

**All Gardens
Great & Small**
by
York Co.
Horticultural Agent
Tom Becker



The Fence Row

Travelling through the back 40 in Pennsylvania, one sees plenty of natural fence rows and hedgerows. Planted years ago by farmers and landowners to mark property lines, a fencerow created a windbreak or barrier against the wind. This windbreak created by a dense row of trees, low shrubs and briars either encloses or separates a farmer's fields from a neighbors.

A word used alternately with fencerow, hedgerows in our area, abound with a smorgasbord of runaway noxious weeds and invasive plant types. As a good neighbor hedgerows tend not to be. The average gardener avoids their blowing seeds and shading dense trees. Hawthorn (*crategus monogyna*), dogwood (*cornus sanguinea*), highbrush cranberry (*viburnum opulus*), elderberry (*sambucus nigra*), hackberry, blackberry, raspberry and wild roses known locally as multiflora rose are a few common species found in hedgerows.

Darrell D Young, a professor of outdoor science at Buffalo State University in his intrigu-

ing article, "The Functional Hedgerow," gives newfound importance to the common or mundane fencerow.

Few farmers or gardeners today view hedgerows as essential, in the natural world yet hedgerows provide a survival habitat for many plants and animals. Ecologically, Darrell Young describes them as 'a safe animal highway' providing cover for small animals as they move from one place to another.

Only the fastest growing toughest plant species survive, many of which become the only remaining plant population for some species in an area. Few hedgerows survive the destructive forces of rural land being converted into urban sprawl. The bulldozer often indiscriminately removes habitat long in the making for nesting birds and ground dwelling animals.

How were these sometimes impenetrable barriers to man and animals created? A man-made invention hedgerows may contain noxious weeds like multiflora rose. Being highly invasive, multiflora rose is no longer

recommended for hedgerows or wildlife plantings. Although quite fragrant and appealing to the eye when in full flower, multiflora rose leaves little room for growing other more practical plants. It becomes the dominant plant species for growing other more practical plants. It becomes the dominant plant species for years and years to come.

Going unnoticed in many hedgerows is a fast-growing tree, called osage orange (*maclura pomifera*). It thrives in harsh, dry conditions. Its thick, spiny, interlacing branches produce huge, 4 to 6-inch round, ugly, orange-like fruit.

On a more practical note, farmers years ago may have planted trees to serve a purpose in their fencerows. Pines or spruce survivors may have been put there as a Christmas tree. A black walnut or hickory tree were planted as a small but valuable nut crop.

Another primary but often forgotten reason for planting a hedgerow was for creating a windbreak on the side of a field, farmhouse, road or barnyard. In addition the hedgerow also provides a visual, physical barrier to unwanted intruders. Soil erosion control is a benefit as well.

Fence rows do not have to have practical purpose to co-exist with man, crops and wildlife. Fencerows exist today because they were located where rocky crags or abandoned stone walls already existed. With today's large plows, plowing too close to the fencerows no longer seems risky to the operator.

However, more likely the risk to a farmer from a fencerow is being snagged, poked or stabbed

by tree limbs or briars. In the end, Darrell Young may be right, hedgerows have an almost deliberate function or purpose, a place to keep man out and give shy, nesting bird species like

bluebirds, much needed privacy. Any questions regarding the above article can be addressed to Tom Becker, Penn State Cooperative Extension at (717) 840-7408.

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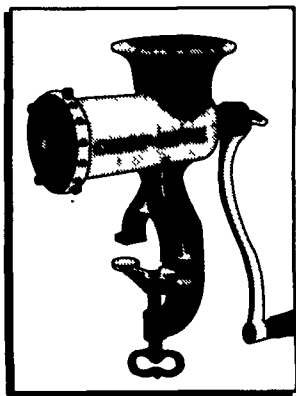


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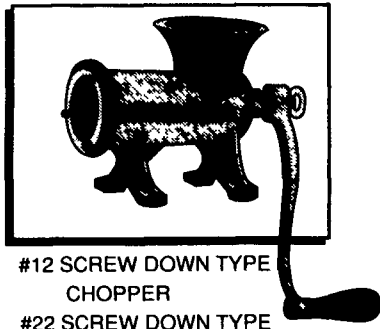
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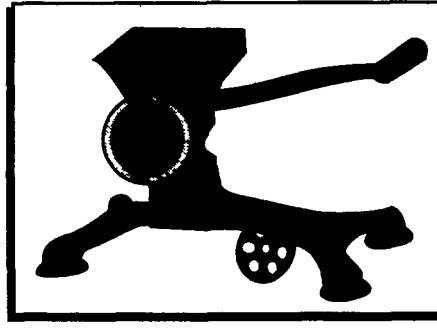
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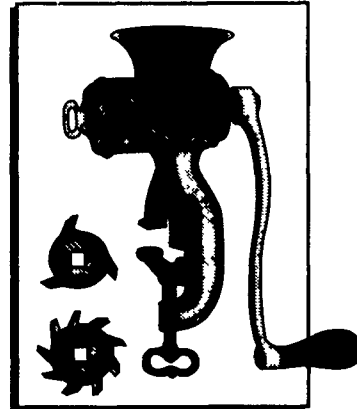
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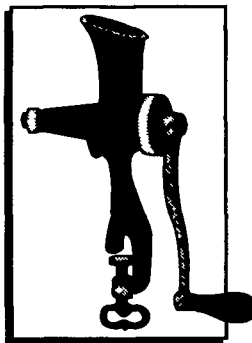
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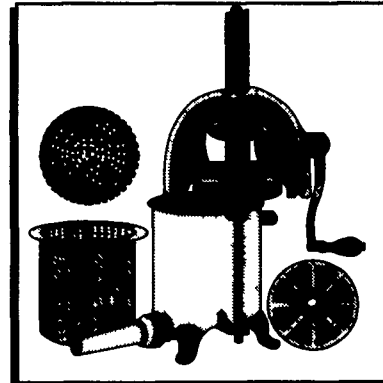
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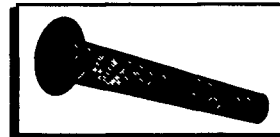
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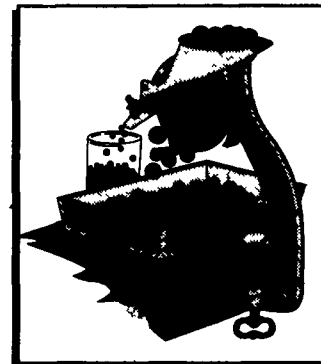
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