

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Spring. Spring up. spring forth. Spring out. Spring open.

And, everything is. "Springing," that is. Right now.

I went looking for a little bit of some of the springing stuff one misty morning last week. Fresh tossed salad was on the menu for lunch, along with barbecued spareribs and baked potatoes. To add a little spring- tonic interest to the greens was my intent.

It wouldn't hurt to wipe out a few pre-blooming dandelion plants anyway. They'd probably not be missed when the bulk of these "weeds" start springing wide their sunny-yellow blooms. With a sharp, pointy-tipped kitchen knife, I dug into the soggy soil, made a quick circular

motion around the root and came up with a delicate rosette of the jagged-edged leaves, just unfurling and still tender and mild in flavor.

Dandelion greens are a rather costly delicacy when purchased at specialty markets. These cost me about five minutes of my time. As an added bonus, the ones scattered around the yard and flower gardens are purely organic — no chemicals and only manure fertilizer. Applied at random whenever heifers or cows split from a pasture or feedlot to go carousing around the yard.

In search of the dandelion leaf tidbits, we (the dog, cats and I) took inventory of other "springing stuff" around the yard. Oodles of daffodil clusters dot the

flower beds, some already pushing open brave yellow flowers in defiance of the lingering chill and persistent winds.

Daffodils are the rebel plants of the season, determined to bloom on schedule and refusing to hug the earth for protection. Instead, they stretch their foliage and stems high, unfurl those stunning cup-shaped blossoms and occasionally get snowed on for their effort. Three smaller-bloomed, species-daffodil blossoms beckoned from the perennial border, just about to spring into fully display. A few hours of the kitchen's warmth coaxed them wide open.

Their glow-yellow fit right in with a small bouquet of forsythia stems, most of them knocked loose from their mother-plant moorings as I raked leaves one short, sunny stretch of afternoon a few days earlier. The forsythias also spring to life early, dotting slender stems with swelling buds of yellow blossoms, then following with more somber green leaf garb.

Ever notice how the earliest flowers springing open are in intense shades, stunning yellow daffodils, brilliant red tulips, deep blue violets? It's almost as if Nature is trying to make apologies for the bleakness outdoors of the preceding many weeks.

We made a quick pass through the bare stretch of vegetable gar-

den, just in case some precocious stalk of asparagus was getting ahead of itself and poking a tentative spear up through the manure The Farmer applied some time ago. None was. And before any do, someone had best attack a few perennial weeds scattered there and request a load of calf pen straw bedding be dumped there for mulching.

On a sheltered bank where a matted layer of dead leaves had been raked away, chips of brilliant blue dotted the damp earth. These tiny Siberian scilla plants are far hardier and durable than you could ever imagine from handling their tiny bulbs. The entire plant and its bloom stalk, a slender stem with star-like individual flowers in stunning, almost neon blue, is a bare few inches high. Mine have been in the ground for about 30 years and just keep spreading.

Someone should dig some of them and spread them around the garden a little more.

Fuzzy "kittens" have sprung out all over our towering pussy-willow, somber gray fuzzies as soft as a baby cat's fur. This "bush" was planted a year or two before the minuscule scilla bulbs, but is as hardy and durable as those tiny little things. The nicest stalks of soft, kitty-blooms are way, way over my head and impossible to cut for forcing. But the birds love it for nesting, so we'll leave it alone.

Shrubs are pushing buds and need to be pruned. The garden plastic must be yanked off for tillage, so we can start the whole process again. Twigs and bits of small dead limbs are waiting to be raked and there are those endless patches of matted leaves to be cleaned off.

Of all the stuff "springing up" right now, none is growing faster than my "to do" list.

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