

## On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Nearly every critical stage of life is marked with a ritual.

Rituals are society's way of sealing an intent, celebrating a passage, and observing solemn, sad, and happy occasions. Births and baptisms. Confirmations and Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. Wedding ceremonies. Funeral processions. Those are just a few that come immediately to mind.

Not all rituals are "life and death" types. Some are funny; some perhaps irritating, some just plain silly.

Birthday parties could probably be considered rituals. What better occasion to celebrate than the milestone of a year in one's life?

My late father had a sort of ritual he followed every fall when he packed up for deer hunting. Practically everything he took along for

the several-day stay, except for his rifle and ammunition, was carefully packed into brown paper grocery bags. Now I chuckle when I find myself stuffing things to take along somewhere into a more rugged equivalent: plastic grocery bags.

Children often develop rituals which must be faithfully adhered to each night before they get settled into bed. Maybe it's a last drink of water, a particular storybook, or the lighting of a favorite, friendly nightlight somewhere near their bed. And better not forget the beloved "blanky," or stuffed animal, if anyone plans on getting any sleep.

Rituals offer comfort and continuity.

Early, warm weather sent many of us die-hard gardeners on our knees observing an annual ritual that almost borders (with apologies to all our ministerial friends) on being sacramental. Kneeling down in a sort of communion with the fragrant, damp ground to plant the first seeds of the season always seems to me very much like an act of faith, almost prayer.

Despite the continuing long-term drought and prolonged months of skimpy moisture, recent showers helped soften the soil's surface to a rich, crumbly texture. On a warm, sun-splashed March afternoon, planting something — anything! — helps fulfill a gardener's longings to coax up green life.

Our primary garden is never ready for planting this early, so I take inventory of the lawn area where I'd been cleaning off the usual winter accumulation of wind-blown litter: leaves, scattered maple twigs, a damp paper cattle mineral bag, five-gallon bucket, couple of plastic flowerpots, and plastic grocery sacks. Absent those distractions, the ideal seeding corner presents itself.

The small, square basin of field stone was crafted by The Farmer to

catch and slow runoff from around the barn, then release it into the underground tile drainage system. Periodically, the stone basin fills with an accumulation of a sawdust and manure, a rich source of potting soil, with a bit of lime added, for the greenhouse plants. As each shovelful passes from basin to bucket, inevitably some loose soil drops off onto the ground at the base of the stone, forming a perfect early-planting patch. It catches the early morning rays of the sun as well, warming the soil sooner than less-sheltered spots.

And close enough to the barn that the ever-present cats should help discourage hungry bunnies.

During another seasonal ritual — taking inventory of assorted seeds — packets of all sorts of seeds turned up, including a couple appropriate for this early corner — tender leaf lettuces and tiny radishes. It takes but a few moments

to carefully tuck these seeds into minuscule rows, then gently cover them in with a sprinkling of soil. A large box of sturdy, clear plastic, upturned over the tiny plot of promise and held down with a sturdy rock, will enhance the sunshine, provide shelter from chilling wind, and help keep the cats from digging there.

Like many rituals, the

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first planting may be more symbolism than substance. Cold weather, prolonged damp, unseasonal heat, drying winds, slugs, bugs, or a variety of factors may limit the success of this symbolic patch.

But none of that can detract from the satisfaction derived from having performed this annual ritual.

A ritual of hope.

A variety of workshops are offered in the following media: jewelry, glass beads, stained glass, ceramics, fiber, and papermaking.

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