

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



At first, the sound didn't register.

Not unusual, considering my normal 4 a.m. state of alertness. You know: hariging in limbo between the brain's awareness of the wake-up alarm and the body's pleading to remain in blissful sleep.

But as the head tried dragging the body to "come to," that sound was burrowing deeper into my groggy brain. Suddenly, like the proverbial light bulb, recognition struck.

Cricket!

Somewhere close, just feet away, maybe on the windowsill, a cricket was chirping away. Or singing, screeching, whatever you call the piercing noise that love-struck crickets make to contact

other crickets. It was persistent and it was splitting the wee-hours silence.

A pause in the cricket's solo, though, reminded me that the wee-hour-darkness wasn't silent at all.

Other noisy insects (a friend from the West calls them "chatterbugs") buzzed and droned through their all-night concerts, singing come-on songs to others of their specie. Overnight road work underway on the interstate slicing through the farm added mechanical thumping to the background racket. And the big fan at the dairy barn roared, as it does incessantly through summer's heat.

But, overriding it all was the clear, sharp, in-your-face song of this very LOUD cricket. Inside.

Isn't a cricket in the house supposed to bode good luck? Not a bad way to start a morning. Crickets are one of my favorite insects, anyway. Their arrival signals the imminent end of late summer's oppressive heat and humidity.

While crickets send specific messages to their own kind with calls produced by rubbing their legs together, the message picked up by us humans is a different sort. Cricket songs announce school buses back on the roads, cornfields beginning to dry down for harvest, goldenrod in the fencerows and pale orange pumpkins starting to peek from under umbrella leaves.

Along with crickets, the appearance of a horde of other creeping, crawling, flitting, humming, flying, jumping and spinning "bugs" signals our inevitably changing season. Right on schedule, our annual army of domestic spiders is busy fattening up for winter, leaving their web sites strung over windowsills, door frames and above the curtains.

The incessant buzzing of cicadas, or locusts, adds more harmony to the bug music of our days and nights. Perhaps because of the summer's bounty of moisture,

they seem far less prevalent than in drier, droughty years. Maybe their buzzing parts are just too damp to buzz properly.

While hanging out laundry on a recent morning, I spotted a beautiful yellow-swallowtail butterfly dining in the yard. It gracefully flitted from plant to plant, seemingly most interested in sampling nectar from various colors of impatiens flowers. Perhaps they have different flavors: red flavored like cherry, purple like grape, pink like watermelon. Would the red-and-white variegated ones hint of peppermint?

But the most interesting insect to turn up lately was a neon-lime-green katydid perched one evening on the box fan set up inside the front door. The fan moves air through the house on stagnant days, mostly providing comfort for Derra Dog in her heavy Labrador retriever coat (enough of it shed all over the house lately to construct a puppy).

Why the large, bright green insect was perched on the fan remains a mystery. Had it just come through a crack in the door and the fan was the first object encountered? Did it like the gentle vibration of the motor? Or was it trying to stay cool? I gently plucked the katydid up in my hand; it promptly hopped several inches farther up my arm.

For a moment, I considered "jarring" the pretty green visitor for budding entomologist and grandson, Josh, and his insect collection. But I couldn't bring myself to do that. Instead, the personable katydid got a ride outside — still on my arm — and relocation to a hanging spider plant on the porch.

It may be doomed to live a short and seasonal bug's life.

But in the meantime, let it sing.

Take Control Of Future

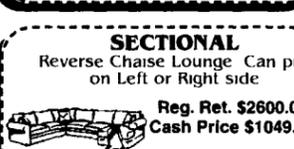
LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — Penn State Cooperative Extension's two-day training, Skills for Taking Control of Your Future will be conducted from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on September 11 and 12 at the Berks County Ag Center, 1238 County Welfare Rd., Leesport.

The training is intended for agency personnel and volunteers who work with individuals, groups, and families with limited resources. The training will be given by Penn State Cooperative Extension Educators from the southeast region.

Skills for Taking Control of Your Future can help clients improve their understanding of themselves; learn how their self-perception affects their ability to stay employed; identify personal barriers to success; strengthen their personal capabilities; learn new skills to better manage their money; and learn how decision-making gives them control in their life.

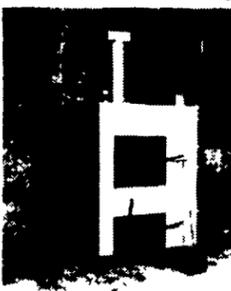
For more information on registration fees and program outline, request a brochure from Penn State Cooperative Extension at (610) 378-1327.

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