



On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)
Joyce Bupp

Silence. Strange, unexpected silence. Welcome silence.

Walking during the middle of the night, the silence took a moment to register in a sleep-dulled brain. Then, realization struck. The wind had died.

The racous outside soundtrack that played for days on end had quieted. In its place were the more normal sounds of the neighborhood. In the distance, came the hum of a truck, a loaded rig huffing up the long, southbound grade on the interstate. Another muted hum from overhead told of air travelers enduring a red-eye flight. And a bird in the trees outside the window chirped at some real or perceived disturbance; perhaps the owls were out and about.

For several days and nights, none of those everyday, normal, background noises of the neighborhood could be heard. Instead, there had been the constant, blustery grumbings and growlings of fierce winds. And the banging of anything loose.

If a slamming screen door is a traditional sound of summer, then a banging piece of roof tin must be a classic spring indicator. With the numerous outbuildings that most old farmsteads accumulated over the years, one will inevitably have a piece of roof tin with a loose corner. Or, after extended periods of wind — like recently — several pieces of roofing tin with loose corners.

Early on during April's blustery imitation of March, a persistent banging bugged me as I fed calves one morning. Further investigation showed a corner of the tin roof on the calf "condo" of four pens had pulled loose, teased by the persistently picky fingers of the northwest wind.

With no ladder or roofing nails at hand — I'm no roofer, mind you — I fixed it in the fastest way available, via a method learned after years of living on a farm. I plunked half of a broken cement block on that corner.

Hey, it hasn't banged since.

Anyone who removes that cement block piece had better replace it with a hammer and roofing nails.

Persistent winds, interspersed with tree-bending gusts, rearrange and disperse anything not nailed — or cement blocked — down around the farm. The older calves often playfully yank their empty feed or water buckets out of their holders. Blown about by the winds, they turn up in the lower yard, rolling around outside the dairy barn, or even hung up in the dried cattail stems ringing the pond.

And, though most of our cattle feed is now handled in bulk, the whistly wind can find a single loose feedbag in the barn and whip it through the air like a wide, flat Frisbee. They sail into the meadow, take refuge in the brush at the edge of the woods or catch on a piece of fence. We fish those out of the pond occasionally, too.

Our front porch footwiping rug — actually a piece of Astroturf-like stuff — has become a backyard lawn ornament. At least that's where it spends most of its time, lately. Keeping it company have been a cardboard box, one watering saucer from beneath the front porch flower pots, the occasional piece of wash blown down from the line and enough tree limb residue to build a monumental hotdog-roasting fire.

A heroine of endurance at the mercy of the biting, endless wind has been our mother goose, parked steadfastly on her clutch of eggs in the mid-pond goose nesting platform. She has been hunkered down there now for about three weeks, head tucked under her wing during the worst of the wind, snow and rain that has accompanied her efforts.

As he drove by the pond recently on the tractor, a mighty gust blew The Farmer's hat from his head into the pond and toward the nest. He paddled the canoe out to retrieve it; another gust blew the canoe against the nest platform and startled Mother Goose, who fled, leaving him to take a census of the seven eggs. We predict a hatch of five out of the seven, based on previous years' counts, barring any further wind incidents that disturb our hatching mom. The winds have dried down

Small Fruit Gardening: Fun, Exercise, Educational

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.) — If you love the taste of strawberries, raspberries and blueberries fresh off the vine, this may be the year to plant a fruit garden.

"Small fruit gardening offers fun, exercise and an educational experience for gardeners of any age," says Dr. Barbara Goulart, assistant professor of pomology in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "But there's more to it than just planting the crop and harvesting the fruit."

To get your garden off to the right start, first choose the best planting site. Select an area of your yard that will be in the sun most or all of the day. "Plenty of sunlight is crucial for growing small fruit," says Goulart. "Fruit production is an energy-intensive process and the plants' source of energy is the sunlight. "Sunlight also allows rapid drying of the plant leaves, which helps prevent disease and reduces the need for fungicides," she says.

The site should have good air circulation and some protection from wind. It also should be large enough to permit adequate space within and between rows so that you can tend the plants and pick

the fruit easily. If you don't have a large area, you can use fruit plants as a property divider, grow raspberries on trellises or cultivate strawberries in pots, Goulart says.

The soil on the site must be well drained. "If water stands for more than 24 hours after a spring rain, the soil probably isn't appropriate for small fruit production," she says. Before planting, test the soil for fertility and pH. Soil tests kits are available at county extension offices for a nominal fee. "When you submit the soil for analysis, specify the crop you intend to grow, since nutritional and pH requirements vary among fruit types," she says.

Think twice before planting fruit in last year's vegetable plot. "Brambles or strawberries shouldn't be planted where any solanaceous crop — such as tomatoes, peppers and potatoes — has been grown for the last five years," says Goulart. "Verticillium, a soil fungus, can linger and infect small fruitcrops."

Plant quality is another key to success. Choose one-year-old nursery plants that are well grown and heavily rooted. The only exception is blueberries, two-year-old

plants are recommended. All plants should be listed as certified, virus tested or virus indexed.

To prevent damage from birds and rodents, Goulart recommends covering vines with nylon or plastic mesh, closely woven wire or cheesecloth before fruit begins to ripen. Mowing the grass will help keep rodents away, since they require lots of cover to hide from natural predators.

Fruit crops can be grown without chemicals, but the quantity and quality of the harvest may not be as high. "Fruit similar to what you can buy in the supermarket can't be produced reliably without pesticides," she says.

Information on making pest management decisions that are economically, environmentally and socially sound can be found in the Penn State publication, Small Scale Fruit Production. This comprehensive guide to planting, managing and harvesting home fruit crops is available at county extension offices or through the Publications Distribution Center, Penn State University, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802; (814) 865-6713.



sodden grown to where there were cracks in the yard last week and fields were near perfect for equipment work. But — as one might expect — when we needed the wind the most, it abandoned us. As sub-freezing temperatures attacked our orchard neighbor's fruit trees, many at peak bloom, what was needed most was a steady wind. But, it had gone. And now, too, are prospects of an abundant harvest for our orchard friends — and for us lovers of fresh, local peaches, plums, cherries and apricots.

Gone.
Gone with the wind.

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