

On Being a Farm Wife (and other hazards) Joyce Bupp



That wasn't frost on the pumpkin last week.

That was ice.

In a predictable finish to an unpredictable growing season, Mother Nature and Jack Frost had their annual go-round earlier than usual.

"And I was hoping for a long, warm fall," grumbled a young friend, pulling his shirt collar around his neck against the brisk breeze punching through the wind tunnel between the calf nursery and the old bank barn.

Some 30 acres of our late-planted soybeans were still a lush green color, their pods full of borderline-mature beans, the night last week that temperatures plummeted toward freezing. The Farmer, after a quick check of

the fields soon after sunshine splashed across the meadow next morning, speculated that the frosty blanket had not missed much. Meanwhile, I lamented the end of the tomatoes, so far in decline among the lush weeds that covering them had seemed futile.

Even though we know frost can arrive here by mid-September, the first one never fails to find me darting around after dark, flashlight in hand, covering special plants. Enroute from tucking a tender calla lily under wraps for the night, I paused momentarily at a wax begonia, just covered with dainty, pale pink blossoms.

Too pretty to lose, I decided, tugging the shallow-rooted plant from the damp flower bed and parking it in a container of loose

potting soil. It found company with a couple of colorful impatiens plants and two tender azaleas, already snuggled inside the greenhouse. In an unusually lucky bit of timing, I'd stapled new layers of plastic lining inside our little plant shelter just two days earlier.

Unseen at the time, there was company afoot out there, also hastening to batten down as early hints of the cold season came poking around the place.

Ears of yellow field corn, decoratively piled on the front porch with our single, large orange pumpkin and some colorful gourds, began to sport kernel-less bare spots. Bad enough that the mice are making overtures about moving in to share our shelter; even worse, I'd been laying out a banquet for them on the porch.

The corn went into a container for winter squirrel feeding. Squirrels are scarce enough in our yard that we provide them ears of corn, stuck on a nail in a tree. mice get, um, other offerings.

But, not only are mice on the move. Other critters have been hastily crawling for cover, already decked out in their seasonal fuzzy fashions. Woolly worms.

Woolly worms on the porch.

Woolly worms at the barn. In the yard. On the basement floor? That last was a bad choice, because the fuzzy, black-and-brown caterpillar I spied on the floor while pulling on my barn shoes wasn't moving. Seeking refuge in the house had turned it into woolly-worm roadkill. Or, maybe "floorkill" is more accurate.

While an early frost may have hastened the woolly worms about their journeys, they seem to be in some disagreement on their weather predictions. Traditionally, brown-colored woolly worms mean a mild winter, black woolly worms mean a harsh winter, and mixed bands equate to mixed weather.

The first one spotted totally

chilled me out. It was a solid black, indicative of a fierce and bitter winter. But, the floorkilled one sported black "bookends" with a brown middle, or a mild winter flanked by early and late bitter weather. Several more seen hustling around after the frost were identical, offering hope for breaks in Artic-type weather.

By midweek, frost damage appeared to be considerably less than feared. While our couple acres of sudan grass were nipped pretty badly, the soybeans barely had their heads clipped with the chill. Those lush grassy clumps sheltered the lingering tomatoes to enjoy a bit longer. And the woolly worms continue on the move.

Watch where you step.

Make It With Wool Contestants Stitch Success

(Continued from Page B2)

received an expense-paid trip to national competition. Heather stitched a 100-percent gray flannel wool suit. The double-breasted jacket with lining was hand-quilted. Padded shoulders, front slash pockets, and a semi-fit makes it perfect for winter wear. The slacks are lined just below the knee to allow for slits at the bottom. A wool sweater and scarf complemented the outfit.

Taking first place in the adult and in the made-for-others division was Sharon Donahoe, Bedford. Her outfit and a photograph of her wearing it will be sent for national competition judging. If her project is selected, she will also receive an expense-paid trip to national competition.

Sharon modeled a two-piece suit that she designed incorporating several different patterns. The loose-fitting, fully interfaced and lined jacket has a collar, slightly extended shoulders, and is made from navy and off-white micro weave Pendleton wool suiting. The pockets and buttonholes are triangular shaped and made of coordinating fabric used for slacks. The tapered slacks are made of navy blue Pendleton wool.

In the made-for-others category, Sharon stitched an English wool suit for Kristie Corle, who modeled it.

Capturing first-place in the preteen division was Madison Ochoco, Doylestown. The 8-year-old chose a lightweight

charcoal gray wool to make a flared jumper with buttoned shoulders.

Second place went to Stephanie Augustine, Palmerton. Tied for third place were Amber Getz, Lehighton, and Gabrielle Augustine, Palmerton.

Judges for the event were Marie Kieffer, Cynthia Dialogue, and Chris Ubaldi.

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