

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



'Bout halfway, we are. And closin' in.

Time flies fast enough, without wishing—outwardly or inwardly—for it to go any faster. Still, a brief thought pops up increasingly through conversations with folks: "I'm ready for spring!"

Given the layers and pounds of outer gear necessary to tackle barn work as the temperatures flirted with zero in recent weeks, daydreaming about warm, sunny days and soft breezes comes pretty easily. Thoughts of shorts, t-shirts and a wave-washed beach offer mental allure while piling

on thermal coveralls, turtleneck sweaters, hooded sweatshirts, wear) and a ski cap guaranteed to style an incurable case of "hat hair."

We have the breezes, albeit far from balmy. They rattle the maple limbs overhead, shake the big doors on the old bank barn, whistle through the fans at the calf nursery and poke through cracks around the windows of our old farmhouse, assuring that we never suffer with indoor stale air problems. But the sunshine has been pretty sparse, probably off wintering somewhere in the

sunny Carribean.

Looking beyond the repeated blankets—thick and thin—of snow cover, and assorted build-ups of ice, diminished last week-end by foggy drips, offers cause for hope.

There are some signs of spring out there.

First, of course, came the seed catalogs, the initial offering in the mail arriving barely after Thanksgiving. Poor timing, all you garden catalog mailers. Who has time to think seeds in those hectic weeks just before the holidays? Those catalogs just get buried in the deluge holiday and pre-tax-time mail. Fortunately, they get dug out of the paper work piles just about the time that springtime longing starts to peak.

And what better way to spend a minus-10-degree-wind-chill wintry evening than curled up under a snugly afghan with popcorn, hot chocolate and a couple of springtime wishbooks? No weeds, no worms, no wasps. Just a perfect garden with perfectly straight rows of picture-perfect produce.

Dandelions already greening

up under the damp leaf cover offer a reality check to that.

Blooming on the window sill behind the kitchen sink is something closer to the real thing. A pot of tall paperwhite narcissus, their clusters of white blossoms wafting out a wonderful fragrance. The coolness of the windowsill has extended the duration of the dainty flowers, flanked by a perky geranium sporting soft pink flower heads and white cyclamen blossoms poking up from crisp, heart-shaped foliage.

On another windowsill, pussywillow branches have pushed out pale green shoots of foliage above stems covered with kitten-soft, gray flower buds. For years, the nicest stems on the old pussywillow eluded cutting, taunting us bouquet-cutters from some 20 feet overhead. Until December's first nasty ice storm.

Stretched out in the yard on its side, rotten-hollow trunk exposed, the pussywillow's bud-laden top branches were easy prey for the pruning shears. Now they hint of the growing season, forming white roots and green tops. Even in death, this old tree which harbored annual nests of

our backyard birds has given up new life to replace its former self.

Two large cardboard boxes wintered on the basement porch until late last month, when plummeting temperatures sent me hustling to move them to the ground cellar. Buried inside their stuffing of leaf-insulation are pots filled with tulip, daffodil and hyacinth bulbs, growing roots and shoots for forcing. As signs of growth begin to show, they'll be moved to the cool floor of the greenhouse in a couple of weeks. With a late-April Easter date, a few of the pots may need stalling longer than usual in the cool darkness.

Glancing out the kitchen window a few days ago, I spied a strange cat pussyfooting around the yard. From its size and build, the stocky, fuzzy-gray feline was obviously a male. Recent episodes of screaming, screeching and yowling, sometimes setting Derra Dog off into a frenzy of barking and a chase of the instigators, signals yet another sign of the sliding by of the season—tomcat territorial squabbles.

Take heart. When the catfights start, spring is truly not very far away.



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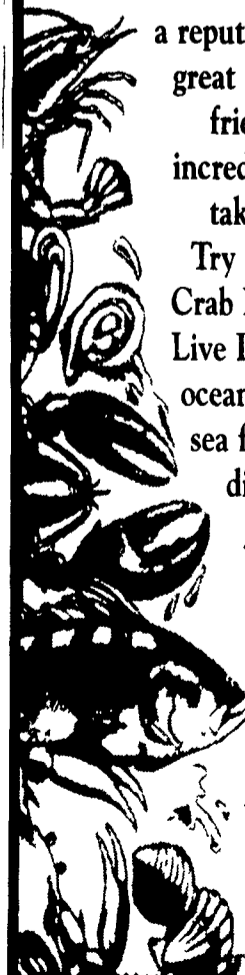
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