

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



here, or for now. Granted, we take its availability as an everyday occurrence. But it is not normal. How many fresh things do you suppose we would be chopping and shredding for fresh salads and snacks about now if we had to plant, raise, harvest and store it ourselves?

We might have spinach somewhere about, if we had paid attention and seeded some last fall. How spinach would have weathered this winter and how far along in growth it would be is uncertain. No way could it be any nicer than the fresh, picked, packaged bag of it washed, air dried, and refrigerated tucked between paper towels in a plastic container.

True, there could be some flavorless, shriveled carrots or parsnips or turnips lingering in ground cellar storage. If they hadn't spoiled. Perhaps some sprouting, poor-textured, also-shriveling potatoes. A few apples going mushy. That would be normal for now if the only fresh fruits and veggies were those we could raise and store ourselves.

But, especially with punches of cold still swatting us with snow and flurries, there's just nothing fresh outside yet to pick. Even the dandelion isn't quite ready.

A tiny row of radish seeds has sprouted at a sheltered corner of the greenhouse, but they've barely pushed leaves, much less edible flesh. And the loose-head-lettuce seed sprinkled next to the radish row has a long way to go before it becomes mature enough for salads. That is, if we can keep a plump backyard bunny making its rounds from nibbling it as fast as it grows.

Tomatoes, which seem like precious jewels about this time of year, are still a figment of our summer garden imagination. And, bananas are never normal in our region of the world, though our kitchen fruit basket is rarely without them. Their abundance and inexpensiveness is almost mind-boggling in relation to

how far they travel to our local fresh produce shelves.

My bagfuls were a mere sampling of the incredible array of non-seasonal fresh produce available — year round — from retailers. Sweet grapes and juicy pears, crisp green beans, red and yellow peppers, baby carrots, citrus of many varieties and exotic treats fill out sparse offerings that would be normal for now. Vastly improved methods of storage keep even locally-grown goodies, like apples, fresh and crisp months longer than in the past.

Still, there are some delectable treats that simply are not the same out of their normal season.

I suddenly have this longing for the taste of a fresh, home-grown, strawberry.

This is not really normal.

But some abnormal things are really appreciated.

What spurred that mental debate was plunking armloads of purchases down on the kitchen counter. Contained in the two, nondescript plastic bags was an assortment of treasure. Inexpensive treasure, but treasure for sure. Because none of the contents of the bags normally or naturally occurs hereabouts in this season of fickle, April-foolish weather.

Crinkly-crisp, deep-green spinach. Cherry-red radishes. A loose head of lettuce, a deep crimson blush accenting the end of each green, fluffy leaf. Bananas, hard-fleshed and lime-colored, to be held in a cool spot to ripen. While waiting, we could snack on al-

ready ripened ones purchased just days earlier from the same location.

One Yellow Delicious apple tumbled out of one bag, its freckled, greenish-golden skin attesting to growth in the natural summer sunshine and rains (though they were sparse) of our locale. This favorite fresh market, a mere two minutes from our front door, often offers customers an apple for the road. On this day, the apple got the whole way home before I got a bite from it. Before becoming a snack soon after, it found temporary lodging with four plump, plum tomatoes, firm, red and ready to flavor cheeseburgers planned for evening sandwiches.

In early April, none of this fresh, tasty food is normal for

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Perkins Restaurant in State College.

Centre County Dairy Promotion is also looking for anyone interested in being a junior representative and any new committee members are also welcome.

For more information call Amanda Gates, 2002-2003 Centre County Dairy Princess, at (814) 692-8946.

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