

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



It's Dusty. It's Dirty. It makes the yard a mess. It's extra work. But, it's recycling a tradition and true tradition.

It's warm and cozy. It smells nice.

It's cheap. What is it? Why, it's heating with wood, of course.

Yep, the woodstove is fired up once again. And, boy, does it feel great.

"I love our woodstove," a friend said recently, praising the wood burner which they used to keep their home snugly during the cold weather. She elaborated on her affection for the burning of wood as a heat source, citing the steadiness of the warmth, and that distinctive homey fragrance of this natural heating fuel.

My sentiments exactly. And so, now that frosty mornings

and brisk evenings once again underline our weather patterns, we, too, have stoked up the basement wood burner.

Burnable wood is a readily-available raw material for us. And, it would really be a shame to waste it.

At least once a year, a tree somewhere in a fencerow or along one of the woodlots topples it to the ground, victim or age or disease. Fallen trees immediately begin to deteriorate, though depending on what type of species they are, may take a long time to compost back into the earth to nurture future generations of seedlings.

Sometimes they smash down part of a cattle fence, or crash down in parts of the meadow where a calf or heifer snuggle down behind them and not be visible. Since these fallen trees

must be removed anyway, it only makes good sense to section them into workable portions for fuel use.

And then there are lots of trees which spread vigorous, long limbs several yards out over edges of numerous fields which border on wooded areas. Those limbs shade growing crops, lessening the corn, hay or soybeans' vigor and productivity, as well as making them more susceptible to insects or disease. Like over-eager shrubs outgrowing their landscape, those need periodic trimming and pruning to keep them from overstepping their bounds.

All these provide fodder for the fire, as well as fuel to heat the body.

There's the old cliché' that wood warms a body at least three times — when it is cut, when it is stacked and when it is carried. For us, that just gets it from the fencerows, to the pick-up, to the back yard. Splitting offers additional warming to The Farmer, which he often does a few sections at a time as he passes through on his way to the house. Factor in additional round of body warmth as we stack it on the porch and haul it inside for use.

A smug feeling of self-satisfaction helps warm the psyche as well, having that stash of wood as insurance against cold

and damp inside our old farmhouse. Lack of power offers tremendous complications to a business dependent on electric to keep cranked the motors, pumps, milkers, feeders and cooling compressors on which our dairy operation hinges. But at least we can be self-sufficient in having a wood-warmed place to sleep and a fire on which to cook, should a dreaded, wintry-weather power outage hit.

Those who grew up a generation ahead of us, and who spent their childhoods helping to appease the appetites of woodstoves, sometimes shudder with a "been there, done that" gri-

mace when we even mention heating with wood.

One day last week, while wrestling with an armload of wood, I bumped the stack on the porch and a couple of large chunks connected with my foot. The ensuing sharp pain in a big toe flashed a burst of insight as to why a child who had grown up with memories of such incidents might be perfectly happy with thermostatically-controlled, automatic heat.

As an adult, I guess I'll weigh an occasional dent in the foot against the dent in the budget from other ways of heating.

And haul in another load of wood. More carefully.

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