



Overpowering. Almost. The aroma hung in the still, moist air of this mid-August evening.

A plane droned overhead, birds twittered late-day gossip in the fading light, and a bunny hopped and paused, hopped and paused down the dirt field road. But it was that heavy, sweetish scent that grabbed my nose.

Not a costly concocted blend of chemical fragrances, nor the distilled essence of floral oils. Not a French import or an exotic Oriental designer perfume.

What was tickling my olfactory senses was Eau de Corn. Hands-down winner of our August "scratch and sniff" selections.

The fragrance of Eau de Corn whispers a promise of golden grain pouring into bins and augers. Of silage bunkers packed full and round with winter stocks of feed. Of forage harvesters chewing noisily through forests of stalks to feed chomping cows and hungry folks.

Eau de Corn's haunting fragrance is an organic and all-natural one, noticeable only a fleeting week or two in August. Its aura drifts across the countryside when corn stalks have almost

reached their final height and begins taking their final steps to maturity. You can catch a whiff as you drive by a pollinating field on a warm, humid night or loll in it with a walk next to a stand of stalks.

At pollination, the tassel atop the stalk, which begins as a needle-like-being tightly wrapped in thin layers of leaves-to-be at the bottom heart of a corn seedling, has flared wide and pushed out tiny bits of pollen along its edges. (County extension crops specialist Mark Goodson recently cut one of our corn stalks apart during a field visit, showing me how those embryonic tassels are buried deep inside the young plant.) As ears push out of the lower part of the plant, each with a mop-top of pinkish-hued delicate silks, the pollen bits fall from the tassels over a period of a couple of days, onto the waiting silks below.

Viola! The silks are pollinated. And each pollinated silk begins to slowly dry, as the embryonic kernel to which it was attached swells and matures into a seed capable of generating another entire corn stalk.

Pretty miraculous when you think about it, huh?

During that pollinating stage is when the aroma of corn hangs heavy in the still summer air, especially during warm, moist, humid weather. Of which we have not had any shortage this summer, just in case you hadn't noticed.

But pollinating corn isn't the only feast for the nose during August.

A batch of Red Haven peaches carefully laid out in the basement to ripen enveloped us with the heady aroma of the favorite late summer fruit, a perfume even more enticing than that of the corn. I lay almost-ripe peaches out in a single layer on a cushioning base and cover them until they ripen enough that the flesh slightly "gives" under gentle finger pressure. Ditto for fresh

pears, which The Farmer loves as a snack to grab on his way through the kitchen.

Mixing with the fruity fragrances in the house is a delicate floral one. It wafts across the kitchen each time you pass by the small vase of nasturtiums parked on the appliance cart. Neon orange in color, these two-inch blossoms carry a sweet, long-lasting aroma. Told by seed catalogs for years that nasturtiums should grow in hot, dry places to bear flowers instead of foliage, I always put mine in the raised border, which can turn desert-like during drought years. And got unimpressive results.

This year, the nasturtiums went next to the stone-walled runoff settling basin around the barns, where the rich soil rarely

dries out. Not only do these babies sport monster leaves, they have stunning blossoms twice the size of any we previously grew, and are vining out in an apparent mission to smother the rose bush and strangle the gloriosa daisies.

In an effort to catch and preserve the scents of summer, I've been tossing rose petals, herb prunings, meadow tea snippings, and assorted fragrant blossoms into a basket to dry in the dark of a storage closet. A handful of the fragrant drying sage from near our son's Idaho desert home adds a unique touch to the mix.

I've always wished it possible to bottle some summer scents to save as a balm for the blizzard season.

This East-N-West Potpourri might be as close as we can get.

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