

Winter Worries

“Winter worries” is a condition I’ve identified as resulting from spending too much time inside the house during the winter months – especially after the holidays. It was just about that time that we began to worry whether we would have enough snow to insulate those plants, requiring a layer of the white stuff along with the deep cold temperatures that are part of their growth cycle.

During last month’s heavy rains, the generally calm stream located not far from our house turned into a raging monster. At that time, we worried about the possibility of water damage to the house as the stream overflowed and water rose to within an inch of entering the side door. Fortunately, no water entered the house. Those same rains also produced so much water I worried about the possibility of some of the perennials rotting in the ground.

On the flip side, there was so much rain it washed away most of the snow, so I then worried if there will be any snow left to melt and produce a “spring runoff.”

Woods and Gardens

with Phyllis Shemchuk



Let’s put aside the worries of the season for a moment to point out a plus. Remember the ash borer responsible for the destruction of so many of our beautiful ash trees? The invasive beetle has killed an estimated 100 million ash trees in the United States since it was discovered in 2002 in Michigan. The word is the insect cannot survive sub-zero temperatures. The lower the temperature drops, the higher the borers’ larvae death count. A recent U.S. Forest Service study in Minnesota estimated “larvae mortality reaches 5% at 0°F, climbs to 34% at -10°F below, and then to 79% at -20°F, and finally, 98% at -30°F below.”

Some of this winter’s cold-weather days are setting records across the country, but I found some interesting weather facts that will be difficult to beat.

According to National Centers for Environmental Information, the winter of 1935-1936 was the coldest

winter on record. February was the coldest month in this severe winter in which Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota had their coldest month on record. In McIntosh, SD temperatures sank to -58 °F, and Parshall, ND hit a low of -60 °F. An unofficial reading of -60 °F also was recorded in Jordan, MT. The average temperature for five weeks ending in February At Devil’s Lake, ND was -21 °F.

During that time, skis were used in rescue operations as a succession of snowstorms hit the Pacific Northwest states and much of the nation east of the Continental Divide. By the middle of the month, all schools in the Midwest, Great Plains, and Pacific Northwest were closed because of deep snowdrifts. Many remote South Dakota towns had no outside contact for several weeks. As far south as Richmond, VA, rivers were completely ice-bound. Spring thaws accompanied by heavy rain over the southern states later led to flooding.

In Canada (away from the Atlantic Ocean), temperatures averaged as much as 36 °F below normal. At the Saskatoon airport, the temperature did not rise above 0 °F from February 2nd through February 20th, and a temperature of -63 °F was recorded in Sceptre, Saskatchewan.

If you think that was cold, check this out: Recent weather charts show one of the coldest inhabited places on earth is Oymyakon, in Siberia, Russia. Winter temperatures there average -58° F. Oymyakon has never recorded an above-freezing temperature between October 25th and March 17th. A low temperature of -66°F was reached on January 31st of this same year!

Meanwhile, the other parts of the planet are having their own problems. While we’ve been freezing in the US it’s summer in Australia. It’s not just humans who have problems with the intense heat. A recent heat wave across the continent has killed wildlife, and created dust storms and power outages. Temperatures in the city of Adelaide soared to 116°F. Heat caused possums to burn their feet on melting roads and native bats dropped dead by the hundreds. I guess no place is perfect.

Phyllis Shemchuk has gardened in Athol, MA for more than 30 years.

Southern Cooking Flavors & Favorites

COOKING, Continued from page 9

Fried Oyster Po’Boys

Serve these lovelies on toasted rolls or buns. Top with a sauce of 1/4 cup mayonnaise mixed with a little lemon juice, chopped dill pickles and 1/4 tsp. of Dijon mustard. Add shredded iceberg lettuce if desired. Makes about 4 sandwiches.

Ingredients:

- 16 medium oysters, shucked
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- salt and pepper
- 1/4 cup flour
- 1/4 cup yellow or white cornmeal
- salt and pepper
- oil for frying
- crusty rolls or buns for serving

Whisk together egg, cream and a little salt and pepper in a shallow dish. In another shallow dish, combine flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper. Dip the oysters first into the egg/cream mixture, letting excess drip off. Then dredge oysters into flour/cornmeal mixture. Set on a platter and refrigerate for 30 minutes to help the coating to stick. When ready to fry, heat about 1-1/2” of oil in a deep pot until sizzling hot. Fry oysters until crispy, turning once, about 2-3 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels and serve on rolls.

Skillet Scallions

This simple idea comes from the 1976 cookbook *The Taste of Country Cooking*, by Edna Lewis. To my mind, she is one of the finest cooks of Southern American food I’ve had the pleasure to discover.

Ingredients:

- 2 bunches scallions
- 3 tablespoons butter

Prepare scallions by trimming any yellow stems from and cutting away the roots. Wash in cold water and trim tops to fit your cast iron or heavy skillet. Heat the skillet and add the butter. When butter foams, add the scallions; the few drops of water left from the washing are enough for steaming. Cover the skillet and cook over moderate heat; turn them over after 3 minutes. Total cooking time is 4-5 minutes. Be careful not to overcook; the white part should be a bit crisp, the tops tender, shiny and green. Serve hot – no salt or pepper is needed, but sprinkle some on if you wish.

Skillet Apples

A nice side with various pork or chicken dishes; or serve warm for dessert with some yogurt or ice cream. Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup butter
- 4 Gala or Honeycrisp apples sliced
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

In a 10-inch cast iron skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add apples and rest of ingredients. Cook stirring occasionally, until softened, about 15 minutes.


Nancy Adams is a native of Peterborough and resides in Hancock. She and her husband, Bud, have raised four sons. She has been featured as one of Yankee Magazine’s great New England cooks. Nancy welcomes suggestions – send them to: Nancy P. Adams, PO Box 23, Hancock, NH 03449.

Frost Free Library Hosts Garden And Farm Discussion

The Frost Free Library at 28 Jaffrey Road in Marlborough is hosting a “human library,” part one (“Get the most out of a garden”) on Tuesday, February 26th and part two (“small farm animals for small spaces”) on Tuesday, March 26th, both at 6:30 p.m.

In this two part chat, Farm Director of GlenBrook Farms, Sadie Stehlik, will share her experience in sustainable farming and gardening in Marlborough.

For more details, call 603-876 4479, email library@frostfree.org, and on FaceBook at FrostFreeLibNH or visit www.frostfreelibrary.com.



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