

On Being a Farm Wife (and other hazards) Joyce Bupp



It took a moment to make sense of the scribbling.

"August — Sunflower Month"

Then I remembered. The note had been jotted at the bottom of July's calendar page as a reminder to write about those homey, cheerful flowers of August in the upcoming weeks.

Except for one problem. Outside our windows, at least, it appears that Sunflower Month came early. By August, ours will be well on their way to garden history.

"Grandma, you have sunflowers blooming," observed grandson Josh one day at the beginning of the month, as we took yard/garden inventory. Indeed they were, and probably are some of the earliest blooming sunflowers we've ever grown.

"Yep," I replied. "I planted some out in the garden and God planted those. But God's are blooming already and mine aren't very big yet."

We concluded that God is a better gardener than grandma (who actually helped a little bit).

When the thick cluster of sunflower plants sprouted on the bank between the house and the dairy barn (seed drops from ancestral plants of last summer), I moved about a dozen of the vigorous seedlings a few feet away into a row along the split-rail fence. After a few hand waterings as a boost through our continuingly-drought-stricken summer, the stems streaked skyward and burst into bloom as Fourth of July, floral fireworks.

About the same time the barn bank volunteers were pushing down roots, The Farmer helped neighbors seed a wildlife-food plot. Before he headed back home, they offered him a bag of their sunflower cover-crop seed to plant. After carefully distributing the seeds across the long seed box on the field drill, he backed the planting machine into a couple of small, unplanted corners below the house. These unused nooks and crannies of soil lie between summertime field equipment parking areas and round bale stacks, inevitably producing stands of incredibly large, healthy, durable weeds.

Well, those spots still have some weeds. But towering over the weeds are dozens and dozens of four to five feet tall sunflowers which virtually all — on the same day — opened into wide, cheerful, yellow blooms. Since sunflowers literally track the sun with their blooms, the glowing faces all gaze in the same direction: east, toward the sun (Hence the name, sunflowers).

Unfortunately, the house is west of those mini-plots, meaning the stands of sunflowers have turned their backs on us. The yellow sunflower effect is still pretty and cheerful, even from the back

side. But to experience the full impact of their bright color, you have to walk down the field road "a little piece," and turn around to appreciate this sea of happy flower faces.

Each of the three plantings, however, has a rebel sunflower, which defiantly faces westward, toward the house and away from the sun. Our daughter has dubbed them "Caleb flowers," bent on doing their own thing in defiance of the normal behavior of this particular species. Her label of the upstart sunflowers is a salute to their second son, who takes after his grandfather, The Farmer, in many ways.

Meanwhile, a single sunflower seed, which wedged itself into an expansion crack at the jointure of the milk house, its concrete porch, and a retaining wall, also sports a cheery, yellow, six-inch bloom at eye level. It's sort of an unofficial dairy barn welcoming committee of one; its colorful blossom obediently faces the sun.

Numerous other sunflower volunteers stand random watch

around the yard, volunteers from drops of previous plantings and from the birds which stuff their mouths full of seeds and lose some en route to the treetops and utility lines. A few tall, vigorous specimens guard the garden, and one lone stalk languishes a bit in the dry shade under the maple trees. Unless they interfere with lawn mowing, we let them do their thing.

Our sunflowers should remain cheerfully bright yellow and attractive for a few weeks, before maturing to seedheads fat with black-oil-type seeds. That should attract flocks of seed eaters to hang out in the meadow while they partake of the fruits of the harvest. Even just a few sunflowers gone to seed in past summers brought in lots of finches and chickadees, which like to hang on the seed-thick heads and pluck their dinner direct. Sort of an avian fast-food stop.

We're considering re-labeling August, at least in our backyard.

Sunflower-Seed-Eaters Month may be more appropriate.

Survival Skills For Child Care Directors

MONTGOMERYVILLE (Montgomery Co.) — A six-hour course for directors of child care centers is being offered by Penn State Cooperative Extension on Tuesday, July 30, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Quality Inn on Rt. 309 in Montgomeryville. Registration is required and the cost is \$30 per person for the day. Session meets DPW guidelines and all participants will receive six DPW credits and .6 Continuing Education Units from Penn State University. Act 48 credits will also be available. Lunch is included in the registration fee.

The course will include "Communicate Across Generations," presented by Michael Conti; "CBK, PDR, Keystone Stars — What Does It Mean?"; "Results from the Bucks-Montgomery Salary

and Benefits Study" and "The Latest Legal Issues in Child Care," presented by Ron McGuckin, J.D. There will also be a luncheon speaker on criminal charge information in child custody matters.

For more information and registration form, call Penn State Cooperative Extension in Montgomery County (610) 489-4315. Registration deadline is July 19. Penn State is an affirmative action, equal opportunity university, and all residents of Montgomery County, regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, age or disability, are encouraged to attend. The meeting room is accessible to a person with a physical disability.

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