

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



An array of beautiful blooms surrounds us.

Lovely daisies of white, pink and yellow. Bright sunflowers, glowing orange and rusty-red. Perky blue salvia stems, held daintily above deep green foliage. Butterflies flitting over cherry red zinnias.

Not a bug in sight. No weeds. No bending, stretching, digging, pulling. No sweat.

Dreaming? You betcha.

Dreaming with a stack of seed catalogs growing higher by the day, deliveries of cheery wishful thinking tucked in among the avalanche of tax forms, monthly bills, and endless come-ons from credit card companies.

These annual paperback publications dangle hope and opti-

mism on the umpteenth night in a row that I waddle into the milkhouse, padded with so many layers of puffy clothes that I resemble the Pillsbury doughboy decked out in quilted plaid flannel. I grumble to The Farmer that I am positive I NEVER want to live in Alaska.

Snuggled under a warm Afghan, the woodstove crackling, and cup of hot chocolate in hand, I can study and sketch layouts and make lists and wish about the gardening season. Which is not really all that far away, if we can peek around those obscene, single-digit thermometer readings to look for it.

Along with catalogs from several favorite old standby seed firms have come some interesting and unusual ones. Like one specializing in seeds for gardening

gourmet-cooks, with pages and pages of paragraphs offering an amazing array of nutritious salad-makings.

Some of these edibles would have been unheard of to many of us years ago. Listed under "radicchio," for instance, are not one, but eight, varieties of this "green," most of them colored red-and-white, but a few actually green.

For those not into radicchio, how about something from seven pages of lettuce varieties? There's classic head-lettuce, semi-cos heads, butterheads, loose-heads, convoluted heads, no heads, curly-edged, frizzy-edged, jagged edged, tender pink, pale lime, burgundy, red, frosty green and bronze-hued, ranging from early, early spring, to late, late fall harvesting. None claim to be January-tolerant. Sorry.

Several seed mixes for mesclun, that mix of tiny baby greens which retails for about \$8 per pound, are available. One included — get this — dandelion seeds. (Your neighbors will be so thrilled.) For "sprouters," there are seed assortments including a sprouts sandwich mix, sprouting stir fry mix, even sprouting broccoli, described as being mildly spicy but reported to be 100 times more potent as an anti-cancer, anti-oxidant agent than

ordinary heads of broccoli.

We are tomato lovers, so a catalog specializing in only tomatoes really grabbed my interest. Tomatoes for cold climates and others for Southern hot spots. Tomatoes that mature quickly and tomatoes that would be frosted before they ever turn color here just north of the Mason-Dixon line.

Heirloom tomatoes, from assorted colors of the popular Brandywine series originating from our own Amish countryside to favorites from halfway around the world. One from Eastern Europe, named Stupice, puzzled me over the unusual name — which probably means delicious or wonderful in another language. There are tomatoes so tiny it takes a handful to make a mouthful, and tomatoes hyped to be so large you might need help to harvest 'em. The kind the groundhogs like to take one big bite out of and ruin. Red tomatoes, yellow tomatoes, white, "black" (a deep maroon), orange, striped, peach-colored, even tomatoes that are green when they're ripe.

"How do you know when a green tomato is ripe?" wonders The Farmer.

Warmed by the snugly Afghan, the hot chocolate and the promise of gardening heaven, I succumb to the tempting siren song of the catalogs, beckoning me to flee (if only in my dreams) from the demons of low-digit temperatures.

As mid-winter escape excursions go, it's a heck of a lot cheaper than a cruise.

Farming Series To Air On WITF-TV

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The series will air on WITF-TV Sundays, Jan. 7 and 14 at 6 p.m.

The programs chronicle the state's dairy, fish, elk, lamb, poultry, cattle, fruit, vegetable and mushroom farms. Twenty-six farmers in 16 counties provide a glimpse of life on the farm, and speak candidly about the joys and hardships of farming — from the art and science of growing world-class mushrooms, to a couple who names their breeding bulls after Civil War generals, to a tour of the country's "oldest continuously operated family farm."

"Farming From The Heart" was produced by WPSX-TV, the public television station in State College.



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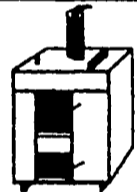
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