

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



follow, to hasten drying by moving the swath of green. Rakes blend multiple rows into field-shaped geometric designs, in final preparation for gobbling up by forage harvesters or balers, and again stir the aroma of drying forages into the breeze. A hay-mow stacked full with well-made bales has its own scent, too, dried-grass packages fragrant in afternoon warmth compounded under a sun-splashed, metal barn roof.

Curing hay silage adds another scent to the breeze, a distinctive fermenting aroma enticing to cows and pleasing to farmers. Extended periods of bad weather on mown hay cause quick deterioration, the results a possible turn-off to not only the discriminating palates of cows, but less pleasing to our own noses.

Walking across the lawn on a recent sultry day, a light breeze flung across the yard the heady perfume of roses. A bed of end-of-season-sale roses purchased by The Farmer in recent years have matured into bushes laden with heavenly June color and fragrance. While it's been said that "a rose is a rose is a rose," I disagree. Roses vary, each having not only a distinctive color and

shape, but also its own nuance of rose scent.

Burying one's nose deep into their petals to sample their fragrances is a bit like being a beverage taster. One should cleanse the palate, so to speak, between each variety. Maybe with a handful of fresh-mown hay.

The roses' delightful fragrance goes a long way toward earning forgiveness for their briary bushes, which find some way to rip my fingers every time I reach in — no matter how carefully — to yank out a weed. Some of them sport virtual suits of jagged armor all up and down their tough stems.

A somewhat dusty-warm smell in this time of late June rises from maturing of grain crops, as combines lumber into wheat and barley fields to thresh out the kernels and spit the straw out in shiny windrows. Grains and their straw have a lighter, less distinctive aroma than hay, but a definite one all their own. A barn-y smell, perhaps?

But hay and grain and roses all somewhat owe their scents to that of a less poetic, but vital seasonal aroma. Step outside on a damp morning after a rain. Can you smell the earthworms?

I read recently that an acre of

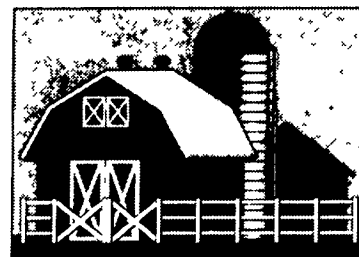
rich, organic soil may have a half-million earthworms busy burrowing and tunneling through it, loosening and aerating the soil while enriching it further with worm castings, or manure. The richest soil generally has the best worms, plugging away endlessly, unseen, to do their part to improve the earth.

While fisherman snag them for bait, I find myself scouring the pavement after a rain for worm "strays" tucking them into the flower beds or a compost pile, where they can go to work enriching more soil. Otherwise, they become bird food as they dry and shrivel up under the hot sun.

That seems to make much better "scents" than having them rot out in the sun.

So, please do your part. After the next rainfall, save an earthworm.

Help make the world a sweeter place.



It's official.

Summer's here.

You, of course, had figured that out days ago, when the thermometer was blasting to the mid-90s and the humidity thick enough to curl a long-haired dog into an oversized poodle.

Even if temps and humidity hadn't given it away, summer's clues are right there at the end of our noses. Every season has its unique fragrances: the damp, moist earth of early March, October's burning leaves, the sharp, clean scent of the first snow. Summer has its own specialties as well.

Few things shout more of the summer solstice than the sweet, musky fragrance of a field of new-mown hay. Logic says that

hay is grass and thus would smell like a newly-mown lawn. But, it doesn't, perhaps because of the blends of forage plants. It smells like...well, hay.

Haymaking is a satisfying kind of farming chore, one where every step shows accomplishment. A well-grown field of hay is in itself a thing of visual beauty, evenly green, stalks of alfalfa or clover or grasses waving in the breeze. Each pass with a mowing machine lays down even, wide strips of dark green, vivid contrast to the light underbelly of the field laid bare. Stalks fall neatly in the same direction, the aroma of the cut stems going airborne as the grass instantly begins to wilt and dry.

Hay tedders and turners may

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