

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



A puzzled look crossed the face of our favorite two-year-old.

"Grandma, what's 'dat'?"

Sara's dainty finger pointed toward the deep-grape-purple fabric, sporting a giant white flower, tied over my jeans and tee shirt.

"That's called an 'apron,' sweetie, I explained. 'It keeps you from getting your clothes all messy while you're cooking, if you wear one.'"

Use of an apron in our kitchen is not an everyday occurrence. To see grandma wearing this strange item of clothing (and in a color I rarely wear) was understandably puzzling to the kids.

A variety of aprons reside here, most of them gifts like the Mardi-Gras-purple model received from Louisiana friends. And, while I once only ever reached for an apron while baking pies, or dur-

ing a holiday cooking marathon, aprons are winning new popularity with me.

That's primarily because I'm a "klutz." A cook inevitably finger-painted with traces of the menu. A barn chores cleaner-upper who exits the milk house damp from neck to knees. A gardener who slathers ground on her jeans while repotting plants or sowing seeds.

Aprons aren't just for cooking, I've discovered over the years.

But then, our grandmothers had figured that out eons ago.

In grandma's era, little kids weren't puzzled by aprons. They grew up seeing these cotton household garments worn and used on a daily basis. Folks didn't own closets full of clothes — or based on our old house — even have closets, so an apron

kept one's everyday dress clean for several days of wearing. And a clean, probably newer, apron protected the good Sunday dress from spills and stains while entertaining dinner company.

The ubiquitous feedbag fabrics of yesterday, packaging material for chicken and cow rations before being recycled into wearing apparel, surely must have been used for countless homemade aprons. Its soft, worn absorbency would lend itself perfectly to a myriad of apron uses, from polishing a prized piece of family china to wiping off the sticky face of a toddler.

Aprons were also for gathering things: eggs as you swept through the chicken house, a couple of potatoes to be sliced up and fried for supper, apples carted in from the backyard tree. Their large pockets were convenient for stashing a paring knife, a couple of clothespins from the washline, perhaps a dainty, lace-edged cloth handkerchief.

Today's aprons are often symbolic of a skilled craftsman or artist, finding favor with folks whose talents range from blacksmiths to basketmakers. They're made of more sturdy, durable fabrics than the aprons of grandma's time, and often sport some logo or quirky saying, such as the ones popular for backyard-barbecue chefs.

Curriculum Workshop Planned For Teachers

SPRINGFIELD (Delaware Co.) — Whether you are looking for new materials to integrate into the classroom or trying to fulfill Act 48 credit hours, Penn State's "Curriculum Caravan Workshop" fulfills many teachers' needs.

The workshop will be conducted on Nov. 20 at Penn State University, Delaware County. This 4-H School Enrichment program includes projects that target elementary and middle school-aged youth, and provides lessons across different disciplines.

So, now I find myself grabbing an apron for times other than cooking. A bright-green one sporting a 4-H logo has proven to be a useful cover-up for washing milkers, keeping me from shivering in damp clothes on chilly mornings. A red calico one I fashioned years ago from a scrap piece of material, or a country-themed one sewn by a friend, are my choices for heavy-duty baking and canning. For gardening use, a durable beige canvas model — with pockets for tools — works great.

The bright, grape-purple design is just fun for surprising the grandkids.

And it adds a sporty touch over worn jeans.

"A variety of experiential activities are available to meet classroom needs," said Joyce Morrison, 4-H agent in Delaware County. "The topics include Embryology (science and agriculture); Financial Champions (mathematics and money management); Meet the Plants (environment and ecology); and Foods and Nutrition. Participants will elect two of the four curricula to explore."

The workshop is for elementary and middle school teachers, curriculum directors and committees, science coordinators, guidance counselors, principals, home school associates, parents and professionals interested in new experiential curricula. It is approved for Act 48 credit hours.

Participants will select two of the four project sessions offered in the workshop they attend. Each session includes hands-on activities and suggestions for integrating learning experiences with existing curricula. A \$25 registration fee covers all workshop activities as well as a meal.

For more information, download a brochure from <http://pa4h.cas.psu.edu> — click on Curriculum Caravan Registration or contact Joyce Morrison by phone at (610) 690-2655 or by e-mail at jem28@psu.edu.

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