

## On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Green ground.  
And purple corn.

No one 'round these parts can remember a year in which so little farm crop work has been completed as the last full week of spring rolls over into official summer. And the prolonged monsoon of damp, gray, drippy and deluges has rendered some unusual phenomena.

We have soils tinted green with mossy/slimy/wet overtones, pushing up reluctant shoots of corn protesting conditions with pur-

ple-tinted stress signs. Corn is a heat-loving tropical and like people who are chilly, "turns blue" when it lacks adequate warmth.

Even though it looks purple and peaked, our corn acreage is at least planted. Early this week, our soybeans sat high and dry, in their seed bags. I've tried not to grumble and worry, remembering last year's parched summer.

Our rolling, well-drained soils dry fairly quickly, enabling our equipment to head for the fields after a good day of sunny airy weather. Much acreage in the re-

gion on low-lying ground, or of heavy soils, had not yet been planted this week. Couple this late, wet, delayed-everything year with the shortened (or failed) crops of last year's drought and you can imagine how bare most barn cupboards have gotten. The seasonal weather pendulum seems locked into bizarre, extreme swings, unable to find any sort of sensible "normal" rhythm.

Hole-y, yellow-leaved peppers. Tomato stems nipped to nubbins. A totally-vanished row of string beans.

That's what greets us in the garden, as Derra Dog and I swing by after a frustrated check of the green-tinted fields of purple-hued corn seedlings. Lingering wetness has spawned an incredible population of slugs, cousins of ordinary snails but naked of the shell. These little gray oozing clumps of insect goo gnaw their way through an extensive array of plants. And they don't just take samples here and there, but will chomp whole

leaves into Swiss cheese-like conditions, leaving more hole than foliage. Despite my liberal dustings with deterrents, the slugs appear to have banqueted on most of the pepper plant leaves, then finished dinner off with a dessert of infant string beans.

Keeping slugs company is a fat robin I spy regularly, hip-hopping around the yard, usually headed for the garden. Slugs shun tomato plants, but every one of ours not protected by some sort of sheltering device was promptly and nearly nibbled off. This team of sluggish slugs and raider rabbits should eliminate any problems with excess garden produce this season.

A less-destructive damp-weather-denizen is the king (maybe queen?) of the ponds, one of the fattest, biggest bullfrogs we have ever seen. Its conversation

with fellow frogs dominates the evening meadow harmony, as the deep-throated croaks echo back and forth across the waterlily pads and pond grass clumps.

Hard, greenish strawberries. Reluctant raspberries. Melancholy melon plants. A friend has dubbed this season "suspended animation" in gardening.

But, hey, what's this?

Thick growth springing up, turning bare soil to lush patches of green. Strong, sturdy stems defy the weather and push rampant foliage skyward, rejoicing in the frequent rain.

Weeds. Healthy and apparently very happy, regardless of conditions.

Why don't slugs and rabbits eat weeds?



## Chester County Awards Ag Scholarship

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — The Chester County Commissioners and Agricultural Development Council awarded Thomas Marsh of Honey Brook their \$1,000 Agricultural Grant for 2003.

Marsh, a Coatesville Area Senior High School student, has been involved with 4-H Clubs and leadership activities as well as many school activities. He recently attended the 4-H "Capital Days" program in Harrisburg. He plans to study Horticulture and Animal Science at Penn State University.

The Council has been presenting the scholarship each year since 1995 to a high school senior planning to pursue a career in agriculture or an agriculture-related field. The applicants must plan to attend a four-year college on a full-time basis.

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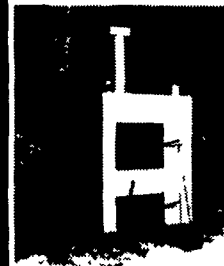
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