

## On Being a Farm Wife (and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



The glory is fading fast.

A day before the chilly showers swept through last week, maple leaves piled around the house echoed the bright yellow of the paper-husk bow on the front door wreath. But overnight, the brief bout of moisture faded the pliable, cheery-golden leaves — last in the neighborhood to let loose of the trees — to crackly brown ghosts of summer past.

In the brilliant sunshine that followed and poured across the fading glory of fall, it was apparent why certain colors have become the classic "autumn" decorators shades of the season.

For beyond every window, the freshly-washed landscape was garbed in muted browns and beiges, traces of oranges, with a few lingering flashes of tired maroon chrysanthemums.

Now the woodlot has slipped into its dormant, gray-black hues, accented at intervals with clusters of leathery-brown, dried oak leaves. Though their glory, too, is past, the dead leaves of these oaks cling with fierce tenacity to their home twigs, enduring the blustery breezes that sweep across the meadow as winter approaches.

Our contoured field strips, which curl out around the hill-

sides, have likewise settled into their somber post-harvest colorations. Most of them are a tweedy-texture of green and beige, dead brown grass stems interspersed with fresh green growth. We've been grazing the "girls" over them for both exercise and their munching harvest of the remaining fresh forage. Rye, sown for cover crop and grazing, and the fifth-cutting of alfalfa, which never grew tall enough to justify harvesting with the haying equipment, combine to yield tasty forage direct-cut by the cows themselves.

Rows of pudgy round-bales of hay are lined up outside the temporary pasture walkway, each with a dead-brown outer layer forming a rain-resistant roof for the nutritious forage wrapped within. Frost forming on the bales periodically in the last weeks have bleached their curving tops an un-autumn-like whitish shade, constant reminder that less pleasant temperatures are a mere weather

whim away.

The rows of big bales provide unique opportunities to wildlife, quick to take advantage of favorable environments. Mice which set up housekeeping among the bales add to the attraction for other species, including a couple of the barn cats which make regular patrols around the hay stash. Hawks — sharp-shinned and an occasional redtail — sometimes check-out the bales, as well. On a few occasions, we've even spotted a fox stretched out over the top of a bale, enjoying the soft, dry bed with a high-rise view of potential prey.

In dramatic contrast to the fading shades of autumn is the brilliant green of the grass, thriving in the cool nights and unseasonably warm days of this fading, but lingering fall. Sections of the rye cover-crop outside the fenced grazing pasture tempt the cows to explore beyond the fence — where the grass really is greener at the moment.

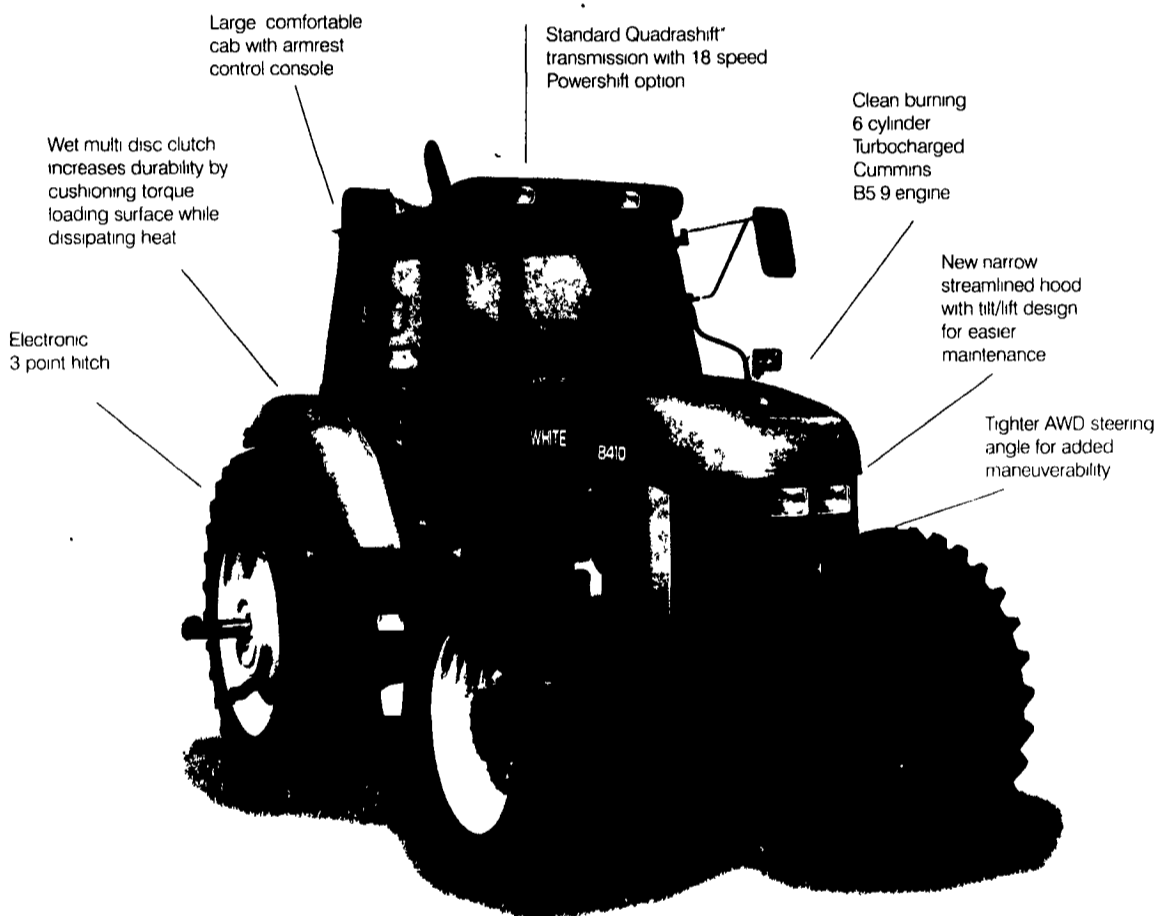
And in concession to the lush grass, I made yet another (and hopefully last!) round of the lawn with the mower, trimming the growth while chopping the leaves that littered every square foot of yard. A split-second before shredding one particular clump of leaves, I realized that the maple droppings concealed a stack of canna roots I'd dug up some days before and left to dry.

Those would have to wait for another balmy afternoon, because there were dahlia roots to clean and store away, tulip bulbs, which The Farmer found on sale, while purchasing repair parts, to pot for forcing, numerous houseplants desperately in need of repotting, and some hardy annuals to be dug, potted, and moved to the greenhouse for winter color.

The canna roots eventually worked their way up to the top of the "jobs to do now" list.

But not until they'd been dug out from under several more accumulations of fading fall-out.

Thank goodness it was leaves that fell. And not a snowdrift.



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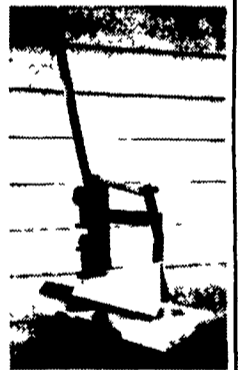
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