

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



We take it, oh, so, for granted. Green grass. Nature's own all-natural, 100-percent organic carpeting, soft and cushy underfoot. Green trees. Whispering in the breezes. Filled with birdsongs. Cooling us with their shade. Green all around us. Especially this greenhouse-like summer, with corn stretching skyward, lush stands of alfalfa, fields thick with soybean stalks jostling for open space to push out foliage. Not to mention the weeds poking up from any teeny corner of soil, elbowing up through flowerbed mulches, waving down from uncleaned rain gutters and nodding from cracks in driveways and sidewalks. Green. All around us. But not so many other places, including parts of the South, where drought disasters have been declared.

And, in many parts of this country, green is part of the natural look only brief periods of the year. Like the desert, where our son lives. Actually, some of it doesn't look like a desert at all. Opposite their front porch is a lush, green alfalfa field, as beautiful a stand of this forage crop as could be found anywhere in the world. Several times each week through the growing season, a huge, aluminum pivot irrigation system inches slowly past, sprinkling a soaking of cool water for a few hours. Its rhythmic "ticka, ticka, ticka" may sweep through the neighborhood at noon or at midnight, whispering the message of watering the desert. Literally. For just inches away from the farthest droplets which cascade in a rainbow to the

ground is an environment far different than that in the leafy stands of alfalfa, corn stalks as thick as several-year-old saplings, heavy potato foliage and the chard-like crinkly tops of sugar beets. Just inches away from the edge of the watered lines, the green turns abruptly into ragged stands of swarthy-stemmed sagebrush. Dry, brown clumps of cheat grass. A small weed with a prickly seedpod the locals call "goat heads." (Goat heads stick in your bare toes and work their way down into your sneakers.) Each footstep you take kicks up a puff of sandy dust.

This is the southern Idaho desert. And in mid-July, the desert is bake-oven, bleached-bone dry. Hot (as in 100 degrees with blast-furnace breezes). Brown. Prickly. Ready to burn like the wind with the slightest spark.

Just as it does here in York County, water makes all the difference in whether the world looks green or brown. (Remember how brown and dry we looked last year?) Ten-inches of moisture per year is the norm there, most of it falling in the winter. A quarter-inch is a down-pour. In the sandy soil and almost-nil humidity, moisture evaporates almost immediately.

And so endless miles of aluminum piping, in a myriad of engineered irrigation systems, crank millions of gallons of water onto this desert land every day, from about mid-May through September. Hundreds of thousands of deep well pumps drink deeply from the huge Magic Valley aquifer. Pumping stations and wide canals borrow from the majestic flow of the Snake River and send the lifeblood of water in a tremendous network of watering systems.

Watering systems, which turn the desert green, help feed us and the rest of the world.

Checking the garden after our return home, I felt a deep gratitude of our natural greenery. For tomato plants sprawling into the lima beans and nudging into the zinnias, for melons braiding their stalks together with nearby cucumber and butternut squash. For pole string bean plants creeping over the border fence, peppers hanging crooked with fruit, and pumpkin stalks climbing through the dairy barn windows.

I truly finding myself rejoicing for our natural green, even if it does suffocate us with humidity.

At least we don't have to watch out for rattlesnakes with every step we take.

Meadow Wildflowers

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.) — "Natural Landscapes and Habitats," Church of the Holy Spirit, in Vernfield, starts at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, August 29.

The church is in the process of converting a large area of mowed lawn into a meadow. In cooperation with the Unami chapter of the Audubon Society, the meadow area was prepared and seeded last year. A bird blind has also been installed. Not only is the church saving money on mowing and fertilizer, they now have an educational area to use for children's and public programs.

A native wildflower meadow looks a bit "scruffy" in its first year, as the deep-rooted plants are working on establishing their root systems. To control aggressive intrusions by non-native weeds, meadow managers may have to mow to a 4-8-inch level, and even hand-pull or spot-spray some weeds. By the second or third year, the meadow plants can turn their energies above ground to produce prolific blooms and seeds. With their vigorous growth crowding out undesirable plants, the only maintenance needed may be an annual mowing in the late winter or early spring. Birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects thrive in native meadows.

To receive a walk schedule and registration form, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Recycling Education Program, Natural Landscapes & Habitat Walks, 1015 Bridge Road, Suite H, Collegeville, PA 19426, or call the Recycling Education Program at (610) 489-4315.

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Tuesday, August 8

Finesse your Forages

Ev Thomas, agronomist with the William H. Miner Institute

Wednesday, August 9

What employees need?

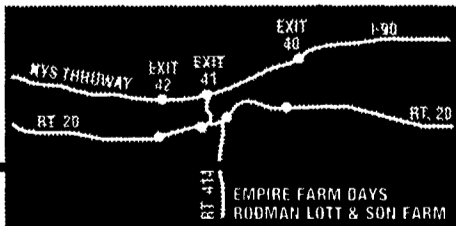
What cows crave?

Protocols for profit and productivity. Dave Sumrall of Aurora Dairies

Thursday, August 10

Bolster your Biosecurity

Charlie Elrod, director of the New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program (NYSCHAP)



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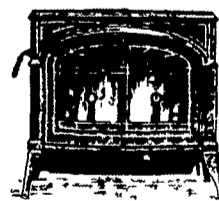
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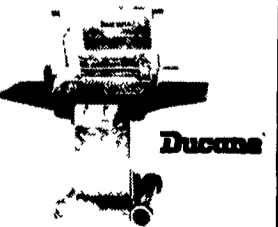
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