

# Farming

## MAGAZINE

FALL 2024

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Volume 24 Issue 3 No. 95

Forest Farming Goldenseal  
Getting Your Ducks in a Row  
Forty Years of Being a Shepherd  
Cabbage to Kraut: Making Your Own

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# Farming

## MAGAZINE

Volume 24 Issue 3 No. 95 Fall 2024

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*The quality of mercy is  
not strained;  
It droppeth as the  
gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place  
beneath: it is twice  
blessed :  
It blesseth him that  
gives and him that  
takes.*

*-William Shakespeare in  
The Merchant of Venice  
[1598]*



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*Farming Magazine* celebrates the joys of farming well and living well on a small and ecologically conscious scale. It explores the intricate bonds connecting people, land, and community and offers a hopeful vision for the future of farming in America. The magazine is created in the spirit of stewardship for the earth and regard for its inhabitants.

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**Cover Photo:**

Jersey heifers grazing on a fall day near Fredericksburg, Ohio.

Photo by: FM Photography

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## PO Box 85

Dear *Farming* Folks,

Thanks for the great work y'all do with *Farming Magazine*. My wife and I always look forward to receiving a new issue. It's a joy to see the stories, photos, and practical advice included in your pages.

*Brooks & Regan Lamb*  
*Memphis, Tennessee*

Greetings, good folks at *Farming Magazine*!

In reading the letters in the P.O. Box 85 section of the latest Summer 2024 edition of your magazine, I read with interest the note from Eva Weaver asking to have her subscription terminated due to their concern over the emphasis on organic farming methods, with the last straw being the article by Karen Geiser in the prior Spring 2024 edition. Wait, what? I knew I had read that edition cover to cover as I usually do. Had I missed an article full of subversive information on the dangers of organic farming? I quickly pulled out that magazine and read Karen's article again, waiting for the part that Ms. Weaver identified as the last straw. Not finding anything other than great ideas and information on how to live a life made more healthy and sound by thinking beyond the corner drug store, I fail to see what could have upset Ms. Weaver enough to demand the balance of her subscription be returned. Please continue with your usual format of how to care for our families, our animals, and our environment as God entrusted us with his bountiful creation.

This is also an opportunity to wish David Kline a very happy birthday today. I hope you and your family are sitting under the shade tree in your back yard, enjoying bowls

of fresh fruit and ice cream. Just don't tell Ms. Weaver it is organic.

Kathleen Martin  
*Bend, Oregon*

Dear *Farming* Folks,

Thank you for the work you do for all of us and the joy you spread.

Gerry Dwyer  
*Esperance, NY*

Dear David and Elsie Kline,

I am a subscriber to your very good magazine. I'm pretty much against all the modern chemicals. Mary Lou Shaw had a good article in a past issue. I also take a magazine called *Legacy* for M-F's Massey-Harris people. This copy of the enclosed article is quite interesting. I thought you might find it so. Please excuse my writing. I'm 85 and a 2-year renewal is pure optimism!

Sincerely,  
Walter Pratt  
*Dundee, NY*

David & Elsie,

Thank you so much for the current and relevant magazine. It brings back memories of farming with horses as a child.

Onward,  
Marion G. Bontrager  
*Hesston, KS*

Dear David & Elsie,

Time to renew once again. This is one check I'm happy to write!

*Farming Magazine* is my favorite magazine! Thanks for all the effort you put into it. I'm a farmer at heart but only do it part time. We have plans to buy 30 acres in my home community of Bainbridge, Ohio, and

relocating in the spring. Then I hope to try my hand at making a living of farming full time. The past nine years I have done a lot of farming in my mind—and *Farming Magazine* is fertilizer for good thoughts!

Sincerely,  
Wilbur S. Zimmerman  
*Breckenridge, MO*

Dear *Farming* staff,

I am sending my renewal for two years along with my thanks for making *Farming Magazine* such an interesting publication in today's mentality—bigger is better. Thank you to all writers who contribute to this magazine.

Lester Miller  
*Mohawk, NY*

Dear David, Elsie, and staff,

Thank you for all your efforts in providing such a diverse, down-to-earth magazine. We greatly enjoy all of it. Mary Lou Shaw's and Leah Smith's articles are favorites. We welcome (and would like to see more) articles on homesteading—sourdough, cheese making, canning recipes, etc.—as we seek to live a more holistic lifestyle. Thanks again.

Joseph Mullet and family  
*Horse Cave, KY*

Greetings!

Thanks for such an inspiring, down-to-earth magazine! I look forward to every issue.

David Hochstetler  
*Wolcottville, IN*

In response to "Weather Wisdom:"

Without the living God's words, NONE of man's own actions alone, or conversations, will ensure future promising summers. God's words are true; the same yesterday, today, and forever. Observing and obeying God's words will ensure rain in due season—wherever humans live on earth. Refusing to pay attention to what God says will result in drought, oven-like heat, and death. God, alone, is our deliverer. Sources: *Deut. 28:1, 12, 15, 23*

With love,  
E. Nava  
Argos, IN

Dear Folks at *Farming*:

Another Horse Progress Days has come and gone. I missed the first one at Elmer Lapp's and I missed this one. In all probability, I'll miss the next one to come to Pennsylvania also because by then I'll

be 100. No matter. "*To everything there is a season.*" (*Ecl. 3:1*) And the ones in between I have enjoyed. The one reason I hoped to attend this year's was to hear David's remarks. Perhaps a future *Letter from Larksong* could contain the highlight of his message.

I believe it was at the 2005 HPD that I picked up a sample copy of *Farming Magazine* and have subscribed ever since. A lot of parts are not working as well as they might, but the eyes are OK. Check enclosed for another year of good reading.

Tom Armstrong  
Sellersville, PA

*Tom: We missed the Horse Progress Days because of a death in the family (our daughter-in-law's dad). I was asked to do a presentation on the pleasures of small-scale farming, which I will cover a little in my editorial. Thanks for your loyal support over the years. David*

Dear Friends,

The printed address on my summer copy of *Farming* tells me it is time to renew my subscription to your fine magazine. Thank you for all your work bringing to print and distributing a wonderful magazine encouraging readers to think about people, land, and community and appreciate the wisdom of our farming parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles etc.

Please renew my subscription for two years at the same address in Reelsville, Indiana, which is not far from Poland. That is Poland, Indiana (Ha, Ha). The small settlement of Poland was named after the first blacksmith who settled in the location.

Please continue the good work that you do and know that you are enriching the lives of many readers.

Best regards,  
Stephen King  
Reelsville, Indiana

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**Letter from Larksong**

O hushed October morning mild,  
 Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  
 Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,  
 Should waste them all.

**October ~ Robert Frost**



For me, the saddest part of the autumn season is that day when the leaves have peaked in color and splendor, and a cold front comes through with wind and rain stripping the trees bare, and the season quickly changes to winter. I always hope that day carries well into November and after a long Indian summer. But inevitably, the time arrives, and we accept the cold that is sure to follow.

Today I was clearing the paths through the woods to make walking more pleasurable; in other words, not having to worry about picking up hitchhikers such as burrs from burdock, beggar ticks (boys' lice in my childhood), and the most annoying one, Virginia stickseeds.

It is doubtful anyone has taken autumn walks in the woods and returned home without hundreds of the clinging seeds on their clothes and socks and on the dog. Stickseeds cling particularly well on worn and frayed pants and coats—my favorite attire. And on sweatshirts. I have spent hours picking the irritating tiny stickseeds from the frayed edges of my coat.

By late fall and woodcutting time, Virginia stickseed has dropped its leaves and what remains on the two- to three-foot-tall plants are multiple-branched racemes up to a foot long loaded with the small Velcro-like seeds. The plant blends in well with the surrounding undergrowth and the minute you brush against it, hundreds of the little beggars almost seem to jump on your clothing. Then the picking begins. The common burdock is a breeze compared to the stickseeds. Small birds, such as kinglets, have been found caught in the racemes of Virginia stickseeds.

On the positive side, Virginia stickseed flowers attract native pollinators and other beneficial insects.

There is a second reason I clear the trails and that is the ticks. I always imagine when walking through a woods that hanging on the ends of every leaf of the overhanging vegetation is a vicious wood tick, reaching for me with its clinging claws, seeking to bury its bloodsucking head somewhere on my body. Besides, I'm told we also have deer ticks around here. Deer ticks are about half the size of the wood tick. The bad part is that the deer tick passes on Lyme disease, which can cause serious illness if not treated early.


Unlike the deer tick, wood ticks seldom transmit Lyme disease. I know, I'm probably being paranoid about the ticks, but in the first fifty years of my life there were no wood, or deer, ticks in our woodlands. One could meander everywhere with no concerns for the pests. Only once in those years did I have an encounter with a wood tick. A friend asked me to go with him to Presque Isle near Erie, Pennsylvania, to look for a rare black-headed gull mixed in with thousands of Bonaparte's gulls.

When we gave up searching for the proverbial needle-in-a-haystack gull, we walked some of the trails on the Isle. There was one sign that warned, "Caution: Wood Ticks in Area." I was careful. The next morning at the breakfast table I was telling the children about our gull trip and mentioned the wood tick sign. Right then one of them said, "Dad, what's that on your head!?" I brushed it to the table, and it was a wood tick! They thought it was funny. I saw very little humor in it. I still wonder, where was that tick all night?

With well cleared paths, we can enjoy the woods without fear of wood ticks and beggar ticks and stickseeds.

Beef prices are easing off and dairy heifer calves are moving up, as we expected with so many dairy cows bred to beef bulls.

"Regenerative," "Sustainable," and "Natural" labels can be confusing to the grocery shopper. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, said concerning labeling, "It's like the wild, wild west out there. Just about anybody can slap on a label saying (their product) is sustainable or whatever. We must be able to tell consumers what labels actually mean."

Gary Hirshberg, an early adopter of organic tenets and co-founder of Stonyfield Farm, the organic yogurt company, agreed that consumers need to be wary of labeling claims on food. "I've lived through the term 'natural,'" he said. "I've had ice cream that holds its shape when it melts, and it was labeled natural."  DK

There are environs where a person just feels complete and at peace. Home, farm, and forests come to mind. Home and family can become so familiar and comfortable that we scarcely notice the little incongruities others might chafe at. The farm scenes where we daily walk and work and have our being become normal and dependable. Shabbiness and small inefficiencies go unnoticed in the grand theme of our goals. Forests are really beyond reproof, so full of grandeur and life. From the mold beneath our feet to the treetops towering above us, it leaves a person feeling like an unnatural element that should be criticized.

There are other environs that can really put the fizz in our root beer. Like mixing a self-assured farmer into surroundings and society where we sense a certain condensation descending from them to us.

The city-bred politician probably keeps a fine filter between himself and the rural community. The same could apply to officials, inspectors, lawyers, and anyone who holds a position of authority or is guilty of a grossly elevated income. Now I'm not finding fault with anyone for finding fault with someone else. It's so easy to do. And rather fun. Somehow it seems to level the social status when we find inefficiency and ignorance in the opposition. It might even tip the scales in our favor, at least in our own mind, which is really the only mind we usually concern ourselves with.

I suppose that is what I was amusing myself with as

I lounged in enforced physical stupor in the third-floor room of a Cincinnati hospital. The healthy baby sleeping in the clear plastic basin didn't need my attention, nor his healthy mother resting in the cot beside him. The thermostat is set at 70°, and someone brings us food whenever we lift the phone to tell them what we would like. There is free coffee just down the hall, accompanied by free crackers and peanut butter, pop, juice, yogurt, and ice cream. Free, of course, is a relative term when one is staying at a hospital.

The view from the window is about what one would expect in this environment. Glass windows, concrete walls, and acres of blacktop. The building is constructed on multiple levels, so a portion of the second story roof sprawls outside the window. Flat rubber roofs have river gravel sprinkled on top for aesthetic appeal. The perimeter is edged with short walls. It would make a nice rooftop garden. With this in mind, I calculate the area outside the window and decide I could easily build a 30 x 80 greenhouse in the space. Dirt could be hauled in, and salad greens, radishes, carrots, cucumbers, and grape tomatoes could be grown in abundance. That comparatively small section could do wonders to add palatability to the salads the cook sends up with our meals.

The other window looks out into a small section where the hogs could fatten. They would thrive on the tremendous amount of food waste a place like this must generate. The hogs would also provide entertainment for



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unwilling guests who could spend many hours watching hog antics and mannerisms. Then again, unsuspecting shade raisers might not appreciate the sight of a grisly hog greeting them with a surprised woof through the flimsy glass it might create unwanted business in the cardiac section of the hospital. Therefore, the hogs might do better on top of the four-story roof. Yes, that is the place for them. They could range freely and sustainably on the uppermost rooftop. I believe a self-regulating system would soon be established. The largest porkers would be the first to try escaping over the walls and would automatically end up on the menu. As scrapple perhaps. Many benefits could be counted on the practical economy of raising hogs this way, although such a self-regulating system might have an impact on pedestrian activity and hospital participation. Perhaps the hogs and cows would do better if kept in a separate, ground-level property.

Chickens would be more compatible to the rooftop system. The eggs and meat could easily be used by the cooks, and the litter would make great plant food for vegetable production. It begins to sound more practical. Cole crops and salad greens in the corners and areas too small to hold greenhouses. Thin soil with heat coming through the ceiling below would keep crops growing year-round. Stale, dry hospital air could be circulated through the greenhouses to help heat them. The plants would filter out the accumulated unpleasantness and return the still warm air infused with some healing vim and vigor.

Just think of the morale booster it would be for the confined person to watch as the resident farmer picked a bushel of green beans for lunch, nipped some spinach, pulled a basket of carrots, onions, and radishes to go with the lettuce, hampers of cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes overflowing like so many cornucopias. It would be enough to lift any drooping spirits. Another thing guaranteed to take their mind off their own troubles would be to see their bacon and sausage links catapult off the nearby four story building...No, no. The hogs were replaced with chickens.

This is, of course, just the fanciful

rambling of an amused, bored, and room-bound farmer, but agriculture in general might benefit from taking a few pointers from a time when people grew their own food. As Jerry Brunetti put it: We could turn a cornfield into a housing development, and if each family had a garden in the yard, the same field with houses could produce more food than the cornfield did. With that in mind, I know of a small place at the edge of the city where a person could scrape together some of the displaced topsoil, put it on the rooftops, and make a fair show of sustainable farming. Excluding hog production. 🐷

*Noah Wenger and his wife, Christine, and their children live and farm near Hillsboro, Ohio.*

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My grandfather, my dad's dad, regularly came to help out when I was a boy. Often this was in the spring. He had two farming sons and a farming daughter and did his best to bless each with his help when help was most needed. This was not unusual. In my boyhood this is how things were done, and this was how farming families acted.

I have a strong memory of being awakened before six on spring mornings by the sound of the John Deere 70 powering up under my bedroom window. Grandpa would be sitting on it monkeying with the throttle and choke to get it to run right, his lunch box stashed between his feet and still wearing his coat against the spring chill. Often, I would be able to see Dad in the barn doorway where he was milking the cows before getting his own start to the field. Or if we had made sufficient headway the day before, Mom might be milking the cows while Dad was busy getting the planter ready to go. Soon enough, I was to be boosted out of bed to help with milking and getting the chores done and the work started. From there, back to the house to wash the cow smell off—we hoped—then breakfast and off to school.

Today we weaned and moved pigs, my grandson and I, and I power-washed the feeders we would use later. As I pulled my hand out from the feeder holes, I knocked it against the side. I felt it without really noticing it. A minute or two later I looked down to see blood streaming down the backs of my fingers from a quarter inch chunk of loose skin on the back of my hand.

Then I remembered my grandfather's hands when he came out to help Dad years ago. His hands too were hard in the palm from years and years of callus upon callus. His fingernails were thick; some were bent and twisted and needed to be trimmed with a sharp pocketknife. But the skin on the backs of his hands was paper thin and could be knocked open by the slightest blow. I have gotten to where my grandfather was in the 1950s seventy years ago.

I was rueful, but not terrified, at the thought. There is, after all, a certain rightness to it. I come from a line of peasants, people of the land, back through my parents and then all my grandparents and as far back as I know; poor and destitute sometimes, some were orphans, some manic depressive. There must have been a few liars, though I know nothing of that. Many were living out their lives far away from where they were born. For generations on the male side, we have understood the pressing need to somehow make it go,

to provide for children, to farm the land, and to keep and protect wives. If that meant damage to hands or other body parts, so be it. If it meant risk and loss and too much work and no sleep, we would put up with it.

But I am terrified. Because for generations now, our culture has scorned and made fun of men like me, like my father and grandfathers. Feminists have done it, and I suppose they have their good reasons, but so has everyone else. I mean no disrespect for the female side of my ancestry, for they may well have suffered more and worked harder for the family, the community, and the land than we males did. But I understand it as a man. And I pop awake sometimes at two in the morning, terrified at the prospects for my children and grandchildren and still unborn great grandchildren. And I fear especially for my grandsons and their sons. For we have chosen, instead of respect, love, and a place for young working-class men, scorn and rejection. And the result all too often is a young white male full of blinding rage, emptying a military weapon into a crowd of people.

We have asked for these tragedies in some ways by our constant chatter about and admiration for any who figure out how to make money without contributing anything of value to the people and families around them.

The farm my grandfather helped on was perhaps a bit short of horsepower. Maybe it was actually short of horses. But we were farming with plenty of people working. Today we are desperately short of people and blessed with far too much horsepower. Much has been said about this change in a half century, and some of it by better commentators than I. What I would like to point to is the question of changes in the economic and cultural structure and how that drives our personal values.

"Nobody is done until everybody is done." This was an oft repeated saying on our farm and many others when I grew up. It is based on the understanding that while each of us might have different abilities and each has different interests in some ways, we are still all engaged in the same effort; that is, the effort to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe and clothed and fed. This played out in many ways on the farm of my youth. Much of the hardest, heaviest work was shared, and not just with brothers and sisters and cousins either. Our neighborhood hauled out manure together in spring. Nobody made hay alone. Silage in fall was a crew of men and women surrounding and supporting the neighboring farmer who owned and operated the forage chopper and blower to get the silos filled.



Though my parents owned a small pull-type combine in my youth, my good friend's farm was still hauling bundles into the threshing machine in the cow yard. Corn was picked on the ear, and the leftovers from a winter of feeding the stock were shelled out, again by a crew with shovels and picks. Rat hunting was one of the perks of this work, and the dogs had a field day. Pigs were castrated by neighbors working together, and bulls were shared by neighbors.

All of this results in a different attitude. Today people compete with their neighbors. In former times, they cooperated. While there is nothing wrong with competition, it should be more in the nature of a game and certainly should not define our relationships with neighbors. But formerly, it seemed easier to keep our eyes on the main event and understand the fact that those who ran the economy, and thus in large measure the government, were the ones that would do whatever they could to separate us from the products of our labor. And they would do the same to our neighbors until we were left with nothing more than endless work in return for the few scraps we could grab hold of. We need to understand that those who already own most of the earth and its wealth want it all and will do what they can to separate us from what we have been able to build up.

It is not the neighbors we need to oppose. It is rather those who separate their fate from ours by use of money. And our strength, the strength we have always had—though lately seem to have misplaced—is each other.

I confess I don't know how to go about rebuilding what we once had so commonly we didn't even notice it. It won't come from government or from the market. It is totally up to us. We have a strong heritage of ancestors who did whatever it took to first survive and then thrive. But this pitting neighbor against neighbor has been built slowly and steadily over my lifetime and perhaps longer. It has to do with size of farms, maybe. Certainly, it has to do with preferring the neighbor's land ahead of the neighbor himself. Life has speeded up and that is mostly a detriment. I was raised to hold in contempt any who sat and watched someone else work if they were able themselves. Today, living off the work of others seems to be our national pastime. There is no real drive to help where help is needed. Or to share the load. And we are the lesser for it. 🐔

*Jim Van Der Pol grazes and direct-markets pork, chickens, and beef from his farm near Kerkeboven, Minnesota. He is a regular contributor to Farming Magazine.*

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*A dream coming true: purchasing our own farm, raising White Dorper sheep.*

## Forty Years of Being a Shepherd *A Personal Journey*

—Ulf Kintzel

“Panta rhei” ~ Heraclitus

Today I would like to tell a personal story because on September 3rd of this year is my 40th anniversary of being a shepherd. Today I will not lecture you. I postpone it to the articles after this one. Today I intend to entertain you. So sit back comfortably and enjoy.

I grew up in East Germany, behind the Iron Curtain. It was customary in East Germany to attend 10 years of school and then, at the age of 16 or 17 years, to do a two-year apprenticeship. While a small percentage of students went to school 12 years to get a high school diploma and then went on to college, most students went down the road of doing an apprenticeship of some sort. I was no exception. I had no issues in school, being a good but unruly student. But I was itching to get out and opted against my high school diploma and college. I wanted to be outside and work and not stare into textbooks.

Until the age of 13, I was steadfast in wanting to become a forester. I never wavered. Then, one day, by chance I entered a sheep barn with Merino sheep at feeding time. I witnessed the woolly sheep feeding on grain, hay, and straw at old-fashioned wooden feeders. I was dazzled by the smell of the lanolin of wool, straw, hay—all mixing into the most sensible smell I could imagine. I still have the image in front of my inner eye.

That was the moment I wanted to become a shepherd. I again never wavered. It was at that collective sheep farm, just a few miles away from my childhood home, where I worked during the next three summers during school break, starting at age 14. It was taxing. I had arms comparable to strings when I started working, was physically weak, and the manual labor took its toll. Getting up at 5 in the morning, biking several miles to the farm to be there at 6 when the job started wasn't the easiest task at age 14 and 15, then 16. Still, I loved it. Oh, I earned money too. I also loved that part.

At the end of ninth grade, we had to apply to a business, in my case a farm, that was licensed to train and teach apprentices. I opted for a farm more than 60 miles away from home. In a place and at a time with limited mobility where few people had a car and most travel was done by train or bus, it was quite far away from home. I recall getting the acceptance letter. What a joy it was. I was going to become a shepherd! Just one more year of school!

September 3, 1984, was the first day of my apprenticeship. We were housed in a dormitory for apprentices. It housed dozens of apprentices, mostly working at the large dairy barns. I was the only shepherd apprentice. The rooms housed six people each. There was one table, six chairs, six locker-sized closets, and three bunk beds. There was one washing room with one shower for the boys and one for the girls. A kitchen was

*Photos by Author*



attached to the dormitory, which fed us three meals a day and also functioned as the kitchen to provide lunch for all people working at this large collective farm. Everything was very basic and spartan. We apprentices didn't care. We didn't know it any other way. The practical education took place at the sheep barn for me, which was part of this large collective farm. At age 17, 18, and 19 you don't really give the wisdom of collective farms much thought. Nor do you think much about the wisdom (or lack thereof!) of a communist government with its restrictions, its slogans, its inefficiencies. Most youths at that age think a lot about themselves. So did I.

Every few weeks all apprentices of a certain trait gathered at a centralized school for a few weeks to learn the theoretical parts of their respective traits. That was a little less fun since it meant studying. All the more fun it was to return to the farm.

After two years of my apprenticeship, I received my certification after some final exams and was now officially a shepherd. Likewise, many of the people I grew up with now received certificates as mechanics, bakers, butchers, engine drivers, farmers, or construction workers in their chosen fields of apprenticeships. I then applied for a job at a sheep farm where the supervisor was well-known in the region for being particularly good at training herding dogs and tending sheep. That was the skill I felt I was lacking because my supervisor during my apprenticeship wasn't good at it. I wanted to enhance that skill. I was accepted at that farm and received a room in an apartment. (Housing was allocated; you couldn't just rent an apartment.) It was a two-bedroom apartment, and it was meant for two people to live there. I was lucky that during my two-year employment I was living there almost the entire time by myself. That was almost unheard of in a communist society, which was notorious for lacking housing. Again, the living conditions were simple. The building was poorly insulated. I had to heat the apartment with lignite (brown) coal briquettes, using a masonry stove made from stove tiles (Kachelofen). It had indoor plumbing, which was not the norm at that time, but only cold water. To take a warm shower or bath I had to heat the water in a bath stove, also with coal.

I now drew a paycheck. While apprentices received a little money, I now had an income. That was a new (and a good) feeling. My supervisor Rudolf was indeed very good with dogs, and he was willing to share his knowledge with those who wanted to know. And I wanted to know. Oh, the extra hours we spent after work talking about herding dogs and how to train them. I am grateful he taught me so much. He was also a very difficult supervisor. He was an alcoholic, a wife beater,

a cheater, and he came into fights as well when he was drunk. It was my first life lesson in learning that there aren't just people who are only good and others who are only bad, but good and evil are often personified in one person. He also was the breeder of my very first two German Shepherd dogs from herding lines, Sina and Cora. He sold me these two as puppies and I trained them under his guidance. These two dogs became essential in my further development and influenced my career. It is fair to say that without them I would not have ended up in America. You will hear more about these two dogs later.

During my two-year employment I was once hired at a neighboring sheep farm to dog-break a flock of wethers (castrated male sheep), that were kept for the production of Merino wool. The person in care of that flock of 300 wethers was a former dairy farmer named Hartmut and had no experience in tending sheep. The flock would not respect a dog and would just escape and run down the road. I wrote an article about this experience for this very magazine and will not rehash every detail. But I will say this; I succeeded in dog-breaking this flock and immediately received a job offer from the heads of this collective farm. They wanted to establish a sheep farm with 200 Merino ewes for breeding purposes and also wanted to keep the wethers. I was supposed to become the supervisor, now working with this former dairy farmer Hartmut (who became a very good friend of mine). The collective farm built a brand-new barn (with asbestos roofing!) for the ewes, and I was hired to be the manager and supervisor and oversaw the purchase of the 200 Merino ewes. I was just 21 years old, and I certainly made my mistakes "supervising" a co-worker, who was 14 years older than me. There was friction at times! Learning to deal with people in an appropriate way is the hardest thing in life and in business. It is especially difficult when you are just 21 and think you have all the answers.

This new job at a sheep farm with me as the man in charge was my dream job. My story and thus my article probably would have come to an end right about here had it not been for big world events unfolding. The communist regimes started falling apart in the late 1980s and were toppled, starting in Poland under the leadership of union leader Lech Walesa (after whom our second son is named). On November 9, 1989, the wall came down. If you are old enough, you probably all remember where you were when the World Trade Center Towers were attacked on September 11 or where you were when J.F. Kennedy was assassinated. Well, I remember where I was when I heard that the Iron Curtain was lifted, when the

Berlin Wall fell. It was in my view the most influential event in my life. None of what unfolded afterwards for me would have happened that way without it.

However, the fall of the wall and the collapse of the East German government and the subsequent reunification of West and East Germany meant I was in for a bit of hardship. Many branches in the communist economy were unproductive and were kept afloat with subsidies. Those farms and factories now went bankrupt or were bought by western businesses or were restructured. For me it meant I would become unemployed because the flock of sheep was going to be sold off because the wool was now basically worth nothing. When I heard the rumors about it, I immediately started looking for a job in West Germany. There was a monthly publication in West Germany called “Schafzucht” (sheep breeding), which had job offers for shepherds listed in it. A neighboring shepherd and friend of mine had given me a few back issues. I called up two sheep farmers, trying to get an interview. Such calls were no small task in East Germany. Few people had a phone, the connections often failed, and all phones had rotary dials. That meant you started over several times, dialing the lengthy number, when the connection failed. I got two interviews. The first one was in the heavily populated industrial West; the job description

purchased Russian-built car. It was no small task to go back and forth with these notoriously unreliable cars. The landscape was breathtaking, and the villages were lovely, convincing me that was the place to go. The interview, conducted by the head of this sheep farming family, an old man well past his retirement age, went well. Why did it go so well? Because I understood next to nothing of what he said. The dialect in that area is so completely different from where I was from, and he did not speak high German, the kind of German in which Germans from different parts of Germany, with very different dialects and often resembling an almost foreign language, can communicate. Yet, I nodded in agreement most of the time, desperate to get this job. I did get it, but I had no idea what I had signed up for.

I went back home, dissolved my small household, and drove back in late April of 1990 with my two herding dogs, Sina and Cora, and a couple of suitcases. That was all that was left of my belongings. What I didn't know at the time was that this job became the first true hardship in my life. The new boss was merciless. I worked from 7 in the morning to 10 or 11 at night. The room I had, just a little subdivision in a church, of all places, was very basic, to put it charitably. After penning up the sheep at night after tending them, I often had to help some at the

restaurant they also ran, getting beer crates from the basement to still the thirst of the many French and American soldiers who came to the restaurant/bar. The pasture where I tended a flock of 1,200 Merino Landrace sheep was a training area for the U.S., Canadian, and French militaries. It was a restricted area, void of regular people. The only humans I saw were those firing grenades with their tanks and artillery on training days and my boss and his family at breakfast and dinner. And they were almost hostile in their interactions with me. I was never more miserable and lonely in my life—before and after this stint.

In early June, coincidentally on my 23rd birthday, my employer asked me if I had the courage to participate in a local herding competition one week later. They were looking for competitors and were falling short. I had already participated in such herding competitions in East Germany, and a lack of confidence in my abilities, real or perceived, was not one of my shortcomings. I said yes, mostly in the hopes that I would finally get out for a day and meet people. Who knows what was to come.

At that herding competition, I met a fellow shepherd who told me about a job he had as a hired farmhand for



*My very first German Shepherd dogs, Sina and Cora. I am wearing traditional shepherds' clothing at a herding competition.*

was tending sheep on the dikes along the river Rhine, living mostly in a tiny camper. It was an odd place, and I hoped the second place would be nicer. The next interview took place in the southwest in Germany, right on top the Swabian Jura. I drove there with my recently



a company run by the Catholic church. They rented out qualified farmhands as part of the farmer's insurance. The government-mandated health insurance entitled a farmer, who was sick or needed surgery or had died, to hire such farmhands and the insurance paid for it for a limited time, working Monday through Friday. Weekends were off, but since animals need to be fed on Saturday and Sunday too, farmers would often be willing to hire you for extra pay. They also housed you and fed you.

This all sounded too good to be true, and my fellow shepherd was known to look too deeply into beer bottles now and then and tell tall tales. Nevertheless, I got an interview at the firm and was hired. Everything I was told was true. My pay was twice as high, my accommodations were now far nicer, and the food was far better. I was appreciated by whomever I worked for because I came at a time of hardship when they badly needed help. How hard of a hardship was it for the farmers? In one case the farmer had died, and the family needed help.

All these contracts were time-limited, depending on the cause, such as surgery or illness. Over the duration of my employment I saw many different farms. I milked cows, plowed fields, transported grain, and also tended many flocks of sheep once the word got out that my company, the Katholisches Landvolk, had hired a shepherd with trained dogs. My home base was a rented room in the Black Forest at an elevation of 3,300 feet above sea level. I enjoyed incredible views. Where I spent the few days I was off work. My apologies to my wife and kids when they read this, but I had the time of my life. At the same time, I realized that this job was not sustainable, and at some point when I wanted to settle down, get married, and raise a family, this job was not what I wanted. So what did I want? I didn't know. I decided to get my high school diploma and then went to college, getting a degree in agriculture. It was a way for me to figure out what I wanted in life.

While in school and then in college, I continued to work on weekends and during recess at various sheep farms. After all, I needed money to live. College was not what I had envisioned. Turns out, I was not made for being indoors and studying. An office job after college was out of the question. So what would my future hold?

I continued participating at herding competitions where I met some Americans, who told me there was a

herding club in the Northeast in the U.S. that did herding as a hobby with a few dozen sheep, trying to model their training according to German sheep-tending practices. They were looking for someone to come with his dogs and teach them, all expenses paid. "Yeah, right, crazy Americans," I thought but then the herding club sent an official invitation the following winter. I accepted, thinking of the great adventure lying ahead of me at someone else's expense.

I spent the month of August in 1993 in northeastern Pennsylvania. I was fascinated by the lifestyle in the U.S. It wasn't difficult to win me over, though. I had always looked favorably at America even before that. This trip went so well that I was invited to come back in the summer of 1994. This time, nearing the end of my time in college, I looked beyond the adventure and started looking at it as a business opportunity. My new-found friend Beth, a realtor, helped me to navigate the extraordinary bureaucracy that was called Immigration and Naturalization Services. After I finished college, I moved to the U.S. in the fall of 1995, settling first in northern New Jersey on a small farm, owned by my friend Beth, taking care of her sheep in exchange for room and board, starting my dog training business for herding dogs.

The beginnings were hard, never having much money at first, but it slowly developed into a profitable business. Something was missing. I turned 30 a couple years later and decided it was time to get married. But where could I find a wife? Mutual friends told me about a Polish girl working for their relatives at a farm, doing farmwork and helping at their home. So she and I agreed on a blind date. When she arrived that day at the farm, I was not at all intrigued when she got out of the car. I later learned that her first impression was similar, thinking I looked too arrogant. So it was not exactly love at first sight, perhaps something that only exists in Hollywood movies anyway. Then we started talking and it got better. Did it work out? Twenty-six years and three kids later I would say "YES." Turns out, soulmates are not found, they develop over time.

Meanwhile, our time in New Jersey did not get better. My business became harder because of the influx of many people seeking affordable housing while working in New York City and surrounding areas. Real estate prices skyrocketed as the area became more congested and suburban, and the agricultural infrastructure diminished. My wife's commute to work, which was once an hour,

College was not what I had envisioned. Turns out, I was not made for being indoors and studying. An office job after college was out of the question. So what would my future hold?

became an hour and a half and often two hours. The situation was untenable. We started looking for farmland elsewhere. We traveled as far south as Virginia and West Virginia, as far west as Wisconsin, and as far north as Vermont and New Hampshire, looking for affordable land. It was pure coincidence that we discovered the Finger Lakes area in western New York when a stud dog I wanted to use for my German Shepherd dog happened to be in this area, residing with the brother of the Pennsylvania-based owner, who was on a business trip in Canada. We admired the area but dreaded the cold weather and the big snow. The resident brother of the dog's owner told us it really wasn't all that much colder in western New York compared to northern New Jersey. The realtor we consulted told us that heavy snowstorms don't hit where we were looking. The Buffalo and Syracuse areas were the areas receiving the kind of snow that made the news. I dismissed the former as wishful thinking and the latter as sales talk. Yet I did my research to find out myself. It was all true. In fact, the northern part of New Jersey, where we lived, has seen far more snow in the last 18 years from Nor'easter storms than the Finger Lakes has seen from lake effect snow where we now live.

In 2006, after many trips to western New York, looking at land and farms, we were ready to buy a farm. We were looking for bare land, not wanting the headache of never-ending repairs of a century-old house and barn. On Memorial Day weekend we visited several places for sale. The last on the list was a 100-acre plot, which would indeed become our new home. After purchasing the land that weekend, we initiated to have a modular ranch house and a pole barn built. We moved all our belongings and the sheep in October of the same year to our new home, leaving New Jersey after 11 years of living there. Two years later, an adjacent 25-acre parcel became available, and we didn't hesitate to purchase it.

We had taken a high risk when we left New Jersey, my wife leaving a well-paid job and I leaving a thriving business. However, this move to western New York

rewarded us in many ways. Let's start with my wife: Her job is much nicer with a much better work environment. She also has more professional and fairer supervisors.

For our three children, this was also a blessing. While our oldest child, our daughter, has some memories of New Jersey, they all three view this farm as the place of their childhood. What better way is there than growing up on a sheep farm in the Finger Lakes area?

I reaped even more rewards: the land was now mine, no private moody landlord and no unreliable state landlord decided about my fate any longer. I no longer

had to drive miles to my pasture—I just walk out the basement door and I am at work. All pasture is adjacent and on one side of the road. The area lacks weather extremes: no record low temperatures in the winter, no record highs in the summer, no huge rain events or stifling winter storms. Also no tornadoes, no mud slides, no earthquakes, no

wildfires. The item I had not given much consideration and had greatly underestimated was the quality of the soil types. In comparison to the pastures I rented in New Jersey, this new farm had much better and deeper soils with far more fertility and water-holding capacity than I anticipated. Anyone who is familiar with Lansing and Honeoye silt loam, which are the majority of my soils, will know what I am talking about.

I completed my transition from Texel to White Dorper sheep. Between selling hair sheep that needed no shearing and sheep that are grass-fed and need no grain to fatten, my market for breeding stock skyrocketed. I won't go much into these details since my last article outlined that transition to White Dorper sheep, published in the last issue of *Farming Magazine*. I say this: it has been a great time to be in the sheep business.

Our time in western New York, now counting 18



*At the tender age of 19: leaving the night pen with a flock of several hundred Merino sheep.*



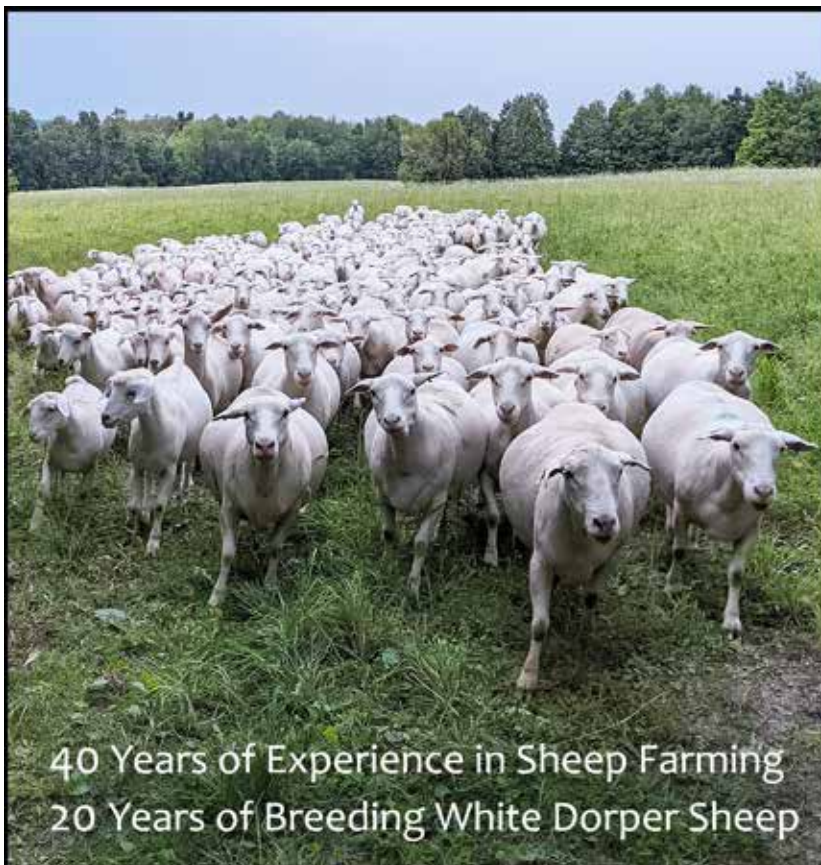
years, has only upsides and no downsides. Everything in our lives had improved compared to our time in New Jersey. It was well worth it to have made this move. Our quality of life is lovely here in the Finger Lakes area.

Now I am approaching the “last chapter” in my business life. The kids have left and live their own lives. Everything has been paid off, and the need for making money, once tremendously important when paying down two mortgages, investing in the farm with expensive items like fencing and tiling, has come down to a trickle. I am approaching 60 in big steps, and I am contemplating downsizing to be able to travel some more with my wife. Soon we will sell some of our farmland. A sense of safety and the desire for an easier life has replaced ambition. None of our children will farm, and thus the farm has become our retirement plan. I will continue raising White Dorper breeding stock, but I will no longer do so on the same large scale with all the farmland plus rented parcels in the neighborhood. At its peak, I had over 700 sheep in my flock, and nowadays I often wonder, “How did you do all this by yourself without any permanent fencing and rented pastures of odd shapes all over the neighborhood?!” Fact is, I’m no longer as productive as I once was, and the days take their toll followed by slower recovery. So if you are in your 20s and 30s and 40s—enjoy it and work as much as you can.

It won’t last. You’ll see.

*Panta rhei. Alles fließt.* Everything flows. I have accepted that change is inevitable because I have found joy in every chapter of my life. The whole book has not been written yet; I am still looking forward to becoming a grandfather one day. I am not one of those who bemoans that the times that once were are gone or have changed. I can see the beauty in every chapter that unfolds. I am grateful that I was able to live such a fulfilling life thus far. Look at it this way: had someone back then when I was living under communist rule behind the Iron Curtain told me that one day I will marry a Polish woman whom I will meet on a blind date, have three beautiful children, live on a farm in the Finger Lakes region in the great United States of America of all places, and raise sheep of a breed that didn’t even exist in Germany yet, I would have said t they are crazy. Such a story would seem to be just too far-fetched. 🐑

*Ulf owns and operates White Clover Sheep Farm and breeds and raises grass-fed White Dorper sheep without any grain feeding and offers breeding stock suitable for grazing. He is a native of Germany and lives in the U.S. since 1995. He farms in the Finger Lakes area in upstate New York. His website address is [www.whitecloversheepfarm.com](http://www.whitecloversheepfarm.com). He can be reached by e-mail at [ulf@whitecloversheepfarm.com](mailto:ulf@whitecloversheepfarm.com) or by phone during “calling hour” indicated on the answering machine at 585-554-3313.*



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# Forest Farming

## GOLDENSEAL

—Sonja Heyck-Merlin

The range of Goldenseal—*Hydrastis canadensis*—is widespread through eastern North America, ranging from Vermont south to Georgia, and west to Alabama, Arkansas, and Minnesota. It's especially prevalent in the Ohio River Valley. Common names for the plant include yellow root, ground raspberry (because of its red berries in the summer), and yellow puccoon.

Goldenseal has a deep history as a plant medicine, used by Indigenous Peoples and then by European settlers. The plant is valued for the chemical berberine, which gives the roots their distinct bright yellow color. As an herbal medicine, goldenseal has been used as a general tonic, especially for treating inflammations of the digestive system and as a topical treatment for skin and ear infections. The roots are also used as a yellow dye.

The plant was so popular that by the early 1900s it had been overharvested to near extinction across its native range, as its forested habitat was being simultaneously cleared for clay and coal mining, grazing and agriculture. In 1914, the U.S. government published a bulletin on the intentional cultivation of goldenseal, though little was done at the time to protect the species. The rise of modern medicine, however—and with it the shunning of herbal medicine—helped to stabilize its wild populations during the next 60 years.

“Goldenseal cultivation and trade decreased from the early 1900s until the 1970s with the resurgence of herbal medicine. The resurgence of using plants as medicine again leads to declines in the abundance of wild populations,” said Andrea Miller, sustainable forestry program manager at the nonprofit Rural Action in Athens, Ohio. The Rural Action forestry program supports landowners interested in economically, culturally, and ecologically sustainable methods of forest production.

Goldenseal is currently classified as vulnerable to extinction within most of its range under the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Since 1997, goldenseal has been listed in

Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Because of goldenseal's vulnerability, Miller advocates shifting away from wild harvesting to cultivating the plant through forest farming.

“The concepts of forest farming are not new. The term ‘forest farming’ might be relatively new, but plants have been cultivated by Indigenous Peoples and stewarded for medicine, food, and other ethnobotanical reasons,” said Miller.

Forest farming is the process of using natural or modified forest habitats to support the growth and production of commercially valuable non-timber forest products (NTFPs); NTFPs can be medicinal like goldenseal, black cohosh, or ginseng; edible like ramps, tree syrups, and berries; or decorative like pinecones, fern fronds, or grapevines.

### *Growing and Nurturing*

There is an important ecological relationship between the forest composition and growing-site suitability, according to Miller, so it's important to choose a proper site when growing goldenseal. The plant is classified as an herbaceous perennial understory herb with no persistent woody stems, meaning it is neither tree nor shrub but a perennial that comes back from root stock each spring.

It prefers cooler north, northeast, and east facing slopes with 60-80% shade under a canopy of mature deciduous trees, and it is generally found in stands dominated by sugar maple, tulip poplar, and black walnut, all species that are more associated with the cooler side of a hill. Goldenseal thrives in rich, moist, and well-drained soil with a slightly acidic pH (5-7).

Calcium is an important micronutrient; ideally 2500-3000 pounds per acre. When in doubt about a suitable site, look for sugar maple leaves on the forest floor. Sugar maple leaves are 1.75% calcium by dry weight, and as the leaves decompose, they return that calcium to the soil, in contrast to oak leaves which are high in tannins and don't readily break down.

Additionally, goldenseal has some soil texture preferences. “Loamy, uncompacted texture is ideal. Is it bouncy? Is it loamy? That's what you really want

Photos by Andrea Miller



compared to soil that's compacted," said Miller.

Though wild goldenseal tends to favor these conditions, Miller said that based on site visits, goldenseal can be relatively hardy when planted in a variety of locations, for example, sunnier spots and drier soils. She recommends that landowners experiment with planting sites that would not necessarily be considered favorable for goldenseal.

With forest farming, there are two cultivation methods—wild simulated and woods cultivated. The goal of the wild simulated method is to produce a product that is virtually indistinguishable from a wild plant, which is not significant in the marketplace because the root is not valued for its appearance the way American ginseng is. The pros of the wild simulated method are less labor and less maintenance, but the trade-offs are lower yields, longer harvest cycles (seven to ten years), and dealing with natural competition.

The woods cultivated method includes practices like thinning, tilling to form raised beds, and removing competitive vegetative matter, and therefore requires more labor and maintenance. The results of these efforts are typically higher yields and shorter harvest cycles (three to four years).

"Generally speaking, most people stick with the wild simulated method where you're mimicking wild conditions," Miller said.

### ***Propagating***

Goldenseal can be propagated in three ways: by rhizome, seed, or fibrous roots. To propagate by rhizome, dig up the rhizomes from mature plants (five to seven years old or plants with a flower and berry) in the fall and divide into ½-inch to 1-inch segments, making sure each newly divided piece has a bud. Then plant two to three inches deep with the bud facing up. It is possible to propagate rhizome pieces without a bud, but they may not emerge the following year or even the next.

Goldenseal fruits ripen from late July through early August and should be harvested early to beat the animal competition, especially turkeys. Mash the fruit to separate the seeds and then sow immediately. Sowing the seeds early gives them a chance to complete the necessary 30-day warm stratification. If the seeds don't go through the proper stratification process, they can remain completely dormant for two seasons.

To sow the seeds, remove the leaf litter and plant the seeds ½-inch to ¾-inch deep, 1½ inches



*Goldenseal flower*



*Goldenseal fruit*



*Goldenseal growing in the woods*

apart. Recover with soil and leaf litter. Wild simulated planting techniques can also be used: Rake back the leaf litter with a soft rake. Then take a hard rake and scarify the soil and broadcast the seeds five to seven per square foot. Place the leaves back over the broadcasted seeds.

Although it's less common, goldenseal can be propagated by its fibrous roots which grow along the entire length of the rhizome and are covered in microscopic dormant bud scales. Cut the roots from the rhizome and plant 1/2-inch to one-inch deep in the understory. Or overwinter the roots in moist sand, allowing the buds to develop before planting them. This process is slow; sometimes new plants don't emerge for two years or more.

All three propagation methods work, but Miller feels the seed method has an advantage. "You're preserving genetic diversity. So instead of cloning plants that have the exact same genetics, you're taking seed from plants that are potentially cross-pollinated with other populations, so you're enhancing genetic diversity within your population," said Miller.

If propagated by seed, goldenseal plants go through three stages of development upon emergence: seedling stage, development stage, and reproductive stage. Plants can remain in the seedling stage for one to two years. Site quality influences how long the plant remains in that seedling stage, and it's easy to overlook the immature plants. Once the plants reach two to three years old, they develop a single leaf and stem, which emerge in the spring. They persist in this stage for one to two years, sometimes more.

Plants from divided roots do not go through the seedling stage. "When dividing roots, what emerges will usually have one stalk and will persist in this vegetative stage for one to two years. After this stage, plants will reach reproductive maturity," said Miller.

Reproductively mature plants (whether from seed, rhizome, or fibrous root) are usually five years or older, have a forked stem with two leaves, and flower almost immediately after emerging.

### **Harvesting, Washing, Drying, and Marketing**

At four to eight years old (dependent on planting style), harvest goldenseal roots in the late summer through fall

when the energy is going from the above-ground parts of the plant back into the roots. The leaves, which are medicinal and are thought to synergize with constituents of the roots to provide a more potent medicine, can be harvested anytime, although spring is preferable because that is when they contain their most active constituents as energy is sent to the leaves to photosynthesize.

Spray the harvested roots with cool water with a hose over a mesh screen. Do not brush or scrub the roots as this may scrape the exterior, cause them to lose mass, and may break and damage the roots. Dry the roots at 85-100 degrees, providing good airflow. Under these conditions, the roots will lose about 70% of their weight in four to seven days. "Don't dry too hot," Miller said. "The exterior will dry, but the inside will not. That will increase the probability of mold. Low and slow."



Dried goldenseal roots sold to root buyers and/or ginseng dealers usually fetch about \$20-50/#. Price paid generally increases as the producer gains closer access to the finished product. Selling to a local herbalist or creating value-added products such as tinctures will increase gross receipts. Rural Action and its partners were recently granted \$6 million through the Inflation Reduction Act that will be applied to projects focused on promoting sustainable forestry practices including the growth of Herb Hubs in the region. Herb Hubs will provide equipment for processing and packaging cultivated herbs and plans to aggregate and market forest farmed products, including goldenseal at \$140/#.

Another potential marketing outlet is to sell planting stock or even fresh roots. Fresh roots are advantageous because they don't need to be washed and can be placed in cold storage in fall and sold in the spring.

"I work with all these landowners who have awesome sites, and they want to grow so much goldenseal, but I can't direct them to enough planting stock to fulfill the amount of goldenseal they could be growing. So, there is a huge lack of sustainable planting stock on the market. This is a really big opportunity for producers to grow goldenseal," Miller said. 🐾

*Sonja Heyck-Merlin and her family own and operate an organic farm in Charleston, Maine.*



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# *Fireside Chats With* Dr. Paul..

## *Get Yourself a Tree...Continued*

—Dr. Paul Dettloff, DVM

*M*y home farm is in a pie-shaped section of land. The east boundary is about three and a half miles in length, with both sides coming to a point four miles to the west. This is mostly wooded hills containing about 4500 acres, of which 3500 acres is contiguous woods. None is pastured. In the middle was a limestone gravel pit that was quarried about 35 years ago and is all healed by mother nature. Adjoining me on the north is a 240-acre tree farm that I inspired a courthouse worker to fill with trees. The wooded 240 is east of mine.

This is all organic land, loaded with wildlife. Not one acre of this triangle is pastured. The soil is mostly clay with eroded rich soil along the narrow creek filling valleys with a sizable layer of dolomitic lime, topped with fracking sand on top, with some mounds of fracking sand reaching out into the valleys. This is the driftless area of western Wisconsin that lies east of the mighty Mississippi, from about Eau Claire at the northern edge going all the way to Illinois.

Trees are a point of focus as my children all helped plant trees every spring. I had an addiction to any tree—

sugar maple, locust, catalpa, Kentucky coffee trees, ginkgo, basswood, hackberry. Catalpa always froze out, and the basswood struggled but are growing. I have one north side valley that is loaded with absolutely huge box elders, and close by grows a massive white birch. I'm sure they have symbiotic relationship with the fungal network in the soil whereby they trade sugars, minerals, and organic molecules.

Japan is a series of heavily wooded mountainous tree-covered islands with a lot of people. They have benches in their parks where they will sit for an hour with no phone and meditate or relax—it is called tree bathing. We all know how relaxing it is to sit under a shade tree and just rest. Perhaps we should do more of it.

I find a locust stump is perfect to sit on. They were what blacksmiths called ironwood for their anvils and pounding on. They give off more BTUs than oak and are so hard they will spark when chain sawed. Farmers know all about locust trees as they don't rot and are excellent for fenceposts. Everybody needs a favorite tree to hug. So throw your arms around a tree and take three big breaths. 🌿

*This will be Dr. Paul's last "Fireside Chat." For a number of years his column was in every issue. When he passed away on July 7, 2023, it was a testament to Paul's energy and drive that we had articles on hand until now. We will miss him as a friend and for his practical advice for farmers. Paul loved to share his knowledge and, as his obituary said, "Paul was a life-long learner who loved to teach and share his love of animals, nature, and sustainable agriculture. He never met a stranger that couldn't become a friend, and he always saw the good in others. Anyone who knew Doc, knew he had goals and a 'To Do' list right up until the end. He 'was surrounded by love when he passed.'" ~ Editor*

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## GETTING YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

Jeffery Goss

Ducks are popular with small homesteaders for ponds and barnyards, yet many people fail to realize the wide diversity of duck breeds and species, or to understand the different needs and habitats of each.

The duck family is broadly divided into two categories: diving ducks and dabbling or “puddle” ducks. This difference is not just in one behavior, but in their diet and anatomy. Diving ducks often swim completely under the surface, and their legs and feet are set near their tails, giving them the appearance of being taller. They can fly very high but must run along the surface of the water to take off. They usually prefer to sleep on the water. Their diet is largely carnivorous (fish, crawfish, and insects), though they do also eat aquatic plants. Dabbling ducks, on the other hand, eat mostly seeds, young vegetation, and sometimes fruit, and occasionally worms and grubs. They normally sleep on land, and when feeding in water they keep their hind end above the surface—a position known as upending.

Most breeds of barnyard ducks are descended from the American and/or European mallard. Although wild mallards can fly, most of the domestic breeds are heavy-breasted, or top-heavy, which means they cannot fly far because of their shape. This includes the Runner, Khaki Campbell, Ancona, Saxony, Appleyard, and other modern egg-laying breeds. The Rouen is still close enough to its mallard ancestry that some of them can fly short distances, but the rest are basically

flightless. Mallards and their domestic derivatives are not monogamous, and in barnyards they are often kept at a ratio of one drake for every 2-5 females. If the opposite situation occurs where the males outnumber the females, the drakes’ over-eagerness can be very stressful and harmful to the hens.

The same is also true of Muscovy ducks, the other most common duck breed in the U.S. Although known for being good egg layers, they are a different species altogether from the breeds described above. Native to Mexico and Central America, they were first raised by the Mayan people more than a thousand years ago for their eggs. Contrary to what the name suggests, they have no connection to Muscovites or Moscow. Although larger than mallard types, they can fly well and are prone to roost in trees. They also tend to be more aggressive.


There are also four other duck species that people less commonly raise in this country but are worth mentioning: pintail, Mandarin, wood, and teal ducks. Pintails and teal are both capable of long migration but will typically stay around if food is plentiful; nevertheless, it is a common practice to clip their wings the first autumn. Pintails are very fond of rice, and wild ones gather in huge flocks in the Missouri Boot Heel and Arkansas Delta each year. As barnyard ducks, they are easy to keep as long as they have water, according to many reports. The pintail, domestic (mallard) duck, and Muscovy can all breed with one another and produce fertile eggs, but the offspring of any such union will be

“mule ducks,” who cannot reproduce.

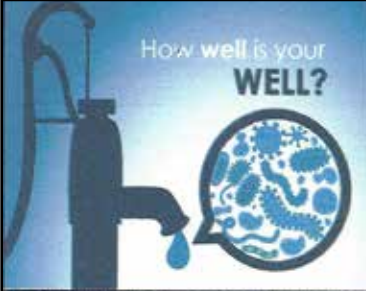
Wood ducks, smaller than any of the others described, are native to the mid-south, including the Ozarks, where they both breed and winter. They were once common in the wild, though now much less so, and are also available from gamebird farms and hatcheries. Wood ducks need water and shade for their young in the summer. They like woodland streams and shady farm ponds and typically nest in a protected cavity. They can be raised in elevated nest boxes close to the water. They need a peaceful environment and should not be kept near aggressive breeds of fowl (such as Muscovy ducks or Chinese geese). Although not heavy egg producers, they are inexpensive to feed and hold an important place in the woodland-farm edge habitat. The males have a distinctive “hood” and bright green, yellow, and red (or purple) feathers. Wood ducks, like geese, are usually faithful to one mate, though a wood duck will sometimes mate again if its partner dies or is gone for many months. Wood ducks eat fruit and acorns, as well as grasses, grains, and aquatic vegetation.

Mandarin ducks are the kind raised in China for centuries, for their eggs primarily, but sometimes for meat and for the feathers they shed annually.

So far, all the breeds and species we have dealt with

are puddle ducks. These are the type that can be raised in a barnyard setting or a small pond. Diving ducks include the goldeneye, scaup, canvasback, redhead, bufflehead, merganser, and eider. These require a large body of water such as a lake or large pond, and generally cool northern temperatures for breeding. In Missouri they are best enjoyed as passersby in the late fall and early spring sky, heralding the change in season as they make their way between the far North and the deep South, quacking all the way. 

*Jeffery Goss, Jr. lives in rural Stone County, Missouri, and is a seedsman, market gardener, and farm journalist. He writes primarily about agriculture, health, and theology.*



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## Down the Rabbit Hole

### Part 3

—Melissa Kan

#### Weaning

At 6 weeks old, I separate the kits. This can be a stressful time for them, so look out for diarrhea or mushy pellets, but it normally goes without a hitch, and they adjust quickly. I move the kits straight into their pasture pen, though you could go even more slowly and gently by moving mama and babies together for a few days while they adjust to a new house. We have “rabbit tractors” my husband built, modeled after Joel Salatin’s designs. The rabbits stay together as a litter and get moved to fresh grass daily. They get rabbit feed, hay, fodder, and water, just like adult rabbits, and all the vegetable scraps we can spare. I also give the “grow-outs” daily oats and black oil sunflower seeds as this helps them put on healthy fat and weight.

I am amazed at how hearty young rabbits are. By the time they are 6 weeks old, they are plump and active, and we don’t have any problems growing them out to processing time (around 12 weeks old).

#### Processing

We now grow out the rabbits until about 13 weeks. We can get a 3.5-pound carcass at that point, which

we are quite pleased with. You can leave both genders together until about 14-16 weeks. We do see some of them mounting each other at 13 weeks, but so far this has not been a problem. If you have the space, you could separate them and grow out a bit longer, but at that point the growth is slower and the meat is getting less tender by the week (and the processing will start to get harder).

The evening before we plan to process the rabbits, I remove all the feed and water. While I don’t go over the details of processing here, it is not a difficult process. There are many books and online videos that describe it. If you have processed chickens, you are more than prepared, because it takes half the amount of time and little to no equipment.

I can process a rabbit in about 6 minutes now, so I can easily do a typical litter in under an hour. There’s no need to wait for water to reach scalding temp as with chickens! A good boning knife and maybe shears is necessary. Most people like to hang the rabbit for dressing. I have a set called the “hopper-popper,” which is a hook you mount on a wall, tree, or cinder block that allows quick severing of the spinal cord. I then hang the rabbit from the hooks for skinning and evisceration. I save the ears and feet to dehydrate for dog treats. We also save the heart, kidney, and liver. A good rule of thumb when processing rabbits is if the liver looks good, the meat is good. If you see unusual spotting or coloration of the



Photos by Author



liver, it might be best to feed that to the dog. I've also tanned some hides, so we are wasting as little as possible. After seeing how warm those baby bunnies stay in winter, I wouldn't mind some hats and mitts lined with rabbit fur myself! We keep the rabbits whole, though separating and freezing the pieces would certainly make for some easy meals!

### Cooking

Now for the rewarding part—sitting down to succulent rabbit meat from your own backyard! I described rabbit meat in Part 1, but I promise you will not be disappointed. The main thing to keep in mind is that rabbit meat is lean, and because rabbits are “skinned,” you won't have that fatty layer that meat birds have. Rabbit meat lends itself to “stewing” as a result. You can have endless combinations of doing a quick sear on both sides in a large cast-iron skillet, then layering onions, garlic, and herbs around it, and covering partway with a bone broth gravy and slow cooking covered in the oven for a couple hours. But nothing beats the ease of the crockpot. This is my kids' favorite rabbit recipe:

- 1 whole rabbit (2-4 pounds)
- 1-2 whole sticks of butter
- salt
- fresh herbs (rosemary, thyme, sage)



Place the rabbit in the crockpot. Season with salt and herbs. Place sticks of butter on top of rabbit so they can melt down and braise it. Add 1 cup of water or broth to bottom of pot. Cook on low for 4 hours. Add more liquid or butter during cooking time if it seems to dry out. Serve with rice, or mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables. Rabbit tastes especially good with potatoes, turnips, kale, or sauerkraut. Think Irish and British flavor profiles.

Of course, rabbit bones make wonderful bone broth (though you will need to reserve many more bones to have enough for broth than you do with

chicken). If I have any meat left from a rabbit meal, I will reserve all the cooking juices and meat and make a simple rabbit soup the next evening for dinner. Add some cans of cannellini beans if you need to stretch the protein a little further. Remember that rabbit meat has a higher protein content than almost all other meat, so while it is lean, you need to eat less of it to feel just as full (though when it is deliciously cooked, you might not remember that!).

As with any animal on the homestead, make sure to build your library of resources and preparedness for rabbit injury and illness, which I did not cover here. Experience is often our biggest teacher, and we have

had successes and failures already, but having something to reference and some herbs or homeopathy in the cabinet helps greatly!

I hope this series has given you some inspiration and appreciation for this undervalued meat source on the homestead! Maybe you will consider adding rabbits or allowing it to be a homestead project for one of your children. And if you have any urban friends who would like to do more food production on a small backyard scale, make sure to mention the wonderful rabbit! 🐰

*Melissa and her family live in Lynchburg, Virginia, and enjoy growing their miniature 1/4 acre homestead a little more each year, while reading and dreaming of one day homesteading on a larger scale.*



*A rare photo of a rabbit nursing 7 wriggling kits at once*



# The Prayer of a Child

—Daris Howard

The weather has turned really hot this July, and it reminds me of the opposites we have. In the summer, we wish it was cooler, and in the winter, we wish it was warmer. Sometimes we even wish for the opposite season.

As I pondered that, I remembered an event with my youngest daughter, Elli, when she was about three. The weather had been frigid for about a week and showed no sign of abating. The temperatures were around twenty degrees below zero, and there seemed to be a constant wind that shot the cold right through a person.

It happened on the worst night of all that one of our older children had a concert they were playing in. We always attended events the children were in if we could, so we all prepared to go. To help everyone else stay warm, I got our van warming for about fifteen minutes before we loaded into it. When it was time to leave, we all made a mad dash to the van. I made a couple of trips carrying Elli and some things to keep the youngest children occupied during the concert.

The concert was enjoyable, and when it ended, people didn't stay around and visit like they often did. Everyone was concerned about getting stranded in the stormy weather. I got the van warming again, then pulled it up near the doors. I helped everyone into it, and we headed home.

Once we got home, we did our usual evening song, prayers, and other family things. There were bedtime snacks, then we sent the children off to bed. It was late, but I had a cow that still needed to be milked, and other animals that needed to be fed.

I grabbed the milking bucket and went out to do the chores. Our milking barn was open on one side, so the freezing air whistled through it. By the time I finished milking and feeding, I could barely feel my fingers, and my toes were completely numb.

I came in and gave the bucket of milk to my wife, Donna, to take care of. I then went to warm up. I took

my outer clothes off and stood in front of a heater, but I continued to shiver. Donna made me some hot chocolate, which helped, but I finally decided to get warm I needed to take a hot shower.

By the time I finished the shower, I was finally feeling warm and comfortable. That's when I heard Elli kind of crying—more of a soft whimper. I went up to her room and put my hand on her head. She didn't feel hot or anything.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

She nodded. "Daddy, I left Toby, my bear, in the van. Can you get him?"

Fresh out of the shower and finally feeling warm, the thought of going out in the night made me cold just thinking about it. "Sweetheart," I said, "it's freezing out there. I'll get him in the morning."

"But he'll get cold," Elli said.

"He's a bear," I replied. "He'll be okay."

Elli didn't complain. She sniffled a little, then told me no one had helped her say her prayers. I said I would help her, so she knelt on her bed.

Usually, I would share things she could say, but this time she had the words in her heart that she wanted to pray about. "Dear Heavenly Father, please help Daddy go get Toby and not be cold when he does. I need him so he won't freeze, and so I can be happy and go to sleep."

She said a few more things, and when she finished, I put on some warm clothes and retrieved a bear. It's amazing how much power and faith there is in a child's heartfelt prayer. It kept me warm as I went out into the frosty night.

And when I gave Toby to her, her smile and the hug she gave me as she snuggled him close were the best pay I could ever ask for.

*Daris Howard, award winning, syndicated columnist, playwright, and author, can be contacted at [daris@darishoward.com](mailto:daris@darishoward.com); or visit his website at <http://www.darishoward.com>, to buy his books.*

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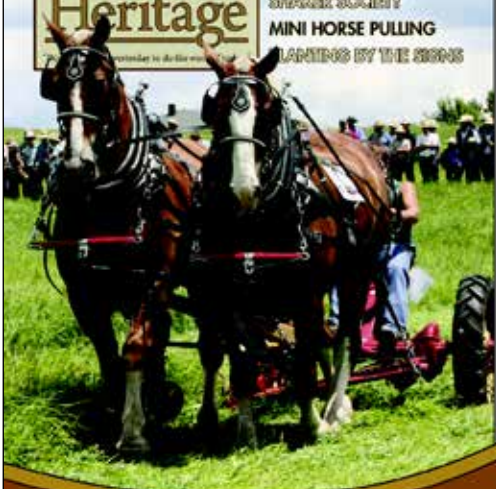
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Basil—free of mildew

*Printed after one of my articles last year was an invitation for readers to write to me with any specific questions they might have about organic gardening or homesteading in general. That invitation is reissued at the end of this article, which contains my responses to some of the questions I have received.*

### Blighted Basil

A woman asked why her basil plants become mildewed year after year despite trying different varieties which promised mildew resistance. Basil plants are susceptible to a few diseases, including Fusarium wilt, powdery and downy mildew, and bacterial leaf spot. The one occurring most commonly is basil downy mildew. Related to the cucurbit downy mildew, it is caused by the fungus-like water mold *Peronospora belbahrii*. Though plants afflicted with this disease are safe to eat (though perhaps not too appealing as their leaves first yellow and then brown), they are wholly unsalable.

Basil downy mildew can be introduced into your garden by infected seeds or transplants, or with wind-borne spores (*sporangia*). Once there, it can spread from leaf to leaf. As mentioned above, there are varieties claiming varying degrees of downy mildew resistance (denoted DMR in printed descriptions). Amazel, Prospera, Rutgers Devotion, Rutgers Obsession, Rutgers Passion, and Rutgers Thunderstruck are a few. Plus, red/purple-



Carrots, mulch in place

# Growing Concerns:

## Q & A

—Leah Smith

leaved varieties are less likely to become infected. However, as my questioner discovered, planting DMR varieties alone is no guarantee of avoiding infections.

The above diseases are all encouraged by damp conditions, which is why the cultural practices of 1) avoiding overcrowding and maintaining good air circulation (so make sure to keep the weeds down), 2) avoiding extended periods of wetted foliage with A.M. watering or watering below the canopy, and 3) planting in full sun, are recommended. In fact, infected plants (i.e., ones that indeed have *P. belbahrii* present) will not develop symptoms when growing in cool, dry conditions. An additional interesting point about this pathogen is that it is not observed to survive in the environment but rather must have a living plant present to pass to.

And a final point about healthy basil plants is that infections of all kinds (as well as pest infestations) are observed by many to be signs of nutritional imbalances and deficiencies. Plants which are healthy, photosynthesizing along and producing their sugars, are not hospitable to attack; their cell walls are too rigid and their sap too sticky. So remember also that basil is a heavy feeder, requiring plenty of fertilization to grow happily.

### Pumped-Up Parsley

Another woman was having trouble with her parsley, wondering why it was small and sickly-looking year after year. Let's start from the ground up. Parsley is a heavy feeder too, and prefers rich, well-drained soil. However, it is also a heavy drinker. Though overly damp soil

Photos by Author

is likely to rot plants' taproots, it likes consistently moist soil for optimum growth.

Our approach to getting parsley plants off to a good start is threefold. Firstly, we place our transplants into seemingly oversized cells in our transplant trays. Their taproots do not like to be disturbed when transplanted out (or from tray to tray as you are sizing up/pricking out for that matter), so in large cells they can grow undisturbed. We are also sure to get them into the ground before they even think about filling up their plug space with roots. Secondly, we use super fertile (and well composted) chicken manure as a mulch for our plants, to which they respond with dramatic growth. Lastly, our parsley will definitely receive additional water during dry periods. Of course, the mulch will also help to retain moisture in the soil, but be sure to give space to the plant crowns to ensure good air circulation and avoid any problems with disease.

## 24-Carrot Gold

A young man asked me how we reliably grow carrots for a steady market supply. Carrots do have their challenges. First is their germination. The initial step to making sure they germinate well is to avoid using old seed. Different crops have different periods of viability for their seeds. While comparatively long for cucumbers, melons, and tomatoes, for example (from 6 to 10 years for them), for carrots it is **up to 3 years**. So begin with fresh seed.

Next comes site selection. Carrots prefer a loose, well-drained, sandy loam soil. They don't do well with overly nitrogen-rich soil as it can cause forked roots, though they do like organic matter.

Even in the best circumstances, carrots are slow to germinate. Some people prime their seeds by giving them an hour soak in water, and then fold them into a damp paper towel and store them in an airtight container for three to four days prior to planting. Alternatively, you can simply make sure that, once seeded, your plot receives ample, even moisture. You need to achieve this with frequent watering that doesn't disturb the soil and seeds too much. You also need to prevent soil crusting, which can hinder germinated sprouts emerging from the soil. A light sprinkling of mulch on top of your seedbed can do the trick. Depending on the area size, pieces of burlap or polyester row cover are



also wonderful ways to cover soil surfaces and to retain moisture and keep the soil soft. And you don't need to water underneath them, you can water your seeds right through these materials and keep the small seeds below undisturbed. Time this for the end of the day to further retain moisture.

The cooler the soil, the slower the germination. This is particularly detrimental when it leads to weeds getting ahead of the crop. Whether flaming after an initial site tillage or just after carrot seed sowing, solarizing the soil, selecting a site where the weed seed bank is perennially low, etc., take whatever steps are necessary to keep weeds in check. We like to plant a mixture of carrot and radish seeds in rows, as it has several advantages. The faster emerging radishes help you to keep track of the rows and aid early weeding; the radishes benefit from the frequent watering the carrots need to receive, so it is well done together; and harvesting the radishes both helps in keeping the soil loose and relieving some of the pressure of crowded carrots...

Which is a good segue to the next task for your patch, namely thinning. Carrot plants should ultimately be one to three inches apart (depending on variety). A hand claw weeder dragged perpendicularly across your rows will help remove the tedium from the task, as you must remove crowded carrots somehow. Once germination, thinning, and weeding are behind you, your final step to ensure tasty harvests is to protect the carrot roots themselves from exposure to the sun, which will lead to flesh greening and bitterness. Pull

*...Continued on page 66*



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# Weather Wisdom

—Bruce Stambaugh



I miss the autumns of my youth.

Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, children my age filled our suburban neighborhood. Fall was always a glorious time. We would frolic in the colorful piles of fallen leaves before our fathers burned them.

We enjoyed the more moderate temperatures, especially at school, which had no air-conditioning, likely because it wasn't needed. On weekend nights, we would listen to Cleveland baseball games on the radio and chase plump coal-black crickets through the cool grass under starry skies.


On rare occasions, remnants of hurricanes made it into northeast Ohio. During one such storm, heavy gray clouds cooled the days and brought soaking rains and gusty winds that blew down our neighbor's willow trees. Nature's power amazed us.

The first frost in late September or early October ended the growing season and our duties in the garden. Our family traveled to a local orchard to pick red and yellow apples that seemed to glow in the morning sunshine. Our affable father loaded his family into the crowded sedan and drove to Holmes County, Ohio, from our blue-collar city to view a kaleidoscope of colorful leaves.

Now, decades later, much of that has changed. Trees begin losing their leaves in August, dropping them like lazy snowflakes due to severe droughts in consecutive summers. Storms that do arrive with needed rains come too late for farmers. For the second or third year in a row, their silos are filled with chopped cornstalks, too many with no ears at all. Other geographic areas may fare better.

Hurricanes have increased in number, frequency, and ferocity, causing catastrophic damage via violent winds, tornadoes, and extensive flooding. The proof is in the global news and the weather statistics compiled over the last three decades. And given the climate trends, things will likely only get worse in the future.

Technology has allowed professional meteorologists to make better weather predictions in the short and long term. Their forecasts and estimations don't match what previous generations experienced in what was then autumn's regular rhythm. Too often, today's climate extremes disrupt the autumn pleasantries.

Autumn in the early 21st century is different from what it once was. 

*Bruce and his wife Neva live in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where Bruce continues to write and serve as a volunteer severe weather spotter for the National Weather Service.*

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# BEE TALK



—Sam Miller

**MAY 25** – The honey flow is in full swing, and the bees are really at it hard. The weather is also nice and dry, so that is helping to let them put in the maximum amount of hours in a week. They don't believe in a 40-hour work week if the weather is nice and the nectar is available like it is now.

I could take several gallons of honey off each hive right now if I took the time to do it. But I think I'll wait a few weeks and then take off all that is ready. I have plenty of equipment, and I will just make sure they have lots of room right now. I expect the honey flow to be over or mostly so before the end of July because very seldom do we have a spring this heavy, and a heavy mid-summer flow. We will enjoy it as long as it lasts.

The hives were small but seemed healthy and built up fast this spring. I did not make any splits this spring and am trying to keep an eye on the mite levels and maybe treat for mites if I must. I have not seen mites or mite damage, but I know that can change fast during the summer.

**JUNE 10** – The honey flow is still going but not as heavy anymore. I took several supers of honey off the biggest hives and extracted it, so we have fresh honey for the table. It is very light-colored and mild like most early honey is. It is delicious.

We are still busy in the planting season on the produce farm, and the bees do not get much attention or are not bothered much by their keeper. White clover is not blooming like some years and the summer flow looks poor. My five-acre field of buckwheat should be blooming in a few weeks, and I am excited about that.

**JUNE 30** – The buckwheat is getting some attention from the bees but not overboard. I see some honeybees working on it, but there are more other bee species that I don't have names for. The buzzing is very plain in the field most

# HOW TO HANDLE FALL SWARMS

—Randy Stieg



*Drawing by Anna (Raber) Miller*

It seems the best parts of life are the events we do not plan, and whenever beekeeping took on the perception of toil and grind, fortune could be depended upon to send something interesting—something new and unexpected.

I have a small cabin that sits deep in the woods on the edge of a spruce bog where I've kept a yard of bees for many years. It's a very modest structure that was built with lumber sawn from hemlock blowdowns and logs that were requisitioned from the work of beaver on the farm. Its most pleasing feature is a quiet and restful porch on which to unwind in the last minutes of a laborious day. This was always a fine beeyard, the clearing protected from the wind from all sides; a retreat surrounded by the woods. The porch which overlooked the beeyard was a dandy spot where the worker bees could be seen coasting into the hives with their loads of pollen and nectar to feed their young sisters in the hive.

Because of the hot weather, even into the waning days of September, I had been loath in getting the last of the honey supers off the hives, as I tend to pursue the beeyard work more by the bees and bloom and not so much by the calendar. With the last load of supers on the bee truck and the apiary work nearly completed for the year, my mind was a long way from a bee swarm. Then, from my porch rocker a familiar form took shape down in the spruce bog. Closer examination

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revealed a swarm of bees, six feet up a tamarack tree. It didn't take long to rustle up a hive box as I always keep one handy at each of the beeyards for such emergencies. Not being an overly large swarm, it fit nicely in a 5-frame nuc box.

The old-timer viewed these late swarms as an oddity of nature that possibly foretold a portent of foreboding of the coming winter. It was common knowledge among beekeepers that such late swarms were useless, but nearly everything has a value if you can bring that value to light and in some way profit by it. These late swarms turned out to be great teachers on wintering bees, and I learned a lot from them.

As the beekeeping years rolled by, I came to realize that late swarms were not a rare phenomenon; in fact, some years they can be quite common.

Late swarms can certainly be caused by overcrowding in the hive however, I think in some instances it may be the result of the supersedure process that gets out of hand. A good percentage of bees will supersede their queens in early fall, generally producing but one queen cell for this. The bees sometimes become overzealous in their supersedure cell production, producing two or three cells, and at hatching time having more than one queen in the hive. The bees may take the notion upon themselves to swarm, especially if the weather is warm and balmy.

The benefits of late swarms are that young, new queen that stays with the hive usually will fill a couple frames with eggs. So not only is the hive requeened with a new young queen, but it also has a large amount of brood to produce young bees that have the potential to winter well. But my dilemma at the moment was how to keep that swarm alive until spring.

Prior experience had shown that sugar syrup too late in the year was disastrous to colony survival as there was not sufficient time for the bees to properly cap their stores. There was an account in an old beekeeping book from 1878 how a beekeeper of that era fed "hard candy," as he called it, and with it had realized a degree of success at wintering honeybees. There were several ways of feeding this hard candy, but through trial and error I found the most effective way was using a standard deep frame. The frame, containing a couple cross brace wires, is laid flat on a hard surface, then hot liquid candy is poured in and allowed to cool. When cool, the candy should be hard but not too hard—slightly bendable but not runny. This cake of candy also needs a bit of pollen substitute mixed in, and not having any pea flour as the old beekeeping book recommended, rye flour was substituted. It was sifted very fine, then mixed with the candy when hot. It's easy to over-do the flour, and three or four tablespoons is plenty for one frame of candy.

This frame of hard candy was placed in an insulated 5-frame nuc box along



with three frames of drawn empty combs, all being pushed to one side to create an extra-large space for the bees between the hive wall and the frame of candy. In midwinter, such a swarm of moderate

of the day, but even more so between 8 o'clock in the morning and 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

The bees seem to like zucchini and cucumber blossoms better than buckwheat. They are working those as soon as they can see to fly in the morning and working them hard like four bees per blossom on the zucchini. I think they are getting mostly pollen and not a lot of nectar from most of the vegetables. But it surely helps the crops to have them well pollinated even if we don't get a lot of honey from them.

**JULY 10** – The mites are getting bad, so we took the honey supers off and treated all the hives with Apilife Var. One of the hives had sealed queen cells, so we made a couple of splits. It appears to me that the mites are bad enough that the bees are blaming the queen. They are trying to replace her, which I think is a good plan for mite control.

It was high time to treat for mites. They are bad enough that the bees could no longer take care of all the brood. I am afraid they might dwindle down fast.

**JULY 30** – The hive that was replacing their queen looks really good; they have a nice brood pattern and seem to be gaining numbers again. The rest of the hives need some more help, so I treated them all again and want to requeen all of them soon. I hope to make a few more splits then too.

**AUGUST 15** – Goldenrod is just starting to bloom, and the bees look better than they did a month ago. I hope they can store enough of the fall flow to overwinter well. Things are looking up in the beeyard again, and I hope it stays that way.

It is time to get to work, so may you all enjoy the nice season of fall and don't rob the bees too closely. 🐝

*Sam Miller and his family live near Kidron, Ohio, where they farm and care for bees and sheep and grow produce. Sam also shears sheep in late winter and early spring. In his spare time, he reconditions corn binders. He is a regular contributor to Farming Magazine. Sam's mailing address is: 7360 Kohler Road, Apple Creek, OH 44606*



size will nicely fill the space to huddle up, conserving warmth. Observation has shown that colony survival is connected to the size of the cluster of bees versus the size of their hive. A small swarm will not survive in too large a hive.

During the course of the winter, extra snowshoe trips were made to this beeyard just to keep an eye on this special hive. Any day the bees could fly, it was always a feeling of triumph to see a few bees hovering about the entrance. Or on cold days, a light thump on the hive brought a slight hum from within that assured me the venture was still on track.

By the time warmer days of spring arrived, the swarm had eaten a fist-sized hole through the candy frame and had a nice patch of brood started on the adjacent frame of drawn comb. The colony was soon ready to be expanded into a full-sized hive body and then went on to produce a very good crop of honey that summer—a good return on a swarm that was considered useless and without value. Each time a honey super was added to this hive, a little wave of victory surged through me.

A year later, through an accident or maybe neglect, I had several of these September swarms to experiment with. In the spring of that year, I had made up nearly

two dozen two-frame nucs in 5-frame nuc boxes. They were set aside in their own little beeyard to lessen the chances of being robbed out by strong colonies in the honey producing yard. With being out of sight and out of mind, along with a busy time of year, these starter nucs were left to shift for themselves.

The first visit to their little yard in mid-September, I was surprised with two swarms hanging in the nearby bushes. I always enjoyed catching swarms, and over the next few days I enjoyed the excitement of catching several as nearly one-third of these spring nucs cast a swarm. These were wintered with the same procedures as before, the only difference being, as these were somewhat smallish swarms, their 5-frame nuc boxes were placed over-top a strong colony, the two being separated by a double screen board. The rising warmth from the strong colony below created an environment that allowed many of the more fragile nucs to survive. Come spring, aided by this same warmth from below, these smaller clusters of bees expanded surprisingly fast and were soon ready for standard hive bodies and to begin honey production.

Those fall swarms began as a source of trial and error, often a challenge, but turned out to be great teachers on wintering bees and honey production. Some years they yielded excellent results, while other years there was scant survival. But even in years of loss, they proved to be a valuable source to learn from.

September swarms are a fascinating though somewhat uncommon element of beekeeping that can attract and hold the beekeeper's anticipation throughout the winter months, as there is a sense of pride in such swarms that were successfully wintered. These were swarms that circumstances of nature had destined to perish; and there is something fulfilling to the inner man about succeeding with the unexpected in life. 🐝

*Randy Stieg lives on the family farm near Leroy, Michigan, with his two Blue Heelers and keeps busy with fifty colonies of honeybees. The honey is sold to local stores.*

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## HINTS FOR FARM AND HOME

If you take a bath on a warm summer day, add 5 to 6 drops of peppermint oil to your bath. It cools you off and you feel so refreshed! Works great!

E.H. – Ohio

Don't feed your ducks layer feed because it contains too much calcium carbonate, which can kill them.

A.S. – Indiana

If your loose hay is put away a bit tough, you can scatter some salt over it to take out the moisture. For tough bales, turn them on edge and sprinkle salt on the edge that the baler cut. Salt also adds value to the hay.

J.M. – Wisconsin

When doing pressure cooker canning, to remember when your cooker is ready to take off, use a crayon to mark the time on the cooker. The color marks can easily be wiped off as long as the cooker is warm.

A.Y. – Wisconsin

Do you struggle with cracked skin on your fingertips? Apply superglue to the crack, the gel type. It brings relief and allows the crack to heal.

E.W. – Pennsylvania

If your cow gets cauliform mastitis, give 2-4 cloves of garlic in her mouth. It will really be smelly, but takes care of the problem.

J.B. – Virginia

While cleaning up after making venison bone broth, I accidentally got some deer tallow in my sink. Dawn Power Wash didn't dent it. I tried Ecos Fruit and Veggie Wash (removes wax) that I recently purchased from Backyard Herbs and Flowers. It worked!

J.W. – West Virginia

While butchering ducks, add a squirt of dish soap, some salt, and baking soda to the scalding water. It helps with the defeathering. Also dip while holding the wings and dip backwards to get water under the feathers.

M.K. – Pennsylvania

*Judith Woodruff from Linn, West Virginia, has the winning Hint of the Season and will receive \$50. Send your tips and hints to Hints for Farm and Home, PO Box 85, Mt. Hope, Ohio 44660. We will pay \$10 for each hint published and \$50 for the Hint of the Season.*



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# The Land Tells Its Story— What Will It Say About Us?



(photo National Archive)

—Alice Evans

*A collier covers the mound with wet leaves to help seal it.*

On a hot afternoon in June, I learned that the land always tells its story. It will tell its story of what we did to it, both good and harmful, long after we are gone.

My father, grandfather and brother and sister and I were making hay that afternoon. I was fourteen years old.

The rectangular creek bottom on our Missouri farm is bordered by railroad tracks on the south and an indolent creek on the north that winds its way to the Meramec River. Surrounded by hills rising above us on all sides, it feels like being in a bowl. On the hillside by the creek, an ancient stand of white oak timber served as a sentinel, watching over us with silent knowledge from times gone by. Past the railroad on our neighbor's farm, the slopes were dotted with his grazing cattle. From this distance, they looked like my baby brother's plastic barnyard animals, easily moved at will to suit the whims of a toddler.

We arrived at the creek bottom hayfield shortly after our noon dinner. My grandfather began raking. Earlier that morning, my father had readied the baler, checking that the aging machine had all the lubrication, belts, cutters, and twine for smooth operation. Paul,

my brother, started baling, while my father, Sarah, and I picked up the bales and loaded the wagon. We worked in a well-rehearsed unison of motion.

My father pointed to the slopes across the railroad tracks, part of the neighboring Carlson farm.

"When the railroad came through in 1856, a good bit of land around here was sold to a man who owned an iron blast furnace in Moselle," my father said. Moselle is a defunct village about four miles down the railroad tracks from our farm, at the confluence of the Meramec and Bourbeuse Rivers.

The previous winter, my father had shown us the shallow iron ore pit on our farm. There were many other such pits nearby where low-grade iron ore had been mined, he explained. That was why our area was known as Iron Hill, now the name of our road and farm. The railroad had ushered in a new industry. Locally mined iron ore could be sent to Moselle on the railroad and then shipped on to customers after it had been smelted into pig iron.

"The Carlson farm and all the others on the south side of the tracks belonged to that man, and he cleared the land. It was all native timber then. Not when he got through with it," Dad continued. He mopped his forehead

with his white handkerchief, then carefully put it back in his breast pocket. My father was a spare man, moving easily from ground to wagon without showing the effort. Overalls covered his work trousers and plaid cotton shirt. His hands were rough and brown, as capable of making hay as soothing a crying child.

“Why did he clear the land if he was in the iron ore business?” we asked.

“He needed charcoal to run the furnace. Charcoal is made from timber, so he cut all this to fuel his furnace.”

Our neighbor’s pastured hillside had no trace of mature timber. A majestic stand of ancient white oak timber stood on ours.

One wagon was loaded already. We pulled it over to the field edge and hitched up to the second wagon.

As if we had not had a ten-minute break in the conversation, my father continued. “So he built a charcoal pit right over there, on the crest of that hill.”

We stared at the place he pointed to, as if it would be important to someday recall the exact spot where the charcoal pit had been.

My father explained to us that a charcoal pit is an inward-leaning self-supporting pile of wood fitted with a chimney and covered with soil and leaves to deprive the fire inside it of oxygen. Wood is burned slowly, at high temperatures, to convert it into charcoal. Charcoal pits were dangerous, as they sometimes required the charcoal tender, also called a collier, to climb to the top of the heap to check on the fire’s progress. We listened intently.

By this time, we had loaded the second wagon and went to sit in the shade for a few minutes before unloading the hay in the barn. We passed around the warm water jug, each of us drinking deeply from the sweet-tasting well water.

“One day the man hired to tend to the charcoal pit was gone. No one knew where he was,” Dad said.

“Where was he?” we asked, in a vain hope he would tell us something different than we already knew.

“Well, he could have gone somewhere else, but most folks reckoned he fell in and couldn’t get out,” Dad said. “People who did that kind of work usually didn’t have too many folks who cared about them; they were loners. He was probably gone for a while before anyone noticed.”

We recoiled in horror at the presumed terrible fate of the hapless charcoal tender. I was glad my father knew



*A charcoal mound mid-burn. Burns might last up to a couple of weeks. (photo Library of Congress)*

this bit of history, so at least someone knew of the collier’s life. His memory wafted away on the breeze.

I gazed somberly at the hillside, no longer seeing the cows grazing but a smoldering charcoal pit with the figure of the solitary collier outlined in its lurid shadows.

For the first time in my life, I understood why our farm had a stand of ancient timber while the neighbors across the railroad track did not, something I had never considered.

Our land and farms are shaped by both natural and human forces, with each generation leaving its mark for better and worse, to be revealed in small details. The soil, fields, woods, and ponds, and the people and their decisions are a tightly woven tapestry. I became aware that day of the providence that our farm had avoided the ruthless deforestation that occurred to the land south of us, separated by the railroad built in the 1850s. If my ancestors had not already owned our farm, or had sold out to the furnace owner, the land

# ADA

the Ayrshire





would have been very different, even one hundred and fifty years later.

An understanding of the land is acquired over a lifetime, or even over several generations, and does not rest easily. The story of the land reveals husbandry and stewardship, but also greed and hubris and conflict. National and international events trickle down to the people on the land, as the Industrial Revolution had swept our neighborhood's land into its grip and changed its trajectory.

That June day, as I was old enough to begin thinking outside myself, I realized our farm that I knew and loved was not static. It had changed and would change more still. My feeling of stability was shifting, unsettled by this knowledge, yet too young to understand properly. I did not yet know how my life would be entwined with this land on an abiding journey. I only knew that I cared about it.

Later that evening, my father explained how the iron ore furnace had closed in the 1870s. Charcoal was being replaced by coke as fuel for smelting, and there were no coal mines nearby. In the 1880s, much of the land that had been cleared was settled by Swedish immigrants. The land reminded them of their native farms, and they took to raising wheat. The neighborhood across the railroad

tracks from us became known as Swede Hollow. The Swedish settlers, Johnsons and Carlsons and Andersons, were successful and good farmers. After decades of hard work, they secured their financial future with the 1919 wheat harvest and its record prices. Our families became neighbors and friends, bonds that have endured up to the present.

My father told us that the land can be redeemed from how it is treated if someone comes along who will love and care for it. People are like that too, he said.

Every time I unearth a piece of iron in one of our fields, I think of the story of our land. When I walk in the creek bottom, I reflect on the doomed collier and the Swedish immigrants who made good on what had been destroyed.

That afternoon was nearly fifty years ago. My dawning realization of how decisions affect the land for many generations has been a lifelong gift and burden. I think often of the lessons my father taught us about the land. I am still listening to the land and hoping that when it speaks to my descendants, or whoever is here a century from now, they will think I treated it kindly. 🐾

*Alice Evans and her family farm on Iron Hill in Franklin County, Missouri.*

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# Indian Summer Harvest



—Joseph Miller

*I*t was a bit chilly, in the morning then went to the upper 50s in the afternoon. Sunny. A beautiful Indian summer day in November. That rare, usually brief, season of perfect weather before the cold arrives. A gift.

I took three calves to Mt. Hope and came home again by 1:00, then suddenly got the urge to go deer hunting. But then I remembered neighbor Mosie needed some boards for his building project, and I had told him I would have them ready today. I quickly put the log on the mill and sliced off the boards he needed, then shut down the outfit and called it quits for the day. This deer hunting urge was not going away, and I had plans to do something about it.

I got my hunting gear together: binoculars, grunt tube, snort wheeze, water bottle, hunting knife, headlight.

Was that all? Whoa! Better not forget my crossbow! I got my old Barnett Predator and checked to make sure I had enough arrows. Four should do. One had an old used broadhead, just in case a fat groundhog would come waddling along. Then for some reason there was always a field tip sticking in there. Then two were tipped with brand-new razor-sharp “Dirt Naps,” ready to go in case a fine whitetail would come along. There was one problem...it was already a bit later than I liked and I was afraid deer were moving already. How was I going to get into the woods now? I’ll probably sneak down through the ravine, then sit on the edge and watch the crossing.

I headed for my destination at the south end of our woods. But on the first knob in the field behind our house I noticed the cows at the other end of the farm. Something was not right! A quick glance with my binoculars explained the problem. Chocolate, a sixth-

lactation all-black Holstein cross cow was due to freshen anytime. And there she was, lying flat on her side. And because of the distance and the fact that she was all black, I could not see if she was lying uphill. I went on a bit in hopes of being able to make out a calf on the side and everything would be all right. But no! She lay flat. I hurried in that direction, visions of bloated cows and dead calves and everything that goes with that going through my mind.

When I got to the cows, she slowly lifted her head and looked at me. With a sleepy-eyed expression, not a care in the world, soaking up the Indian summer sunshine, and obviously not aware that she had disturbed my plans. And in her own way she had not done anything wrong.

Now what was I going to do? It was too late to go back to the place where I had planned to go. I considered some other options. Almost, I gave up and went home to help with chores. But then I thought of a corner in our field No. 21 that I wouldn't mind giving a try. It was just over the knob in the near field. I quickly turned in that direction. Carefully I made my way to the edge of the field right to the corner of another woodlot where I could see through a fencerow into the neighbor's field. Of course I couldn't shoot in that direction, but it was a field that was surrounded by woods, and I could at least watch the deer. The place was known as the go-to place to watch the bachelor groups in late summer and always held lot of deer.

On my side of the fence was a field that had been planted with sudangrass and still had about ten inches of grass sparsely spread out over the field. I had left it as cover for the winter. The drought we had in September simply had not allowed another good crop to grow.

I nestled down behind a half-rotten log that had been pushed beside the fence to make way for the plow. In front of me was the eight-acre sudangrass field where I harvested 82 round bales the last growing season.

Behind me was a fencerow with a field on the other side that had been in corn the last summer. The corn had already been chopped and this was where I expected to see deer. Little did I expect any action on my side, but at least I could see what was happening in the deer world.

I relaxed in the soft grass, now realizing the need to get out and enjoy the beauty of a calm, quiet evening in early November. To be alone and let your mind wander. To enjoy nature and feel the breeze and hear the birds sing.

After about an hour, the sun was sinking very low and I was getting sleepy. To take a nap now would be really easy, especially with the sun now shining in my face, but no, even though it was very relaxing, I could not afford to miss any of this splendid scenery.

The sun slowly descended behind the horizon, and then there was a sunset so beautiful I find it hard to describe.

Then, in the midst of all this, I spotted a buck along the north side of the sudangrass field at the far end, gradually making his way in my direction. A look with the binoculars told me it was a tall-tined 2½-year-old. Not huge, but still very nice. But, oh my! The wind was perfectly in the buck's favor. This was not where I had expected to see a deer.

But he kept coming. Closer and closer my heart sped up with every step he made. Then at about 120 yards he stopped and looked in my direction. Oh no! Did he already have my wind? He studied the situation a bit, then relaxed and came on in. Was he going to offer me a shot? At 70 yards he stopped and looked again. This time he seemed even more wary. I wished with all my heart I had more cover, but I dared not move now. He again stared a while, then turned toward the woods as if saying, "I saw you! Ha! Ha!"

I got my grunt tube and spoke a few words in buck language. He gave one look and kept right on going,

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disappearing into the woods. I gave a few more grunts but nothing happened.

Well, so much for that, but I really didn't mind that I didn't get him. The splendid sight of a white-tail buck standing in an open field with a striking sunset in the background was enough to make my day. Now I already had a story to tell my family tonight.

But I huddled backward for just a little more cover. It was cooling off and I almost wished for another jacket. A pair of song sparrows hopped into the bushes just six feet away from me. They twittered and chirped and fluttered around with a sweet little bird conversation. Apparently, I was close to their "bedroom," and how were they going to make this work with this odd-shaped statue in their way?

Then my attention was drawn to some rustling on the inside of the woods. So, there was some activity there after all. I thought the buck would surely have tattled on me and let the other deer know about this intruder.

And just like that, the buck that I had seen earlier hopped over the fence and came trotting out into the field. I was very much surprised. At 40 yards he stopped. I lifted my crossbow and rested the 40-yard line on his vitals, and just when I was ready to pull the trigger, he got my wind and whirled around and took off back into the woods. But he just couldn't resist it. He needed one more look at the good-looking dude behind that rotten log. He stopped and looked around. I raised the bow another line and let the arrow whiz away. Everything sounded right. The "thud" of the arrow when it hit. But the buck took off at only normal speed, seemingly unharmed. He entered the woods and, well, I wasn't sure. Did I hear him crash? Then I realized he had been farther out in the field than I had thought.

Well, I might as well go and see what happened. I slowly got up and went down to the place where the buck was standing. A doe and two fawns came out of the woods and raced across the cornstalks, their tails flagging as they went.

I got down to the place where the buck was standing.

I found a few hairs. So I had hit my target. A few steps and there were blood signs. I followed it down to the woods and there he was. He had gone only about 40 yards. Just as soon as he was out of my sight he had crashed. I had made a perfect shot, through the heart.

I just stood there and admired him for a bit. Trying to let it sink in how it had all happened. The feeling of connecting with these wild creatures is hard to describe.


But daylight was now almost gone, and it was time to move on. I got my headlight and my hunting knife and quickly dressed the deer. Not the most favorite job, but something every hunter needs to learn. The first step to great tasting venison is properly dressing and cleaning the deer. Then I propped a stick between the rib cage to open it for better cooling.

It was dark by now. I headed home to help finish things up. The children were almost finished milking, but when they heard that I had gotten a buck, things were done in a hurry. The wave of excitement went through the whole family as we ate supper, and I shared the story with them.

After supper I went to get Beauty, our faithful family horse, and hitched her to the road cart. But with this kind of excitement, everyone wanted to be included, and there was no way we could all get on the road cart. So the girls got Kody, the pony, and hitched him up, and away we went to bring our deer home.

I enjoyed the excited chatter of the children and the feeling of satisfaction that comes after a successful hunt.

My wife relaxed with the assurance that there will be fresh hot dogs to pack into the children's lunches and many easy meals to send along to the sugarhouse.

We brought the deer home and skinned it and hung it in the tree outside the house, high enough that no dogs could reach any of the meat. Then we put the horses in the barn and went into the house and retired for the night. It was a good day on the farm. 

*Joseph and Wilma Miller and their seven children, besides their maple syrup operation, have an organic dairy on their 150-acre farm near Frederickburg, Ohio.*

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"Two sounds of autumn are unmistakable...the hurrying rustle of crisp leaves blown along the street...by a gusty wind, and the gabble of a flock of migrating geese."

—Hal Borland

## Newsworthy

The ninth **Organic Farming Conference** will be held on November 7-8, 2024 in Mt. Hope, Ohio at the Mt. Hope Event Center (8076 State Route 241, Mt. Hope, OH 44660). This is a farmer planned and managed event, with this year's focus being on building your soils to maximum quality forages that ultimately impacts the health of livestock and humans. In addition, there will be an organic home section, farmer panels, and other points of interest. The cost for the event is \$25 for one day and \$40 for both days which includes an organic lunch and snack. For information call 234-286-1436 or visit our website: [www.organicfarmingconf.com](http://www.organicfarmingconf.com).

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- » Letting Go - Panel
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- » Our 20 - Plus Years Journey of Establishing a Grass Production Network (Beef)
- » Building Soil Biology
- » Marketing for the Benefit of the Consumer
- » Panel - Creating Habitat for Nature

**TOPICS FOR FRIDAY, NOV. 8TH**

- » Unlocking Your Farm's Potential
- » Pennies in the Cracks
- » Diversifying the Family Farm
- » Q and A Session
- » Panel - Applying Lean Concepts
- » Enjoying the Backyard Orchard

**TOPICS FOR ORGANIC HOME THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH**

- » Soapmaking/Laundry
- » Farm Kitchen Cheese
- » Feeding Wild Birds
- » Household Budgeting - Panel
- » Raised Beds/Winter Sprouting

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8TH**

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“You expected to be sad in the fall. Part of you died each year when the leaves fell from the trees and their branches were bare against the wind and the cold, wintry light. But you knew there would always be the spring, as you knew the river would flow again after it was frozen. When the cold rains kept on and killed the spring, it was as though a young person died for no reason.”

—Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*





# The Farm HOME

Unfortunately, our main crop of sweet corn was demolished by a herd of heifers that found a weak spot in the surrounding fence. Fortunately, daughter Emily had extra space in their patch and planted much more than they needed. So...last week we all worked together and harvested enough sweet corn for all three families—David and I, Kevins, and David Hershbergers. One evening the corn was removed from the stalks, then husked and prepared for the next morning.

I must add this: After we were finished with our work, of course we sat around visiting and enjoying some coffee. By the time we headed for home, the sun had gone down in the west. Suddenly coming up behind the clouds, in the east, was the moon. It came up quite rapidly, and by the time we were at home we had a full moon. An especially big, beautiful full moon! Then David remembered this is a super blue moon and will not reappear this close for thirteen years! What a good ending to the day! We made sure we looked at it early the next morning. It was still large and bright and beautiful.

When I went over to “Hershes” the next morning fairly early, the big canners of water were boiling, and the girls had already blanched several batches. My job was to cut kernels from the cob, and with everyone chipping in, by 10:00 we had approximately 50 quarts of sweet corn ready for the freezers. This included leaving the basement in clean, spotless condition. So of course, we had coffee and some cookies before we headed for home. The buggy was full of utensils and sweet corn for us and Kevins. How rewarding! We all felt good and ready for the rest of the day.

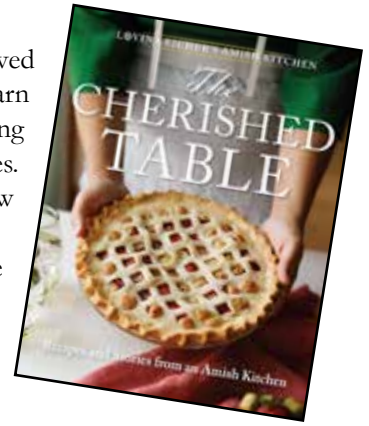
I’m looking forward to autumn. It has been a very warm summer, and I guess my age might be creeping up, as some of those extra warm days slowed me down quite a bit. Fall weather is often so pleasant, the fall colors so beautiful, and I like the idea of finishing “things:” canning season, yard work, cleaning the gardens and planting cover crops. I also think things seem to slow down a bit overall.

Wishing everyone a blessed autumn.

E.K.

Bestselling cookbook author and food columnist Lovina Eicher shares well-loved recipes and heartwarming stories about life with her growing family and community. Learn more about traditions and treasured dishes for gatherings large and small, including canning and butchering days, birthdays, and weddings, and funerals and church services. More than one hundred delectable recipes invite cooks to share a meal—and create new memories—with their own loved ones.

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*Lovina Eicher writes the popular syndicated column Lovina’s Amish Kitchen, which appears in dozens of newspapers around the United States with many followers. Lovina and her husband Joe have eight children and a growing number of grandchildren. They live in rural Michigan. I especially like how Lovina has a quote or remark about each recipe, adding a personal touch. You can purchase this book through Herald Press for \$24.99 plus shipping by calling 1.800.245.7894 or writing P.O. Box 866, Harrisburg, VA 22803.*

E.K.

## Recipes for Fall

### BAKED FRENCH TOAST

1 cup packed brown sugar  
 ½ cup (1 stick) butter  
 2 tablespoons light corn syrup or maple syrup  
 12 bread slices  
 ½ cup granulated sugar  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 6 eggs  
 1½ cups milk  
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the brown sugar, butter, and syrup. Heat the ingredients over medium-high heat, stirring frequently. When the mixture reaches a boil, remove from the heat and pour it into the bottom of a 13 x 9-inch glass baking pan.

Layer the bread slices into the glass pan and sprinkle with the sugar and the cinnamon. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs, milk, and vanilla together until smooth and evenly combined. Pour the egg mixture over the bread. Bake at 350° for 30 to 35 minutes until puffed and golden.

### QUICK BAKING MIX

8 cups all-purpose flour  
 2 teaspoons salt  
 ⅓ cup baking powder  
 1 cup shortening or butter (2 sticks)

Sift dry ingredients; cut in shortening. Blend until mixture resembles coarse meal. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 months.

*For biscuits:* Combine 1 cup baking mix with ⅓ cup milk. Mix lightly, then turn out onto a floured surface and roll out to 1 inch thick. Cut into biscuits. Place on a greased baking sheet and bake at 350° for 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown. Makes six biscuits.

*For pancakes:* Combine 2 cups baking mix with 2 tablespoons sugar, 2 cups milk, and 2 beaten eggs. Whisk together and ladle pancake batter onto a hot skillet. Cook pancakes a few minutes on each side until both sides are browned. Makes 12 to 14 pancakes.

### LOADED PASTA SALAD

-Makes 20 to 24 servings-

1 lb. rotini pasta  
 1 tablespoon olive oil  
 1 lb. thick-cut bacon, chopped



- ½ pound ground beef
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup barbecue sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons spicy mustard
- 2 cups canned sweet corn, drained
- 2 cups fresh tomatoes, diced
- ¾ cup diced green onions
- 1½ cups cubed Colby cheese

Cook rotini pasta according to package instructions; drain pasta and rinse with cold water. Drizzle pasta with 1 tablespoon olive oil and set aside.

In a large skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crispy. Remove bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving a bit of bacon grease in the pan. Add ground beef to the skillet and cook until browned. Season cooked ground beef with garlic powder, onion powder, red pepper flakes, and salt and pepper.

Skim away the remaining grease and remove the pan from heat.

In a large serving bowl combine mayonnaise, barbecue sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and spicy mustard, and whisk until smooth.

Add cooked pasta, bacon, ground beef, corn, tomatoes, green onions, and Colby cheese, and toss until fully combined. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

## BARBECUE BEEF SANDWICHES

- 3 lbs. beef bottom round roast
- 3 green bell peppers, seeded and chopped
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 cup barbecue sauce
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 10 to 12 sandwich buns, for serving

Combine all ingredients in a large Dutch oven or roasting pan. Cook, covered, in a 350° oven for 2 to 3 hours, or until beef is tender and shreds easily with a fork. (I put mine in the oven, but the beef can also be cooked in a crock pot on high heat for 3 to 4 hours.) Serve on sandwich buns.

## HOMEMADE FRUIT PIE FILLING

- 6 cups granulated sugar
- 2¼ cups instant Clear Jel
- 7 cups cold water
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice
- 6 quarts fresh fruit, such as cherries (pitted), blueberries, raspberries, or peaches (pitted and sliced)

In a large stock pot combine the sugar and instant Clear Jel over medium-high heat. Add the water and stir well. Cook on medium-high until the mixture thickens and begins to bubble, about 7 minutes. Add the lemon juice and boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in the fruit then remove from the heat. If not used immediately, it can be canned or frozen.

## PUMPKIN ROLL

Cake:

- 3 eggs, beaten
- ⅔ cup pumpkin puree
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon salt

Filling:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon butter, softened
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°. Combine the eggs, pumpkin, and sugar in a large bowl, then add the flour, baking soda, spices, and salt, and blend together well. Pour the batter into a 15 x 10 x 1-inch greased baking sheet. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes.

Sprinkle a clean kitchen towel with powdered sugar. When the pumpkin cake comes out of the oven, invert it onto the towel. Starting from the shorter side and keeping the kitchen towel tucked inside, roll up the cake like a jelly roll; let cool. (The towel helps the cake keep its shape without cracking; it will be removed after the cake has cooled and before you add the filling.)

Make the filling: Mix filling ingredients together in a medium bowl until smooth. Unroll cooled cake, remove towel, then spread the filling evenly over the cake. Working quickly, roll up the cake again without the towel and refrigerate until serving.



# Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens

## A Vision of Paradise

—Jo Ann Gardner

*Into the garden I go, to lose my mind  
and find my soul.  
Sign at the garden, via John Muir  
(Into the Forest I go)*

I don't usually get too excited about public gardens. Too much walking, too much cement, too orderly, too boring. After a while, my eyes glaze over—plant after plant, neatly arranged with their identifying signs, little change, all very manicured.

So two winters ago when I was staying at my son's horse ranch in north central Florida, a friend said, "You must visit that Garden, the one that used to be a limestone quarry." I was not too enthusiastic. But when my son's wife thought it might be a good idea, I went along. It was in Williston, only about 15 miles away from the farm in Reddick.

When we had walked around for about an hour, Kim observed, "Did you know you walked nearly a mile [with a cane]?"

I hadn't noticed. What propelled me forward was curiosity to see the next treasure around the bend, the next sign that proclaimed this little planting or that site was "Lori's Garden Wall" or "Holly's Garden" or on a beautiful plaque, "Jacob's fortified gateway." Who were these people? I learned that the dedications were to staff who had created them, or to friends or family, or a memorial.

What kind of public garden was this? Despite its size, 20 acres, and intricate design, it feels very intimate, personal, down to earth. Would you expect to see a sign in the usual public garden, as I did, reading, "Please Close Gate to Keep Cows Out of the Garden"?

Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens is, without qualification, the most interesting, no, fascinating, public



garden I have ever seen. It is located, appropriately, in Williston, "down home" country in the heart of Old Florida (see *Farming*, "Old Florida: Plants, Places, People, Summer 2023).

### The Garden's Evolution

When you have read his brief bio, visited the Garden, seen his handiwork, and met him in person, you may conclude, as I have, that Ray Webber is an extraordinary, multi-talented, unassuming person. Trained as an endodontist, a dental surgeon specializing in performing root canals and diagnosing tooth pain through trauma, he taught at the University of Florida from 1977 to 1982, contributed to textbooks on dentistry, and lectured nationally and internationally for 14 years. He also served in the Army for eight years and was called up from the Reserves to serve in the Gulf War from 1990-1991.

No wonder he needed a break. In 1991 he bought an old abandoned limestone quarry that had become a polluted swamp. His plan was to turn the site into a fishing hole for his own and friends' pleasure. Then step-by-step, like some dramatic roll-out on a grand stage, the unforeseen happened as the quarry seemed to assume a life of its own and the "bones" or structure of the Garden took place with Ray as its director.

A rock wall, needed at the top of the quarry, was established. Rocks were hauled in by wheelbarrow, each rock carefully placed. People stopped by. Why not add plants behind the walls? Bridges were added to the lower levels, as were pavilions and gazebos and water features, pools and waterfalls, that draw on Florida's Aquifer, underground porous rock (limestone here), that holds and transmits water replenished by rainfall.



The Garden is said to have a Japanese “feel” to it, attributed to Ray’s time in Japan during his Army service. There’s no mistaking the Japanese Tea House at the top of the Garden, a striking note that dominates the whole, nor the waterfalls, fish pools (with Koi), little islands, little bridges, the graceful outlines of surrounding flora in the palm trees, gigantic ferns, in rock wall planters, some with hanging vines embellished by breathtakingly exquisite flowers as if from an Oriental painting. The details add up.

The Garden evolved over 30 years of hard work, step by step, rock by rock. It was opened to the public in 2014 when Ray Webber donated it to the non-profit Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens, Inc. He then donated the surrounding 64-acre woodland he also owned to Conservation Florida. He remains the Garden’s guiding light. In 2013, there were 875 visitors. In 2014 there were 52,000.

Today it hosts events, plant demonstrations, lectures, and is raising funds in its campaign “Raise the Roof,” to establish a Conservation Education Center. After you read this piece and visit, as I hope you will, you may want to contribute to this effort. (Visit the Garden’s website or contact by phone. See below.) Not only is the Garden itself a “little slice of heaven,” as Ray observes, it is a spectacular land reclamation achievement, designated by the National Wildlife Federation as a Certified Wildlife Habitat that hosts hundreds of species of birds, amphibians, reptiles, and varied wild mammals.

### The Plants

The Garden is in growing Zone 9, defined by its minimum temperatures, 25°-30°F. The climate is subtropical, with hot, humid summers, and generally mild, cool winters. The Garden’s surrounding trees and the topography of the quarry thus create a habitat for both temperate, semitropical, and even tropical plants (these with caution), which explains the many gorgeous azaleas I saw in bloom in February, as well as Ray’s favorite flower, the Golden Trumpet Tree (hardy to 25°F) from the tropics of Brazil and Argentina. Known botanically as *Tabebuia chrysostricha*, a synonym

for *Handroanthus chrysostrichus*, it bears large clusters of nectar-rich, brilliant golden flowers in three-inch-long trumpet-shaped blooms that attract butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds. The specimen I saw was much shorter since it was planted in a tub so it could be moved to protect it from low temperatures. Even though tropical plants tolerate and survive a range of climate conditions they may not thrive when exposed to their minimum temperature ranges. I recall last winter in Reddick, also designated growing Zone 9, when we rushed out to pick the remaining tangerines when a temperature of 27° F was forecast.

As I walked along the paths I was never disappointed. I was, in fact, astonished to see so many plants so artfully, even whimsically, arranged in intimate settings, so unlike most public gardens (an Oriental influence?). I felt a gardener’s hands, an artist’s eye, everywhere. I thought that if I gardened in Florida, in this growing zone, I would be inspired by what I was seeing to want to reproduce some elements into my own little Paradise. There is certainly a wealth of planting ideas here, the plants themselves, the combination of stones and water features, and so on and on.

I’ve visited the Garden twice now and look forward to visiting again. There is always more to see, more to learn.

It was the unexpected that drew me on around another curve, over another bridge, onward.

Amid the palm trees, bridges, and water features, details stay in the mind: delicate orchids hanging from a tree in its homemade wooden basket (I wanted to ask, who thought of planting it there, where did the basket come from, was it fashioned from a natural piece of wood, shaped like a basket?); pools of water-lilies and other aquatic flowers, some in tubs. Tubs and pots are everywhere, of every size, planted with all sorts of flora from the exotic Brazil’s Angel Trumpet in a small square pot set in a small round stone planter to a row of familiar potted red geraniums placed on a natural stone ledge by someone who, perhaps, thought they would show off well there (they do). So many pots to take care of, the gardener in me notes.

The Bottle Brush shrub or tree was in bloom, familiar to me from son Seth’s place where it has grown



Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens

Photo by Neil Gardner

into a huge specimen at the entrance to the farm. Its nearly ever-blooming flowers are aptly described in its common name, shaped like the old-fashioned bottle scrubber, but red. Lori Wallace, the Garden's long-time friendly manager, told me that when in its full springtime bloom in the Garden it is alive with insects, including the rare chimney bee. Smaller than a honeybee, they are said to be friendly and don't sting, a plus for a garden open to the public. There are spectacular ferns in stone planters (stone has been put to creative use everywhere) and tiny ones, unbidden, that sprout from the lichen-covered stones, fruit trees in the Orchard Garden, created, according to the sign, in early 2019 "...except for the 20-year-old fruit trees that include tangerines, persimmons, figs, pears, plums, mulberry, loquat, grapes, and bananas.

"Keep walking," the sign says and of course I do, "to see the roses and azaleas." It was there that I saw the now-familiar to me Louis Philippe rose that I first became acquainted with at the Marjorie Kinnen Rawlings restoration in Cross Creek in the back country near Orange Lake, also near Seth's farm, definitely part of Old Florida. It was planted as a sprawling bush in front of the restored vegetable garden, and in the restored house, its fully double rose-red flowers made a lovely scented bouquet. As the floral emblem of Old Florida associated with early settlement (it is also called the Cracker Rose) it seems like a good fit for the Garden and I was glad to see it there.

Besides the plants I've mentioned, there are many more, including bougainvilleas, bamboos, gingers, bromeliads, maples, a variety of vines, more roses, and nursery tubs of Ray's treasures tucked here and there, waiting to be planted.

Seeing so many spectacular displays of exotic plants was a heady experience for this northern gardener.

Keep in mind that the original clay limestone soil must be amended every time a hole is dug to add a plant to the landscape, and that every tub must be watered, every tropical plant must be protected during a cold spell, that plants need to be maintained in the usual way, i.e., clipped and pruned, and so forth as you would in your own garden, and you wonder how the staff of 13 (five permanent) attend to it all? Are there pests in this garden? When I talked to Ray, he mentioned armadillos.

All this beauty, all these wonders, known as Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens, exist because of one man's vision without benefit of a landscape architect. On a beautiful plaque, Ray gives heartfelt thanks to the many people who have helped him along the way, especially Joel Lee Schwiebert "who helped plan and construct every aspect of this dream home and environment." (Is this the Joel of "Joel's Boardwalk," I wondered?) What eventually became a public garden evolved over time, the result of very hard work. Ray told me it took three years to dig out the water features.

Although he may at first have seen it as a chance to create a nice place to fish, that vision has long been transformed into a mission to create a welcoming place for wildlife and for people. Formally, its mission is "...to instill in visitors respect and appreciation for environmental stewardship by inspiring the public with artistic botanical creations...[The] Garden promotes peace, humane education, animal rescue, and environmental preservation."

How do things get done on a daily basis? As a gardener, I was curious, so I asked Lori.

"Ray gathers his small but dedicated team of five full-time crew, and says, 'Okay, guys, this is what we're going to do today.'" "We're just a bunch of amateurs," she added.

Only in Old Florida. 🐾

Garden Website: <https://cedarlakeswoodsandgarden.com/>

Garden Address:

Cedar Lakes Woods & Gardens

4990 NE 180th Ave.

Williston, FL 32696

Phone (Lori Wallace, Manager): 352.529.0055



Ray Webber and me

*Jo Ann Gardner lives in the Adirondacks with extensive gardens. She and her late husband, Jigs, co-authored GARDENS OF USE & DELIGHT: Uniting the Practical and Beautiful in an Integrated Landscape (\$30.00, color illustrations throughout, 304 pages, quality softcover). Jo Ann's other books include LIVING WITH HERBS (\$19.00, black and white line drawings throughout, 288 pages, softcover), OLD-FASHIONED JAMS, JELLIES, AND SWEET PRESERVES: The Best Way to Grow, Preserve, and Bake with Small Fruit (\$20.00, color photos, 184 pages, softcover), SEEDS OF TRANSCENDENCE: Understanding the Hebrew Bible Through Plants (\$30.00, color photos throughout, 398 pages, softcover). Add \$5.00 for Media Mail. Inquire about Priority Mail (faster, safer). Send check to 12 Angier Hill Rd./Essex, NY 12936.*



## The Barn at Night

We head out to the fields up high  
each evening to lead  
the goat herd back down to the barn  
where safety's guaranteed.

Liza sees us and gives a call,  
the group falls into line.  
They all trot down except Nina  
who pokes around behind.

They file into the barn taking  
their places for the night,  
pawing bedding, making nests when  
they find the perfect site.

They lower themselves to the ground,  
sigh and begin to chew.  
They ruminate and rest their bones,  
a content caprine crew.

Our eyes get heavy listening  
to all of nature's sounds.  
Coyotes, owls, and whippoorwills  
sing in a three-part round.

Settling in to enjoy a rest,  
we join their peaceful pod.  
Crickets offer a steady song,  
our heads begin to nod.

We share dreams of lush pastures and  
ample sweet-smelling hay,  
herd and herders joined in thoughts of  
a blooming clover ley.

Left behind are all the worries,  
fences we need to mend,  
in the quiet company of  
the livestock that we tend.

Krista Duval  
*Athens, Ohio*

## Summer's Farewell

When kind summer heaves a heavy sigh,  
and her steps begin to slow.  
With harvest ripe upon the vine,  
she's ready now to go.

When the morning dew upon the grass,  
it lingers nigh 'till dawn.  
Then we know that fall is waiting,  
and the crispness will come soon.

When the butterflies so happily,  
are flitting everywhere.  
And we grab our guide and follow them,  
these flowers of the air.

When the summer sky above us,  
turns a deeper brighter blue.  
Then you think that God in heaven  
must like changing too.

When the farmer waits with eagerness,  
his final harvest of the year.  
And we watch along the roadside,  
for the asters to appear.

When groups of kids head off to school,  
their studies to fulfill.  
When the thick and humid air lifts up,  
and the nights begin to chill.

When the flocks of crows caw loudly,  
from the cover of the trees.  
And we miss the martins' chatter  
in the quiet evening breeze.

When the sun is slower rising,  
and mist gathers in the morn.  
And the blackbirds fly in cluster,  
and harass the farmers' corn.

When the katydids begin their call,  
and the moon is sure and bright.  
And a beauty we can't fathom,  
fills the hours of the night.

Then we know that summer's fading,  
and the vibrant fall is near.  
And our hearts are glad and ready,  
for this splendid time of year.

Mrs. Joseph Miller  
*Danville, Ohio*



## The Last Cutting...

of hay is made.  
I stand on green  
stubble, and in praise  
feel one with sky, grass,  
and trees.

Five years...a long time  
In healing, old scars of  
corn on hillsides, and  
soil slowly starving.

Now, let winds blow,  
rain fall, winter come.

Sleep, sweet field, sleep.  
Mother Nature has claimed  
you again, and with  
help of a man and  
his flock – will make you  
Whole again.  
The last cutting of hay  
is made.

Emma E. Miller  
*Fresno, Ohio*

## Old Autumn Moon

Old autumn moon's aglow again.  
It catches owl's dark flight.  
It splashes on the unlatched gate  
and spoons the path with light.

It peeks in windows,  
deepens rooms,  
with stories to be told.  
A cozy fire crackles as  
the sleepy hours unfold.

Old autumn moon's aglow again.  
The kettle sings for tea.  
Pumpkin scones are almost done...  
come celebrate with me.

Eileen Spinelli  
*Media, Pennsylvania*

## Morning on the Farm

The night is still and shadowy,  
Stars are twinkling high and low,  
The moon is shining clearly,  
Everything is calm below.

Soon the world is getting brighter  
As upward rises the sun,  
And a red and pinkish color  
Lights the eastern horizon.

Soon the sparrows start to twitter  
And the rooster starts to crow,  
And the mother cat and litter  
String themselves into a row.

Then the farmer in the dawn  
Of the early morning light,  
Refreshed and rested, wakes again,  
Thankful for the peaceful night.

Then drawing back the curtains,  
He looks upon the scene,  
With gratitude he listens  
To the dove on the evergreen.

Then out the door he goes  
With a whistle on his lips,  
He stops to scratch the cat's nose,  
At his heels the dog nips.

He quietly thanks the Lord  
For His blessings and His grandeur,  
For His love, for His beauty  
Of the world and all its splendors.

So should we in the morning  
Remember to praise Him above.  
And to thank Him for His kindness  
And His never-ending love.

Daniel Mishler  
*LaFarge, Wisconsin*



# Confessions of an Imperfect Gardener

—Mary Lou Shaw

I like reading about gardening tips that tell us the correct way to garden. However, when reviewing these suggestions, I also witness my internal dialogue arguing that following one rule often conflicts with a different rule or suggestion. I admit that I have this same struggle in other areas: I want to keep the bird baths filled with water but don't want to allow mosquitoes to propagate, or I want to dead-head flowers to encourage more blooms, but also want them to go to seed for the birds. Life is complicated!

As for the gardening rules, I admit that different years bring different weather, while at the same time we gardeners are growing different produce with different soils and different growing conditions. But when one rule doesn't "fit" with another, I often find myself saying "good enough." Indeed, I am not the perfect gardener.

I've been outlining various gardening rules these past weeks from Edward Smith's book, *The Vegetable Gardener's Bible*. I thought reviewing his suggestions might help me see how I could improve. But even though I agree that these rules make sense, I can't say that I'm doing each of them perfectly. Because I found this review helpful, I want to share his ten main suggestions below. But just to be ornery, I'll then explain why I am having trouble reaching this level of perfection.

**1:** Wide rows should be used for permanent planting sites. Rows only got narrower than walking paths when people attempted to bring large equipment into the garden. Having wide planting spaces allows for "companion planting" which holds down weeds and therefore helps eliminate the need for rototilling. To judge the width of the beds, make sure you can reach to their center.



**2:** Deep beds are necessary for good root growth. A rototiller only reaches the depth of about nine inches, but plants' roots can benefit from much deeper soil. When a new garden bed is being prepared, this may mean converting grass to topsoil by first rototilling and then loosening the deeper soil with a garden fork or broad fork. Not stepping on these beds after they are prepped means there is no need to go back again with a rototiller that would only disturb the soil's many fungi, insects, and microscopic creatures necessary to nurture our plants. The alternative to originally digging deeper is to annually pile on good topsoil or compost on each wide bed. We used the "pile on" method with our large Ohio garden when we had a constant supply of animal manure and bedding for the compost pile. Now we do it by having deep, raised beds where we are still adding topsoil.

**3:** Keep all paths narrow and mulched. Narrow paths give more room for garden plants. Having these paths mulched with organic material prevents the soil underneath from getting compressed so that our plants' roots will then have even more room to expand.

**4:** Keep “family members” together. This rule makes sense because plants in the same family have similar nutritional needs and also contribute similar minerals to the soil. Additionally, they have similar problems with disease and insects, so keeping families together makes it easier to rotate them to a different area the following year as will be suggested below.

I admit that I can’t recite every plant’s family. A plant’s family cannot be found in its Latin name which only has the plant’s genus and species. But “families” are determined by their flowers and reproductive parts. It’s why carrots, celery, cilantro, fennel, and parsley all get put together in the “Apiaceae” family, while eggplants, bell peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes make up the nightshade or “Solanaceae” family. I’m not always sure which plants belong to which family, so I just try to follow the four-year rotation schedule that I mentioned in the Summer 2024, *Farming Magazine*.

**5:** Plants need at least six hours of sun a day. This rule mainly comes into play when we’re first deciding where to establish our gardens. Besides choosing a sunny area, it’s wise to choose one that has good ventilation and good soil. We also have to remember to allow at least six hours of sun for shorter plants growing by larger ones.

**6:** Interplanting different species. I’m enthused about different species growing together because less bare soil certainly helps to control weeds. Different species can also offer physical support to each other as well as needed shade. Interplanting also helps to retain the soil’s moisture and provides mulch. The “Three Sisters,” consisting of corn, climbing beans, and the squash family is often given as an example of interplanting different species.

**7:** Successive planting is probably something most of us do automatically. For example, after garlic is harvested in late June or by mid-July, spinach or Chinese cabbage can then be planted for an autumn harvest. When I’m aiming to assist the soil’s quality and am not looking for additional harvests, I can throw in buckwheat seeds or leftover pea or bean seeds. These plants add

various minerals to the soil that nurture both plants and microbes. With successive planting, it’s suggested that we choose plants from a different family than what was planted in the springtime. This helps to avoid disease that may have built up from the first crop.

**8:** Rotate crops annually. To do this, I depend on my three-ring notebook that has sketches of where each crop was planted the previous year. Rotation helps avoid diseases that may have accumulated from the previous year’s plants. For example, rotating vine crops away from where they attracted vine borers the previous year means that when the vine borers emerge from the soil in the springtime, the vines won’t be available for them to consume. Rotating crops also makes sense because each family of plants have different nutritional needs. For example, the vine crops, along with tomatoes and peppers, need more phosphorus that was deposited the previous year by the root crops. The “leaf crops” like broccoli require more nitrogen that the “fruiting crops” like vines or tomatoes deposited the previous year.

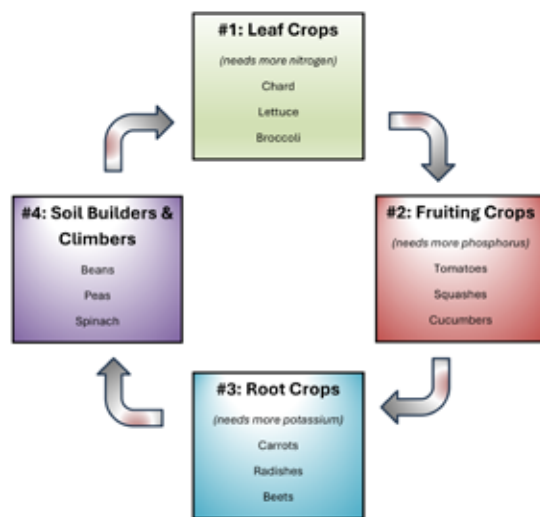
**9:** Give each plant enough space. Giving space seems like a wise balance to interplanting various species.

It is possible to have three or four different varieties growing in the same row or bed as long as their leaves can get enough sunshine and air movement. Fortunately, roots can densely intertwine without any negative effect if they have space to grow deep and wide.

**10.** Meet the basic needs of each plant. The trick here is, of course, that different plants have different needs. We can agree that plants need air, sunlight, and room to

grow roots. They benefit from soil and air temperatures within the range they’ll thrive. Their need for water is usually averaged to be about an inch a week. Finally, different plant families have different nutritional needs which an annual rotation helps to supply.

These ten rules are all pretty basic, so why do I fall short every summer? For starters, I’m already cheating during the winter when sketching the following summer’s garden. What am I to do with the perennials like rhubarb





and asparagus if not to hop over them? And if the tall plants, like sweet corn and climbing beans, need the northeast side of the garden so they won't shade the shorter plants, then how are they to rotate to a different space in a single garden?

But that's just the beginning of my difficulties. Not long into a growing season, successive planting comes into play after the lettuce, peas, and then garlic are harvested. Here we're advised to put plants from different families into the space to help avoid disease, but having two families occupy the same space in one growing season makes the next year rotation more difficult. Okay—I admit to just doing my best with what needs to be planted and then going back to the same four-season rotation the following year. It's what I call "good enough."

The good enough rule applies once again when harvesting the climbing peas in the springtime and then needing that fence for climbers like cucumbers that belong to a different family. When I want to cheat on this, I rationalize that the "three sisters" concept

allows the vines to climb on corn which combines different families. I imagine that the corn, vines and bean combination could be rotated to a new spot each year without much damage being done. That's probably good enough!

However, I'm not done complaining just yet. Providing plants with about an inch of water each week shouldn't be tough. Just check the rain gauge and make up the difference, right? But our heavy clay soil doesn't soak up water well, although no water runs off the raised beds filled with compost. Yes, the plants in the clay soil do well with smaller amounts of water applied more frequently. The next hurdle is deciding the best time of day to water. We're told we shouldn't water in the morning during



the hot summertime because much of the water will evaporate. However, if we water in the evening, the wet leaves may be more susceptible to fungal diseases during the night. Seems to me we'll be watering during suppertime!

In truth, I'm smiling when confessing my failures in reaching perfection, because I've never perfected any area of my life! It didn't happen in school or in the kitchen, so it's not going to happen when attempting to work with the complexities of nature. But nature can also be very forgiving of my efforts as she allows our dinner table, canning jars, and root cellar to be filled with beautiful produce. I'll try to follow the "rules" listed here, but perhaps shift my focus to gratitude for each year's harvest. Unfortunately, that'll probably free my mind to fret about filling bird baths and dead-heading flowers. Life is just full of decisions! 🐦➔

*Mary Lou and her husband live in northeastern Tennessee where they grow most of the food that they eat. Mary Lou's blog, "Growing Local Food," can be found at: [marylougrowfood.com](http://marylougrowfood.com)*

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# Cabbage to Kraut: Making Your Own

—Yvona Fast

We still have cabbage growing in the late fall garden. A cold weather crop, cabbage was a chief source of winter nutrition in the cold climates of central and eastern Europe, as well as northern Asian countries.

What to do with all that excess cabbage? Pickle it! Whether preserved in brine, vinegar, or wine, fermented cabbage has a long history.

Though pickled cabbage is associated with European countries, many historians believe the technique of brining greens to preserve them originated in northern China and was brought to Europe by the Tartars. It was a staple among the builders of China's Great Wall. Chinese still eat pickled cabbage (known as suan-cai or bai-cai). Japanese vinegar-pickled cabbage, kyabetsu su-zuke, is served as part of an assortment of pickled veggies before dessert and is thought to aid digestion.

Kim chi, the most common processed food product in Korea, gets its spicy flavor from garlic and hot chili peppers. Kim chi is to Korea what kraut is to northern Europe. Before the modern age, fresh vegetables were difficult to obtain during the long, harsh winter. Today, some variety of this pickled dish is served almost daily. In the hustle and bustle of twenty-first century life, few Koreans take the time and effort to make kim chi; most buy it in cans, just as we purchase ready-made kraut. When I asked some Korean students at a local university how to make kim chi, they couldn't tell me.

There are many ethnic and traditional ways to pickle cabbage. Just as each country has a cultural variant, each family has a different variation of kraut, kimchi, kyabetsu su-zuke, suan-cai or bai-cai.

Horsemen traveling between China and Mongolia brought cabbage preserved in brine westward, and Genghis Khan and his men took it as far as Europe. In the sixteenth century, nomadic Turks introduced pickled cabbage to Poland and Hungary. By the 1800s, cabbage, along with pork and rye bread, were the foundation of meals in Poland and Germany, and soup made from pickled cabbage was a means of sustenance for Russian peasants. From there, cabbage traveled farther west and became a staple in Germany and Holland, where peasants made large batches of kraut in crocks to last through the long winter months. Our word sauerkraut comes from the German, sour cabbage. Before refrigeration, pickled cabbage or kraut was a major source of vitamin C in the

winter months.

The first transatlantic voyages around Columbus' time were thwarted by scurvy, a disease caused by vitamin C deficiency. Later, Dutch sailors learned to bring crocks of kraut on long winter voyages to prevent scurvy. In the eighteenth century, Captain Cook, who once ordered 25,000 pounds to outfit two ships, attributed his crew's good health to a daily ration of sauerkraut. Although it was used mainly for food, it is said that his ship's doctor once made kraut compresses to treat soldiers wounded in a bad storm, saving them from gangrene.

Pickled cabbage contains no fat, is low in calories, and is an excellent source of vitamin C. Pickling cabbages not only preserves them, it also makes them more nutritious and easier to digest. Pickled cabbage contains more *lactobacilli* than yogurt (that is the bacteria responsible for the fermentation of the cabbage). The distinctive sour flavor and good storage capability both result from lactic acid that forms when these *lactobacilli* ferment sugars in the fresh cabbage. As they digest the sugars, they produce vitamin B. According to Korean scientists, kimchi has a much higher concentration of many B vitamins (B1, B2, B12, and niacin) than fresh cabbage. Since salt causes loss of water, any fat-soluble vitamins become more concentrated.

Cabbage grows well in our cold and short Adirondack growing season. For those who don't grow their own, cabbage is very inexpensive and plentiful right now. Pickled cabbage is a convenient, versatile, and economical way to use up the excess harvest or take advantage of the sales. There are many ways to pickle it; once pickled, it can be used raw in salads or cooked in a variety of dishes. Kimchi is used as an ingredient in Korean dishes such as kimchi soup and kimchi fried rice. Kraut is also used in soups, casseroles, and the traditional Polish bigos, or hunter's stew.

## ***Making Your Own Kraut***

When pickling cabbage, be sure to use plain salt (sodium chloride) without additives such as iodine or other ingredients that are often found in table salt. You can use glass jars or clay crocks; googling "fermenter crock" shows many choices.

Because much commercial kraut has vinegar and we prefer ours cured with salt, we have been making our own sauerkraut for years. It is fairly easy. However, two



things are critical when making kraut. First is thorough mixing. The salt must be evenly distributed in the cabbage. If there are pockets with too little or too much salt, the cabbage will not ferment properly and may spoil.

It is also critical that no oxygen is present during the fermentation process. The bacteria responsible for fermentation are anaerobic and must live without the presence of oxygen. If oxygen is present, other bacteria that cause spoilage, such as acid-loving molds and yeasts, will be present and the cabbage will spoil.

#### **Ingredients:**

- Fresh heads of cabbage
- Salt (commercial grade NaCl)

#### **Other materials:**

- Food processor or cabbage shredder
- Crocks or other containers
- Scales to weigh the cabbage
- Weights

#### **Directions:**

- Remove the outer leaves, and any bruised or soiled parts, from the cabbage. Wash the cabbage thoroughly in cool water to remove sand and other debris. Quarter the heads, and remove the hard, central core.
- Shred the cabbage (I use a food processor for this).
- Weigh the cabbage and place two and a half pounds in a large bowl (this will be about three quarts, tightly packed).
- Add the salt and mix thoroughly. For two and a half pounds of cabbage, use one and a half tablespoons

salt. (The usual ratio is three tablespoons of salt for five pounds of cabbage, but I find this smaller amount is easier to mix.) Ideally, you want to achieve a final concentration of 2.5% salt.

Now, using your hands, thoroughly mix the salt into the cabbage. This step is critical. When the salt is evenly distributed in the cabbage, pack the cabbage by pressing firmly but gently with your hands into crocks or very large jars. Compress the mixture so that liquid comes to the top. Since cabbage is 92% water, adding salt extracts the water or juice from the cabbage. Press down hard to make sure all of the cabbage is submerged and there are no air bubbles. Keep packing cabbage in until it is nearly full. Add a tight-fitting lid to make sure all the cabbage is under water and there is no air that can come in. One way to create a tight lid is to use large plastic bags filled with water. Fill a large plastic bag with water, and place it inside another plastic bag. Make sure the bag is large enough to cover the top and sides, and that there are no gaps along the sides where air could enter the cabbage. Because bags are more flexible than solid lids, this is the best way to eliminate potential air pockets in the container. Check your water level every week or so to make sure it hasn't evaporated. Remove the bags of water carefully so they don't rupture.

Keep the crocks at room temperature (about 65 to 70 degrees) for about 5 weeks. No peeking! When kraut is ready, seal and refrigerate. If you don't want to freeze or can it, you can take it from the crock and quickly cover it back up. 🐷

*Yvona Fast lives in Lake Clear, New York, and has two passions: cooking and writing. She can be reached at [www.wordsaremyworld.com](http://www.wordsaremyworld.com).*



# THE OLD SCREEN DOOR

—Erma Bontrager

'Twas first a dream that brought the change;  
Our entrance room was old.  
No insulation in the walls,  
In winter it was cold.

And thus we thought to tear it off—  
That aged entryway  
A jolly, merry gang we were,  
That busy wrecking day,

We worked and slayed, and changes made  
In windows, roof and floor.  
The walls came down with ripping sound,  
And oh, the old screen door!

With visions dancing through our heads  
We worked with eager haste,  
We'd build a new addition, which  
Would take the entrance's place.

We'd need to do a lot of work,  
To make our dream come true,  
It was a busy time for us;  
Our hands and fingers flew.

And then a thought with pain was wrought  
It struck me to the core—  
I'd never hear that sound so dear;  
The squeaking of the door.

It used to be a friendly door,  
Though scratched and old and worn,  
The paint was chipped and peeling, and  
At times the screen got torn,

But then we'd patch it up again  
And mend a board or two,  
And thus our door, though old and scarred,  
Would work as good as new.

I miss that squeak, the gentle creak  
Which I can hear no more,  
That friendly squeak which used to speak  
Above the old screen door.

It's true, that door was old and worn  
And yet, I now would say,  
A simple beauty graced that door  
Though flawed in every way.

But oh! It was a dear old door  
In memory I still hear,  
That gentle squeak, the muffled bang!  
When loved ones entered here.

Sometimes a slam, a mighty wham!  
Would nearly shake the floor,  
When someone young came on the run  
In through the old screen door.

Ah, memories twine around my heart  
And nearly make me sad.  
I guess that's just the way of life;  
The things that make us glad

Might sometimes cause us sadness too,  
And tinges of regret  
For things we've lost and can't reclaim  
But still, we've memories yet,

And in my heart, it tugs to part,  
To hear that sound no more—  
Familiar squeak which used to speak  
About the dear old door!

*Erma Bontrager lives in Hillsboro, Wisconsin.*




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### The Practical Shepherd

By Abram Bowerman  
Green Park Press  
210 pages

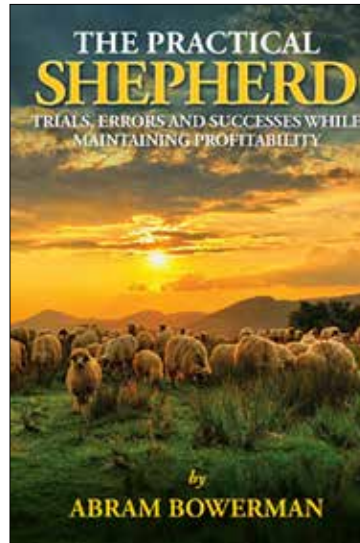
From the age of six, Abram Bowerman had an interest in sheep. With youthful ingenuity he earned enough to buy his first sheep, but quickly learned a lone sheep is stressed, can become sick, and ultimately die. His brother's investment helped him avoid that initial mistake, allowing him to acquire more sheep and build his business from the grass up, primarily on land he didn't own. By the age of 25, he became fully employed as a stockman. Bowerman explains how working with cattle owners opened the door to stockmanship.

With sheep as the centerpiece of Still Waters Farm, Bowerman presents low-cost, practical solutions for raising happy, healthy livestock. He believes the best things in a sheep's life can be found in the pasture. Chapters cover:

- Healthy signs to look for when buying sheep.
- How to prevent disease and parasitism.
- The importance of clean water and shade.
- Designing a sheep corral.
- What to cull and what to retain for replacement ewes.
- A calendar for successful breeding, lambing, weaning, and castrating.
- Pasture management best practices.
- When to make paddock shifts.
- The benefits of multi-species.
- Using and training reliable guardian dogs.
- And more.

With more than 20 years' experience, Bowerman and his family raise 400 sheep, along with goats, cows, horses, and poultry on leased and owned pastureland. In *The Practical Shepherd*, Bowerman walks you through the pitfalls and challenges he faced and overcame so that you, too, can be a profitable, successful shepherd.

*The Practical Shepherd* is available from: Stockman Grass Farmer, PO Box 2300, Ridgeland MS 39158-2300. The price is \$25 plus \$6 for shipping.



### Adventures in Yarn Farming: “Four Seasons on a New England Fiber Farm”

By Barbara Parry  
Photography by Ben Barnhart  
Shambhala Publications, Inc.  
Horticultural Hall  
200 Massachusetts Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115  
309 pages

Reviewed by Betsy Erickson

When the fall rains and cold winds make the cozy corner by the kitchen cookstove a pleasant place to relax, it is a good time to pick up a book that inspires the reader to feel fortunate to be one of the farmers still holding on to rural traditions. That is the perfect time to read and enjoy *Adventures in Yarn Farming* by Barbara Parry. An integral and absolutely necessary component of the book is Ben Barnhart's photography.

Parry and her family moved to a western Massachusetts farm in 2001 and proceeded to remake their lives in a very rural way. Over the following two decades, Parry built her sheep farming dream into a viable business. In the author's words, this book “recounts what I've learned about raising sheep, working with fiber, farming, and life in rural New England.” Barbara Parry takes the reader along on a journey through the year.

Spring is devoted to lambs and lambing, summer still is dominated by sheep, but also crucial are the haying process, gardening, herbs, handcrafts, and friends as well. Still, sheep are always at the top of the list. Fall is yarn centered as she delivers wool to the mill, begins dyeing yarn, and spends time weaving and spinning. Winter features an ice storm, tending sheep on snowshoes, and some knitting and other various fiber projects.

This reader has never been a fan of the “a picture is worth a thousand words” school, but a book like Parry's could make one a believer. The photos of the author's yarns and wool, both as finished goods and as illustrations of the dyeing process, make the fiber enthusiast's fingers itch to reach out with a hand and feel them for herself.

The sheep pictures are equally compelling. Barbara Parry educated herself through reading widely and also by attending as many wool festivals as she could, gleaned information and insight from shepherds, craftspeople, woolen mill operators, and experts in any related fields that seemed to her to be relevant. She brought all she learned back to their unique and beautiful Springdelle

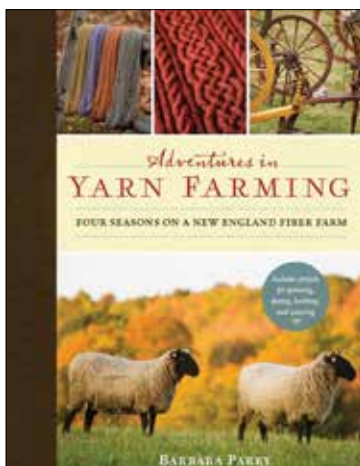
fiber farm.

Sometimes readers are lured into jumping headfirst into an idyllic-seeming farm situation, thinking, in the case of sheep, for instance, that it is a pretty simple, straightforward process—lambs are born, grow, are shorn, and wool will magically turn into knitting yarn. Seeing the photographs in Parry's book, even without delving more deeply, most readers would soon be convinced that there is a little more involved. One sign of this would be the author's unshorn sheep wearing "jackets." Why? Anyone who has tried to clean the vegetable matter—chaff, hay, or weeds—from a fleece knows what a nearly impossible job it is to do by hand. Sheep coats keep the animals clean, and they are removed at shearing time, washed, dried, and used again. But coats on sheep are just one of the sights that might be a mystery to observers. There are others. Why might a shepherd keep wethers—castrated male sheep—that can have no role in reproduction? Why do some breeds produce wool that is suitable for clothing while other breeds with shiny, glossy locks have wool that is better for carpets than for sweaters? How do sheep raisers combat a coyote problem? Barbara Parry's accounts of the challenges they faced and the paths they took to meet them make this work more than a colorful "coffee table book" chosen for its attractive pictures. Instead, the content, too, makes this volume worthwhile.

This book has useful sheep raising information, beautiful pictures, gardening lore, a few recipes, some knitting patterns, woolen mill information, instructions for hand dyeing, a description of the author's unique yarn CSA, and one very unusual, though not pleasant, story.

Parry's husband, Mike, noticed a group of wethers and rams huddling as close to the fence as they could, appearing to be agitated, and so, as responsible shepherds, they immediately investigated, checking out the pasture. They found that one of the Cormo wethers lay dead, his throat cut and his neck partially eaten. Fifty feet away lay Trumpet, one of their rams, also taken down by the throat. Jack, Trumpet's companion, had been killed as well, though not eaten at all. With one sheep still missing, they contacted the state fish and wildlife people. During the course of their investigation, the missing ram was located, also dead. The authorities concluded that this was what was called a "recreational" attack, since it did not appear that hungry wild animals were just looking for food. This made them suspect a large domestic dog.

A few weeks later, a neighboring flock was attacked,



with twelve lambs killed in one night. But this time, someone in the area saw the predator and shot it. It was not a coyote or a domestic dog. It was a large gray wolf, a species that had supposedly been eradicated in Massachusetts in the 1840s. How the healthy male happened to emerge in the hills of western Massachusetts was not clear. The author, though devastated by the harm to her flock, was also saddened to see the magnificent wild animal come to such an end.

*Adventures in Yarn Farming* has so much to offer the reader. One need not be

a sheep farmer to find this book a rewarding learning experience. If you would like to knit a Solstice Hat or a Sundance Scarf, or maybe a Wildwood Pullover, the patterns are here. If you want to make Hyssop Pesto, the recipe is in this book. The same is true for the Maple-Sweetened Peach Tart with Mountain Blueberry Compote. If you want to learn just what goes on at a woolen mill, several pages describe the work at the Green Mountain Spinnery. The same wealth of information exists for lambing, spinning and weaving, yarn dyeing, and much more.

But in addition to all the useful subjects Barbara Parry tackles in this book, she has also created a beautiful book that enriches the reader through the senses—the photographs by Ben Barnhart pop with color, natural beauty, and somehow also with insight into the demanding life of the shepherd. This book will not be idle on our shelves, gathering dust. We will take it out and enjoy the colors and descriptive prose on many gray fall and winter days. 🐏

This book is also available from Colonial Homestead. See ad below.

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## Educating Mom

— Darla Weaver

For about a week I placed my coffee on a coaster beside a small pile of coyote teeth. They glittered like miniature ivory tusks. I tried to ignore them

I found what was left of a turkey's tail under the cushion of a chair on the porch. There it waited, safe from Sasha the dog, until Matthan had time to turn the feathers into an elaborate Indian headdress fashioned from suspender elastic and thread.

Seeing it there reminded me that the deer and squirrel tails upstairs on some of his nature tables had been infested with small, white wiggly things. Worms. I saw them and wished I hadn't. I went away and pretended I hadn't. Would they cease to exist if I ignored them long enough?

Next, I found myself chasing a moth flying around the house. It fluttered just ahead of me, eluding frantic grasps.

"It's a Bird Dropping Moth," Matthan explained.

I knew enough to identify it as a moth when it took to flight, but Matthan would tell me its proper name, habitat, species, and life cycle. He would look it up in a field guide and show me the pupa and caterpillar phases, colors and markings, early stages, and wingspan. He kept

me educated, but not about things I'd find interesting and educational, such as the new line of disease-resistant roses or the comings and goings of the British Royal family.

The mushroom phase came next and made me more nervous than most. I kept a bottle of charcoal capsules within quick grabbing reach, while Matthan lugged bags full of mushrooms from the woods. He needed mushroom field guides then to identify them and a pan to sample the edible species. He and Laverne ate Hen-of-the-Woods, Turkey Tail, Tooth Coral, Bearded Hedgehog, Honey Mushroom, and mini puffballs. I kept waiting for them to clutch their stomachs and turn green.

They fried Old-Man-of-the-Woods too, with olive oil and salt, and ate him as well. I turned up my nose at the two shriveled bits of unappetizing mushroom in the bottom of the pan—and checked the whereabouts of the charcoal capsules. "Not bad," they said. "And we didn't even find any bones."

I deliberately left bags of mushrooms in the fridge until they turned slimy and I could persuade Matthan to throw them out. But it was the Bitter Boletes that terminated their enthusiasm for the mushroom-tasting spree. As Laverne took a bite of that one and chewed, his expression changed. He spit it out and hurried to the

sink to rinse his mouth with water. I knew it had to be bad because he's not given to overacting.

Matthan watched him, looking sheepish. "The book says edible, except for those who can detect the bitter aftertaste."

"I detected it," Laverne said.

I'm fond of believing I'm used to pretty much anything by now. But one day I walked into my writing nook and noticed a strange pile on my typewriter table, tucked between two stacks of books. The heap looked so strange and repulsive that I hardly dared touch it, though I nudged one object with a finger.

It looked like—like teeth. Dinosaur teeth, crusted with dirt. "Matthan," I squawked. "What is this stuff?"

He gave me a wary glance and came prepared to protect his latest nature acquisition. "Teeth."

"Teeth?"

"Uh-huh. Curtis and I found them. From dead horses back in the woods, and maybe a few cows too."

That heap of dead, dirty, monstrous teeth on the table affected me, and not in a good way. My skin crawled. Jitters cartwheeled up and down my spine. I felt creepy and jumpy and two frayed nerves removed from going ballistic.

"They cannot stay here," I announced in a deep, dreadful voice. "I can't stand the sight of those dinosaur teeth. Put them in a bag and take them out of the house."

Matthan obeyed, though a shade sulkily. "I can't understand you, Mom," he said, dropping enormous teeth one by one into a plastic bag. "How could you have been an Indian if you can't even stand to look at teeth?"

"But I never, ever wanted to be an Indian," I wailed.

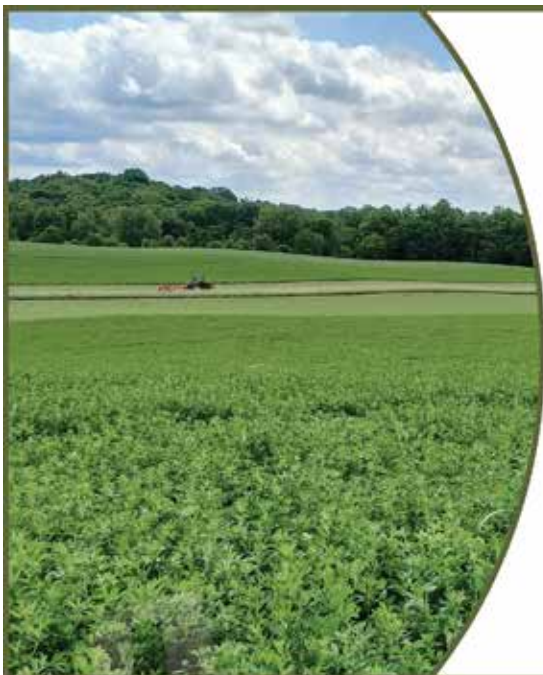
"You didn't? You wouldn't want to be an Indian? Not ever?" And Matthan hauled away his shopping bag full of ancient, dirty teeth, still not understanding.

I felt better when those items were out of sight. When I came upon the next little pile in the same place, I was even prepared to take more of an intelligent interest in it. "Now what are these little—er, things?"

Matthan was delighted to explain. "These are the ribs of a raccoon," he said, sorting them out of the pile. "These two round, flattish ones are its shoulder blades. This is two vertebrae. And here are its teeth."

What can I say? Despite myself, I'm being educated, one bit of nature lore at a time. 🦊

*Darla Weaver and her family are at home near Peebles, Ohio.*



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up the soil to cover their shoulders if needed. Also, we like to add a nice layer of mulch once the carrots are established to help keep moisture in, the sun out, and the weeds down.

### Successful, Succulent Celery

In addition to more than one co-vendor, a reader asked if there is any way to avoid overly thin homegrown celery. Keeping your celery happy can be relatively simple, once you understand what is required. It is one of the few crops I have seen described as a **greedy** feeder and drinker—it likes highly fertile soil, is particularly in need of calcium and boron, and wants consistently moist conditions. We again use composted chicken manure as mulch for this crop, and again it does the trick. Also, Eliot Coleman writes that egg wastes are a great soil improver for celery, being rich in calcium and other nutrients. After reading this, we began saving eggshells to incorporate into their soil site, and depositing the “breaks” from weekly egg cleaning—both shells and egg interiors—onto our patches. The resulting celery was amazing and has been ever since.

Celery’s love of dampness comes as no surprise, considering its wild relatives include the moisture-loving poison hemlock, water hemlock, and water dropwort. So, of course, some irrigation setup/watering schedule is a must for celery.

Celery has parsley-esque roots. That is to say, celery also has taproots which don’t appreciate being handled, and so our celery and parsley are generally sharing their “oversized cell” trays in the greenhouse. The soil needs to be warm when you transplant it outside; it is definitely one of those crops where it doesn’t pay to rush it out. That being said, they also don’t appreciate the punishing heat of summer as they grow larger. If hot weather is standard in your area, you might like to try planting them under the canopy of taller plants or underneath an elevated shade cloth; just make sure they receive partial and not complete shade.

A final note. Though we do begin our celery season harvesting a stalk at a time, the plants will not remain out in the field indefinitely and be happy. Be aware of the days-to-maturity for your chosen variety and begin harvesting the entire plant soon after that time. If they haven’t put on size at that point, more time in the ground isn’t really going to help and what palatability they have will just decrease from there.



*Celery, harvest by the stalk*

### Spore Sourcing

After recommending crop diversification that includes mushrooms, a man contacted me asking where he should source inoculant from. Companies specializing in mushroom production (which is both indoor and outdoor, of many species and varieties, and to all scales) are becoming more prevalent. And like seed companies that focus on producing their stock locally to develop regionally acclimatized

seeds, mushroom companies are producing fungus “familiar” with local conditions. But perhaps more importantly, the employees at the companies themselves are familiar with the particular timing of seasons and harvesting for mushrooms in their area and can offer you the most accurate and pertinent guidance and advice for where you are.

The gentleman in question was unquestionably closest to Field & Forest Products. But perhaps one of the other companies listed below is closer to you.

I hope you have found these reader-selected topics worth hearing about. Perhaps you can help me choose some for next time!

Field & Forest Products N3296 Kozuzek Rd. Peshtigo, WI 54157	Mushroom Mountain 200 Finley Rd. Easley, SC 29642
Fungi Perfecti, LLC Box 7634 Olympia, WA 98507	North Spore 921 Riverside St. Portland, ME 04103

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### Growing Concerns—What Are Your Questions?

Over the years, I have received letters asking various questions about agriculture, mainly about crops that I have not yet written about, but sometimes for more information about those I have already touched on. It occurred to me that these questions and answers might be of interest to more folks and supply inspiration for future articles. If you have questions about the growing or marketing of crops, or other aspects of homesteading, please send them my way. 🐾

*Leah Smith is a freelance writer and home and market gardener. She works on her family’s farm in mid-Michigan (called Nodding Thistle), which has been devoted to organic production since it was first certified by Organic Growers of Michigan in 1984. She can be reached at: 697 N. Eaton Rd., Nashville, MI 49073-9807.*

## *The One with the Grass*

“Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.”  
~ Lao Tzu

—Kim Barker

On our part of the high plains, we are surrounded mostly by grass, mostly by cow-calf producers. The soils and climate around here are not really suited for farming anyway. Wheat and grass have historically been the main crops. Dependable spring rains and dependable equinox rains were good for growing wheat. About thirty years ago, the spring rains became more sporadic, the fall rains less dependable, and droughts more frequent. I used to farm a couple hundred acres about 3 miles from here on a share-crop arrangement, until I realized that wheat field had about as much soil organic matter as the dirt road in front of my house. I harvested my last wheat crop in 1992 and have not regretted that decision even once.

Growing native warm-season grasses requires no machinery and no fertilizer. We do a lot of strip grazing, and move cattle almost every day. People often tell me they don't know how we have time to move cattle all the time, and yet I have more free time than anyone I know. They are making hay, hauling hay, feeding hay, calving in the snow, and many other things we don't do.

Growing grass is not that hard, especially with a little forethought and management. Creation provides the sunshine and rain for free. Soil microbes and native legumes provide a little nitrogen and root exudates keep the microbes happy. We just have to make sure we have leaves enough for photosynthesis, and get out of the way. I have been told to get out of the way most of my life, so that part is pretty easy.

Cattle are at record high prices, which is good. For many of my neighbors this means there is extra money to spray their pastures for weeds and brush. The spray planes have been flying all around us. We have more

brush than the neighbors, and more weeds, most of which are very nutritious and the cattle readily eat. We also have lots more grass. Spray planes are a poor substitute for management. While they were busy killing weeds, my daughter identified three forbs we have not seen before, that my neighbors will never have. One of these was Showy Milkweed, which is good for hummingbirds, bees, and monarch butterflies.

We have also been seeing signs of dung beetles working. Mostly we have the ones I have known all my life as tumble bugs, the beetles that roll the manure into a ball, lay an egg in it, and bury it. This year there are more signs of manure being buried where it landed, which is a bit unusual for this coarse sand that is common here.

We lease a pasture across the road that has acres of sand plum thickets. Sand plums are about the size of sour cherries and make really good jelly. The thickets spread as the plums fall on the ground and sprout. Coyotes eat them; and spread them, the pits survive digestion and grow readily. Over time, a new thicket is underway. We use a bush hog and make paths for electric fence for strip grazing. I mow these periodically to keep them open. I have noticed that mowing them while they have blossoms or plums on them will kill some of the plants. I suspect the plant is using all its energy for reproduction, and root reserves are weak. We are going to try mowing some, then saturating the ground with a highly bacterial compost tea. Brush and trees do well if the bacterial/fungal ratio is heavier on the fungal side. The idea is to shift the ratio back to heavier on the bacteria to weaken the plants. This may be a multi-year approach, but we have no interest in spraying poisons. I have friends trying a similar approach by using poly-wire to keep cattle on brushy areas overnight, concentrating manure



and urine to make a microbial shift to bacteria. There is so much to learn, and it is so much fun promoting life in healthy ways.

Recently I did have a feel-good moment when I was at the local co-op with my daughter, and one neighbor asked another how his grass was holding up. He nodded at me and said, "He's the one with the grass." My daughter asked me later if that was the best compliment I ever had. I thought it was a compliment to him, since he noticed.

Using spray planes and livestock chemicals to randomly kill biology simplifies the system when complexity is the better way. Every plant, insect, microbe, and critter has a job to do and services to

provide, and I don't know what most of those jobs are. I question the logic of killing things just because I don't know their purpose. I do know that for me to do those jobs, it will come out of my pocket and be poorly accomplished. Interfering with workers doing a good job is never productive. As usual, I should stay out of the way. 🐞

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you will live forever."

—Mahatma Gandhi

*Kim Barker and his family operate a ranch in Waynoka, Oklahoma.*



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## *The Growing Disconnect Between Numbers and Soft Policy*

Farm and Food File for the week beginning Sunday, March 3, 2024:

Like much of the news anymore, the initial numbers from the 2022 Census of Agriculture were accurately reported, quickly downplayed—or even worse, ignored—by most Big Ag groups, and then just pushed aside by the rush of the next day’s news.

That’s a mistake, because the numbers, released Feb. 13 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), show the rapid maturity and coming old age of U.S. agriculture.

But these numbers, like old soldiers, won’t just fade away. They’re real and consequential.

For example, according to NASS, the number of U.S. farms plunged by 142,000, or 7 percent, in the five years between 2017 and 2022. It’s the largest drop in farm numbers over the last four ag census periods and the lowest total number of U.S. farms since 1850 when the U.S. was a nation of just 31 states and four territories.

Equally shocking is the confounding fact that this slide happened at the same time Congress and the USDA were shoveling billions into farm programs to support farmers and ranchers.

According to a Feb. 20 report titled “Unsustainable: The State of the Farm Safety Net,” published by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, the federal government “distributed” \$142 billion “through farm safety net programs” from 2017 to 2022.

The biggest bite over those five years was “ad hoc spending,” money not budgeted in any Farm Bill; it totaled \$67 billion. Next came federal crop insurance, the principal revenue-supporting device in U.S. ag policy; it cost \$46 billion. And pulling into third was “commodity programs,” at \$29 billion.

How do you send \$142 billion in taxpayer dollars to farmers in five years and still end up with the fewest number of American farms in 172 years? The Census offers clues.

According to it, the only farm size category that increased in numbers was farms “operating 5,000 acres” or more. These “biggies” controlled 42 percent of all farmland in 2022. Additionally, 6 percent of farms with \$1 million-plus in annual sales owned 32 percent of U.S. farmland and generated 75 percent of all ag sales nationwide.

That ever-bigger bigness was matched by an

ever-graying grayness. According to the Census, the average age of U.S. farmers jumped from 57.5 in 2017 to 58.1 in 2022. More to the point, in 2017 one out of four U.S. farmers were 65 years old or older; in 2022, it was one out of three, or an increase of 12 percent in the ratio.

In the meantime, the number of farmers aged 35 to 65 dropped 9 percent.

In fairness, the number of farmers with less than 10 years’ experience—a group USDA calls “beginning farmers”—grew 11 percent, a pleasant surprise except for the rude fact that these “beginners” were an average of 47.1 years old.

After reviewing the hard numbers, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack suggested that they prove the Biden Administration is on the right track in its call for a “different model” of agriculture that lends a big hand to small- and medium-sized farmers while continuing to support big farmers too.

But there’s nothing different in that “different model.” In fact, the 2023 Farm Bill contained no plan to cap program payments to the biggest of the bigs and offered no favoritism to the “farms in the middle,” the smaller-sized farms that survive mostly through substantial off-farm income.

The facts are that our relentless drive to wring a profit out of our nation’s soil, water, and rural communities has built a highly productive, very fragile, top-down food structure that leans heavily on federal subsidies, environmental degradation, and the slow liquidation of rural America.

That system isn’t sustainable—and neither are we—without change. 🐔

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