

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



A welcome dampness eases in on the early-morning air.

The earthy smell of fresh soil floats up from a small patch of field beyond the lawn. While we do not plow, The Farmer has sliced deep-knife grooves in the field ahead of planting, to loosen soil in a narrow band so any moisture can readily seep through and seedling roots can easily go deep in search of more. Even that minimal opening of soil stirs its musky fragrance.

As dawn's light begins to nudge at the starry sky, it smells like spring. The soft, damp breeze feels like spring.

And, before another week is past, it will officially be spring. Not that most of us need a calendar square to tell us that. Evidence abounds just beyond our doors.

Just in case we'd missed the signs, a robin had been warbling a chorus about them from high in the treetops over the house, even before dawn began streaking the eastern sky.

Seagulls scream and circle the meadow, their amazing agriculture-radar enabling them to zoom in on any field in the region where a farmer pilots a tractor out across a stretch of ground. Opportunist birds, they seem to find it much easier to scavenge from fast-food parking lots and fields which might have worms stirred up, than to go fishing for their own lunch.

That's spring. A few crocus blooms linger at the southwest corner of the house, most of them having poked up their purple and yellow noses through leaf cover several

weeks ago during our stretch of balmy groundhog-shadow weather. Nearby, another prime site for spring bulbs, early to warm and conveniently facing a kitchen window, is dotted with multiple clumps of husky bulb foliage. They were yellowish and pale when the winter leaf cover was first raked away. Now, the robust clusters of green promise bouquets of bright tulips, dainty, red-rimmed narcissus and the heady perfume of hyacinths.

That's spring.

This year's flock of geese and mallard ducks come and go on the pond, sometimes a couple of dozen, then again only a pair or two. Their seasonal squabbling over nesting sites has become a classic part of our spring scene. We'll watch to see if they winnow down — as usual — to a mere two pairs at separate ends of the meadow. Two pairs is actually plenty, since they usually raise at least a half-dozen babies per nest.

That's spring.

Furry gray buds wave at the top of the pussywillow tree, too high off the ground to cut bouquets of the nicest stems without benefit of a ladder and heavy pruning shears. More convenient are the forsythia bushes, their twigs covered in fat buds beginning to show signs of yellow. Coupled with a few bulbs coaxed into early bloom and plunked

into a vase, they make a cheery picture of freshness and promise.

They, too, are spring.

Most seasonally entertaining, though, is the sudden conversion of our resident turkey from a staid and serious overseer of the guinea trio to a noisy show-off. Carrying buckets of milk to the calves one morning last week, I rounded the corner of the nursery to the surprise sight of this big guy all fluffed up, his wings out-curved and dragging on the ground, bronze-burnished feathers gleaming in the sun, his head the bright blue of the amorous season.

And gobbling at the top of his lungs.

"A sure sign of spring," I figured, mentally noting that it was time to acquire him a mate. Mere minutes later, she showed up, having arrived as a surprise a day before while I was away at a meeting. Smaller, demure, a lovely, feminine friend, Ms. Turkey seems to have hen-packed our big-feathered farm mascot overnight. She isn't quite as smitten with him. Yet.

He faithfully arrived early every morning at the calf barn, for a drink of water and corn snatched from the calves buckets. This morning neither he — nor his new friend — were anywhere in sight. Guess I've been jilted.

That's all part of "the birds and the bees."

In spring.

Antique Apple Grafting Seminar

LANDIS VALLEY (Lancaster Co.) — The 10th annual Antique Apple Grafting Seminar is scheduled Saturday, March 23, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in the visitor center of Landis Valley Museum.

Grafting is the process by which a shoot or bud of a plant is inserted into another where it grows permanently. Participants will learn to graft stems from antique apple trees onto roots from another tree, a common practice among fruit growers.

Bring a scion from an old apple tree or choose one from a variety offered by the Heirloom Seed Project of Landis Valley and graft it onto their rootstock to make your own "antique" apple tree.

The seminar focuses on hands-on instructions for grafting apple trees. The afternoon session will include personal grafting training, written instructions on planting and more.

The Heirloom Seed Project of Landis Valley Museum and the Backyard Fruit Growers who work together to preserve historic varieties of fruit trees in Pennsylvania German orchards will host the seminar. The seminar fee is \$20.

Landis Valley Museum is located off Route 272/Oregon Pike, a marked exit off both Route 30 and Route 222.

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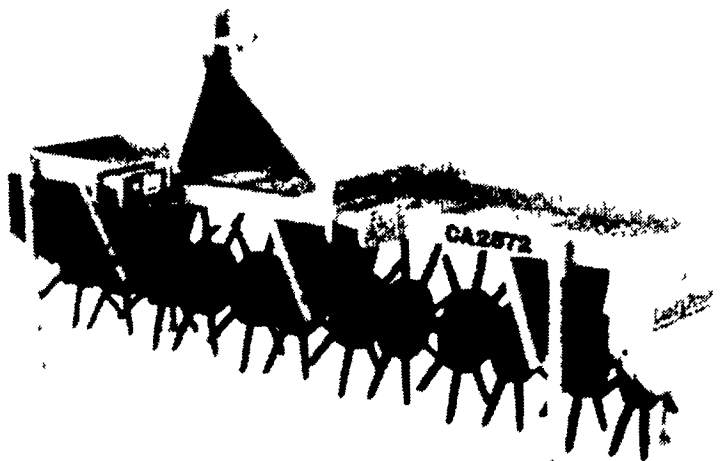
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