

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



Confession time.

All that mayhem and violence constantly being paraded by us in the media has finally caught up with me.

I've acquired a gun.

This move was not without some self-searching. Gun-wise, I'm a fence-sitting, middle-of-the-roader, from a family deeply rooted in the hunting tradition, and sympathetic to the economic devastation overabundant wild life can wreak on farm crops. At the same time, I'm baffled why anyone would want their own arsenal or assault rifle, or why any person under the age of 21

should have their hands on a gun without a responsible, law-abiding adult hanging over their shoulder manning a trigger lock.

That said, I've acquired a gun. And taken my first shots. At a cat.

Whoa...whoa...whoa! Don't go there. Let me explain.

For months I've battled a couple of cats over bird feeder territorial rights on the back porch. The feeder is just a few steps from the window at the kitchen sink, so sited for our maximum observance of the chickadees, titmice, finches, doves, woodpeckers, jays, cardinals and assorted

other feathered friends stopping by for daily snacks.

Didn't take long for a few of the smartest barn cat hunters to figure that a bird at the feeder was a lot easier to snag than two in any bush. The feline culprits have been deterred only slightly by my "fencing" the feeder with a couple of strips of rain gutter mesh and still spend considerable time sitting under the feeder just waiting for its sunflower seed customers to innocently alight and start snacking.

With the arrival of window-screen weather, it's easy to toss a cup of water out the window at the offending cat whenever I spy one lurking under the feeder. But that's messy, splashes all over the place and is hard to aim.

After one recent "bird bath" dousing of a cat, the proverbial light bulb went on. Gift of choice at a grandson's recent birthday party had been squirt guns; he now boasts an arsenal of about a dozen of them, ranging from tiny derringers to water-fueled AK-47s, most of them fashioned from neon-blaze-orange plastic.

So now, I've acquired a gun. A "squirt" gun.

This blue-plastic, pistol-sized, one-cup-calibre water gun I have out on loan is ideal for rousting those songbird stalkers. It's quiet, effective, cheap and harmless. Even a little challenging, to hit the cat and not the birds.

Seeing as how water guns are a summertime toy of choice for kids (and adults, from what I observed after the birthday party), it seems there could be numerous uses for them around the farm. If we can just figure out how to harness their capabilities.

• Watering plants, for instance. Kids and water seem to go seamlessly hand in hand. Let them think they're not supposed to squirt your houseplants summering outside on the porch and they'll keep them nice and moist through the most extreme heat and dry. How to handle their similar watering of the inside plants may be more of a problem.

• Washing the car. If your car is plastered with farm dust and muddy cat prints — as is mine at the moment — it may take one of those giant Super Soaker squirt-

ers to do the job. Those monster H2O-weapons might also work for washing second and third floor windows outside, provided your kids — or you — have practiced aim.

• Pre-soaking cows' teats prior to milking prep. Just turn the kids loose on the cows shortly before milking. Of course, we all have in our herds at least a couple of those mud-puppy-cows needing a water cannon rather than water pistol to come clean.

• Sign your work. The parent-teacher of the steady-handed me that, if one is real steady-handed with her weapon, one can write her name in water on the side of a big canvas — like the barn door.

Sort of a water gun crime in which the evidence literally evaporates. Which, by the way, is what the cats have done from under the bird feeder since we took up guerrilla warfare.

Warning to salesmen heading for our front door: This house is protected by a squirt-gun-armed farm wife.

Now if we could just figure out some way to use it on telemarketers.

Safety Issues Can Zap Unwary Microwave Oven Consumers

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — The ease of operation and convenience of microwave ovens can lull unwary consumers into thinking the household appliances have no safety drawbacks, but a food engineer in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences says safety should always be an issue when cooking food.

"While the use of microwaves to cook food is totally safe for consumers, the way microwave ovens heat food can cause some safety problems, especially for children," says Swamy Anantheswaran, associate professor of food science.

Even heating a cup of water inside a microwave oven can be dangerous. Boiling water on a

conventional stove allows steam to escape through the bubbling action as the water reaches a boil. By contrast, a microwave oven heats unevenly, which can create pockets of water that are much hotter than other parts of the water in the container.

"As the water heats unevenly, the built-up steam cannot escape through bubbling," Anantheswa-

ran says. "When you add something to the water, such as sugar, instant coffee or a spoon, these superheated pockets of water can release very hot steam that can cause first-degree burns."

Adding ingredients such as sugar or instant coffee to the water before microwaving to promote bubbling or boiling.

Consumers never should use paper towels, plastic wraps or wax papers that are not clearly marked as microwave safe. Some microwave packages shouldn't be heated more than once in a microwave oven.

Fast-food products wrapped in metal foils can cause sparking, which can ignite the paper bags used to package a take-out order.

Consumers should be extremely careful about using any metal container or utensil. Sharply pointed tips, sharp edges and even the points and edges formed by crinkled aluminum foil can cause sparks. Some metal containers can be used in a microwave oven if they have smooth and rounded surfaces and edges.

"Pointed objects act as a lightning rod, attracting electrical energy," Anantheswaran explains. "A working lightning rod dissi-

pates electrical energy by grounding it. In a microwave, the electrical buildup will cause sparks because there is no way to ground it.

"China dishes with gilt bands of gold, silver or other metals also will arc in certain microwave ovens," Anantheswaran says. "Each microwave oven has its own unique electrical field and heating pattern. The best policy is never to put gilt china in a microwave oven."

Thick, viscous liquids such as soups or stews can heat unevenly as well. Products containing salt are particularly prone to uneven heating. "Salt absorbs massive amounts of microwave energy," he explains. "The soup at the center of the bowl may be cold or just right, yet a spoonful from the periphery of the bowl may scald or even burn your mouth."

Anantheswaran says soups and stews will heat more evenly if cooked using power levels set at 50 percent or 75 percent. Stirring the product between heating is recommended as well.

Consumers never should try to cook whole eggs in microwave ovens, because the high-in-fat

yolk heats much faster than the rest of the egg. "The egg does not look particularly ominous in its shell, but once cracked, the yolk could scald or burn, he said. "You can find the perfect cooking time for eggs through experimentation but in my opinion, it's easier to boil the egg in water."

Consumers can cause plastics, ceramics, and even glass carousol plates to melt by not paying attention to heating times or activating buttons. Cooks may inadvertently punch in 22:00 instead of 2:20, or punch in 22 minutes and hit the "power" button instead of the "timer" button. "The kitchen is a busy place, and you may not realize what is happening until it is too late," Anantheswaran says.

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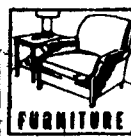
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