

## On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Almost hard to imagine.

Just a year ago, dry ground and dusty roads in mid-May foreshadowed the summer's devastating drought. A farmer friend mentioned that a few days ago, as the latest surge of rainfall was pounding the East coast.

Even early this week, many farmers have corn planted, but no forage chopped for livestock. Others are working on forage, but seed still waits in the bags. Early Monday morning brought a smidgeon of frost to our meadow. And the bottoms of countless barns, bins, and bunker silos across the region are bare as the proverbial baby's bottom.

Those of us whose livelihoods live and die by Mother Nature have learned to, if not like, at

least live with these dramatic swings that the seasons increasingly seem to bring. So, a recent leaden-gray evening, with steady, gentle rain falling from clouds almost skimming the treetops, was not enough to discourage Derra Dog from begging to go on our evening walk. Completing our walking trio was Midnight, former stray cat turned porch pet, whose mission in life is to make sure I never lack a furry friend underfoot to fall over.

Enroute, we take a quick detour around the springhouse perennial flower bed, to check what new surprise might have popped up in the last soggy day or two. Droplets of moisture cling to every plant surface, lending the effect of handfuls of dewy dia-

monds tossed at random across the greenery.

An early-blooming iris at a sheltered corner sports large, golden yellow blooms. Its wind-battered stems under moisture-heavy blooms lean down into neighboring clumps of foliage. Cherry red dianthus blooms look almost gaudy in the somber landscape. Nearby, slender stems peeking out from under a rose-hush dangle small, bright blue, bell-shaped blooms. They're new; wonder where they came from?

Prolonged rain has left the meadow sod spongy, and each step makes a squishy sound. Rain drops ooze down sword-shaped cattail leaves and cluster in shiny tiny globes on each waterlily pad dotting the pond. The steady spattering of raindrops textures the surface of the pond, and circles radiate where an occasional fish rises to check for edibles.

Sight of the cat padding along sends resident red-winged male blackbird into a fit of screeching and scolding. This family's nest is usually tucked into the tangled mass of a multiflora rose bush hanging over the far side of the pond bank. Father Bird vigilantly patrols the territory with a sharp voice and warning aerial dips increasingly low overhead, spiffy

neon-red-orange epaulets flashing on his dark wings.

Even louder is the honking raised by the dozen-plus adult "wild" geese scattered around the ponds. Three pairs keep watch over families of fuzzy goslings, herding them to the far side of the water when Derra splashes in for her evening swim. The geese do not know they have absolutely nothing to fear from our gentle, aging Lab, unless, of course, they are hoarding a stash of cookies.

One pair, however, reroutes our way, seven fluffy goslings paddling furiously between them. Their flotilla forms a V-shaped wake in the pond's rain-spattered surface as they glide in our direction, anticipating a handout of floating pelleted fish food. Alas, we have come empty handed, and mother goose honks at us indignantly.

Wildflowers bloom along the

edges of the little stream beside the ponds, yellows and purples nodding above the gurgling water. Bits of bright white scattered along the streams soggy edges pose a puzzle, until I realize they are root leftovers from plants yanked out by the feeding geese. A heavy spearmint fragrance wafts up from the stream bank, where patches of the aromatic herbal tea plant grow wild. Its wonderful smell beckons me to snap off some tender tops, for brewing a hot cup of May tonic on this damp, chilly night.

One dripping dog, one drowned-looking cat, and one muddy-footed farm wife make yet another detour through the gardens, snapping off a fistful of fat asparagus stalks and rescuing the stem of water-sodden yellow iris blooms.

When it's too soggy outside to enjoy spring, we'll bring its treasures inside to savor.

## Lancaster Co. Conservation District Awards Scholarships

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The Lancaster County conservation District recently announced that Jeffery Creamer and Jason Betzner are the recipients of the Lancaster County Conservation District Ann Brown Memorial Scholarship for 2003.

Jeffery Creamer attended Manheim Township High School and is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Creamer of Lancaster. He will attend Penn State University to study Earth and Mineral Sciences.

Jason Betzner attended Lampeter Strasburg High School and is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Betzner of Lancaster. He will attend Virginia Polytechnic Institute majoring in Geology.

Sarah Smith from Pequea Valley High has been selected as the first alternate.

The Lancaster County Conservation District Ann Brown Memorial Scholarship Fund provides two \$1,000 scholarships. Additionally, Creamer and Betzner will be eligible for a follow-up sophomore year scholarship of \$400.

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