


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



You could call it Transition Time.

But, Indian Summer sounds so much more poetic.

Regardless of what you call these fleeting weeks of mid-October, they whiz by with frightening speed. And, like the noisy finale of a fireworks display, Indian summer bursts with bright explosions of color, which quickly fade and float silently back to earth.

"Swamp" maples that grow wild in the meadow are firing up their displays of brilliant crimson-orange. Collectively, at least, that's what color they appear to be. Studied individually, though, the leaves are as distinct in appearance as single people in a crowd of thousands.

Each leaf, smaller than some species but with the distinctive maple-leaf shape, may have splotches of green and splotches of red. Coloration may follow the veining. Or maybe not. Shaded variations of the leaves colorings abound in an array of patterns, each one unique as individual snowflakes.

Kicking along through these colorful leaf fallouts has always been distracting. Their delicate beauty begs to be scooped up

by the handfuls, to study the individual patterns and intricate lacings of color. Every year, I promise myself to try to fashion their loveliness into something to preserve them with more permanence — a bookmark, placement, or notecards. I've even gotten so far as to press them between pages of a catalog. Where they inevitably get lost, forgotten and dried up.

Oh well, it's a good thought, anyway.

Other species are equally pretty, like the demure maroon dogwoods, their subtleness accented with flame-red, berry-like seeds. Norway maples, on the other hand, are stunning show stoppers with their giant spreading canopies of golden yellow, glowing

against a clear blue sky.

But brilliant Indian summer color is not selectively granted to the most desirable plant species.

Vining Virginia creeper, attractive in a confined spot, instead runs rampant, wild, and uncontained. It tracks long fingers of cheery red up the sides of old barns and weaves through fences. Competing for attention in colorful brilliance are indestructible stands of sumac.

Tawny, fluffy heads of golden-rod wave in the breeze from abandoned meadows and weedy roadside patches. Plus, in, around and through any or all of the above is likely poking clinging vines bearing bright yellow "leaves of three, let them be" poison ivy.

It's always seemed a little cockeyed to me that these most pesty weeds turn some of the

most beautiful stunning fall colors? Is that some sort of in-your-face statement by Mother Nature?

Thick, early morning fog frequently hangs over the meadow on our Indian summer days, cloaking the sun in a nebulous mystic aura as it tries to burn off the mist. Often, it is mid-to-late morning before the fog dissipates. Other days, a vague haziness veils the colors of our world even through the afternoon.

Indian summer full moons rise up looking like the proverbial round orange cheese, inching their way above the eastern horizon. The warm afternoon temperatures drop in the other direction as fast as the moon climbs heavenward. Its orange gives way to bright white, a spotlight in the night sky sparkling with rhinestone stars.

These nights, even more beautiful than most, beckon Derra Dog and I to walk a little extra distance. A large flock of geese, spending recent nights on the ridge fields, honk and chatter in the darkness. Moonlight reflects in ripples across the ponds, and a great blue heron flaps off in a huff as we get too near its roosting tree near the frog pond. As Derra "woofs" and trots up the hill, deer silhouettes bound over the top of the hill.

All too soon, this pleasant interlude will end. Leaf explosions will disappear into the woodland floors and the geese will move on. Previews we had earlier of cold nights and frosty mornings will become the norm. And the golden glow of Indian summer will fade to somber browns.

Let's savor ever moment of it we can.

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