

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Green.

Smooth expanse of velvety-textured, emerald carpet. Evenly mowed, uniform in color, bordered by clusters of tulip blooms, nodding in the breeze, cherry clumps of red, yellow, pink.

The lawn of early May.

Lots of lawns of early May. All those lawns I admire in passing, attractively landscaped, resplendent with flowering trees and carefully pruned shrubs and planters already filled with blooming plants.

Rough, ragged, uneven. Somewhat reminiscent of a construction site. A work in progress.

Our lawn of early May.

It seems nearly every spring, some disruption or project we

have under way entails having equipment all over the lawn. One year, it was cleanup and leveling where a pair of willows — planted when the kids were both little — had toppled over. One just fell over on a calm, sunny day, the other soon crashed in a wind-storm, like long-married couples who pass away within days or weeks of each other.

Another year, it was tearing up a branch of the underground tile drainage system which originates at the edge of the lawn. Or cleaning out a buildup of road gravel from a storm culvert under the road which dumps at another edge. Or when we had to redo the springhouse area after manure storage construction.

This year, it is restructuring some lawn features for safer play areas for our beloved "little folks" who hang out here. In order to do so, The Farmer had to open a section of the yard fence and drive in with tractors and...and well, there goes the lawn.

You rarely find "lawn slaves" on farms. Not with all the more pressing field demands of the crop season. Rye is growing inches-per-day and must be cut, chopped and packed into the bunker silo in a very small window of optimum nutrient value — like a couple of days. Otherwise, forget it, since it will quickly turn old, tough, stemmy and worthless for cattle feed. Harvesting and ensiling of high-protein fresh alfalfa haylage has to follow close behind, and on almost as tight a schedule.

Corn fields also await timely planting, to be followed by soybeans, and grass hay and early grain harvest. And, then it's time to cut alfalfa again. All this dependent — naturally — on the whims of weather, which can play havoc with the whole spring schedule.

Thus, our lawn should feel privileged to get a weekly ride-over with the mower; it's a bonus if I can get the thick swaths of

clippings raked for mulch before the grass starts pushing up through them, like forgotten hay. Dandelions, their yellow heads lopped off one day, poke up new ones the next day to taunt us until the next mower pass-over.

And, escaped heifers — May invariably brings a few seeking the greener grass on the outside of the fence — always manage to find the freshly-trimmed lawn and leave their "calling cards," natural fertilizer to further encourage the grass. So we carefully watch what we plant in beds and borders. Even surrounded by lots of lush lawn grass, those girls will zero in on and nibble any plant even slightly toxic to bovine bellies.

Glancing out a kitchen window one morning last week, I spied a strange, brown shape at the far upper corner of the lawn. Binoculars confirmed it was a bunny — but standing up on its haunches, ears perked high. It stayed there, like a statue, for a

long time, looking for all the world like a chocolate rabbit in an Easter candy display.

We guess that the watchful rabbit is a mama, guarding a nest of babies she has tucked somewhere in the tall grass of that corner. Handy, too, to where she can nibble fresh goodies from the garden. We prefer baby bunnies to beet tops, so that corner of the lawn has been declared off-limits to lawn mowing.

Another section of lawn going scruffy.

So the border must be redone where the equipment came through — but first we have to move a few large bank retaining timbers — and move in some more wood chip mulch under a big willow at the pond — and finish picking the rocks and smoothing the soil for reseeding some grass.

Some days it would be tempting to just let it all grow up.

If we encourage enough bunnies, they can keep it mowed for us.

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