



Da Bears!

At approximately 2181 miles the Appalachian trail is quite the trek. Hiking enthusiasts the world over love to come and give it a try. I personally know of one hardy soul who completed the entire trudge in one fell swoop. He lost a considerable amount of weight, one of his goals, and was quite smug about it to boot. I would like to do it myself but work and my babies (livestock) make such a leave of absence untenable.

The Forest Service, after consultation with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, has decided to close part of the Trail in Georgia to camping due to some mischievous bears. Now there are always some bears around and hikers are thoroughly warned about leaving dirty dishes lying about and improper storage of food so as not to attract undue attention from these forest denizens. But with all the weekend warriors and newbies that frequent the Trail, folks have gotten a bit lax and some enterprising young bears have learned some nasty habits. The section of the trail closed to overnight camping runs from Neals Gap, just east of Blood Mountain, to Tesnatee Gap. It seems there are reports of a bear stealing food and backpacks. Allegedly the bear has learned to chew through the ropes used to suspend food bags from high tree limbs and then grab the goodies once the bag hits the ground. He doesn't even have the decency to run away with his ill-gotten booty. Instead he just sits right there as the hapless, hungry hikers scream, bang pans and generally flail about as he continues to enjoy the free meal.

The bear hasn't acted aggressive... thus far. In regard to human and wild animal interaction, sometimes familiarity breeds contempt. Or at least contemplation of a different kind of free meal. The Forest Service hopes to change the habits of the offending bear by removing the source of temptation for a time. Perhaps then he will just move further into the forest in search of more traditional foodstuffs. There is the possibility he will instead move further up the trail in search of easier and tastier fare at other campgrounds. The Forest Service sometimes relocates problem animals but has little patience for ones that display an unwillingness to move on to a life more suitable for bruins. Case in point is a bear from a couple of years back that developed a rather nasty habit of confronting hikers on the trail and trying to scare them into dropping their backpacks and run so he could get the food. This bear was eventually euthanized.

So kiddies, the lesson here is to pay attention to your housekeeping in your campsite and always store your foodstuff in the manner prescribed by the Forest Service. You don't want to be responsible for the untimely death of ole' Mr. Bear do ya? Now if it was me and dat ol' bear come upon me eatin' a bowl of my mama's gumbo, well... I've always wanted me a bear skin rug!

What's All the Buzz About?

As covered in a previous article, Carpenter Bees are a serious problem up here in them thar woods. And they are bad this year. We noticed they, as well as many other of nature's horde, emerged a bit earlier this year than in previous years. We already have lightning bugs lighting up the tree line every evening. They usually don't show up till June.

Now I know most of you think that Carpenter Bees sole function is to drill into your house until it resembles Swiss cheese. All the while they happily squirt their excrement all over your windows, siding, decks, etc. Not to mention all of the sawdust flying up your nose. For all the ones you see buzzing around your house at this time of year there are millions more in the woods drilling into the plethora of dead branches to lay their brood. "So why do they come and attack my home?" you may ask. Well, that's because you make them out of nice, soft pine siding. Pine is a whole lot easier to drill into than oak or maple and the like. The bees, like many of us, like to take the easier route whenever possible. They actually prefer to use old abandoned tunnels that a previous generation has left for them.

This brings us to the crux of this tome. We now have our Carpenter Bee Trap Service available. The traps are doing a bang-up job where we have installed them and we are ready to place them around your home as well. The traps take advantage of the bee's proclivity to seek out pre-drilled holes in which to nest. Once inside the trap the bee realizes they have been duped and want to quickly exit. We conveniently provide them with same in the form of a ruse. A clear, well lit opening is provided at the bottom of the trap which they quickly fly towards believing it to be the egress they desire. Once there they are forced into a small aperture and drop into a clear plastic bottle from which there is no escape, thus bringing an ignominious end to the wood destroying activities of that particular *Bombus eatus woodus*.

Most structures need 4 - 6 traps for proper control. *Proper placement and monitoring is crucial!* They need to go up in the Spring and be down by the end of Summer. This is where the *Service* in Complete Home Services comes in. The Carpenter Bee Trap Service includes a well made trap, installation of said trap, monitoring and finally trap removal at the end of Summer (and disposal of the trapped bees).

Please remember, there is no "getting rid" of Carpenter Bees. They are part and parcel of the environment which surrounds us. They will be back next year and we will be waiting. It's not too late to get your traps out for this year. Once the bees are firmly entrenched in established nests they will be harder to trap so don't dawdle!

The HEAT Is On!

Ahhh, Summer's heat is upon us once again. With temps in the balmy 90's and nights a tolerable 60, Summer has come early to North Georgia. It's about doggone time! Old man Winter's frigid finger had been on my backside a little too long this past Winter. Now, mercifully, El Sol once again reigns supreme! There's nothing quite like loading up a trailer with 500 or so square bales in the blazing sun while your exposed, sweat soaked skin and clothes are encrusted with a nice layer of hay chaff. Lets a person know they are really alive, if they don't drop dead of a heat stroke. But enough about the wimpy folk.

"Oh sweat, where is thy sting?" was a popular refrain of mine these past few months. Summer's lubricant serves many purposes ranging from toxin removal to aggravating the wife. As much as I sweat in a day I can't possibly have any toxins left. Not to mention that all that work and sweat helps me to retain my girlish figure. Working in the hot sun does have an otherwise draining affect on most. If you stay slow and steady, and drink PLENTY of water, most folks are fine. In my home state of Louisiana the temps regularly exceed 90 degrees with a humidity of 80 - 100%! Did you know 100% humidity is when you take a cubic foot of airspace and it contains 50% water? It's almost like swimming without even jumping in the water. Of course being a water baby I LOVE to go for a swim on a hot Summer's day.

Speaking of heat, things certainly have been heating up for us lately. We have been slammed with work. We have hired a couple of new guys and we have been getting an earlier start every day and still finishing later than usual. Not that we are complaining, I'm just saying. Keep it coming! We appreciate the work and the trust you place in us of a job well done.

Also work around the farm is about to swing into high gear. Do have an unruly teenager lying about the house consuming groceries and whining about their not being anything to do? Well you could always send them to me for about a month. This old man will test both their tenacity and stamina. Heck, I'll feed 'em good and even let them take a dip in the lake every once in a while. They could also learn a little about the *outside*, where their food comes from and even marketing. You'll get them back a little wiser, darker of skin and much more appreciative of the air conditioning. On second thought, maybe you shouldn't. I hate to wear 'em down to a nub before you had a chance to watch them fully grow.

When you rise at about 5:30 am every day and leave the field around 9 - 9:30 pm you wonder, "What the heck was I thinking?" But that's one of the great things about Summer. Plenty of time to get things done. Speaking of which, my crew is about finished with the day's tasks and will arrive back at the office soon. Around 200 bales of hay still beckon from the field and heed their call we must. This should be enough hay to last me for a couple of years unless the barn springs a leak.

What's the Deal?

Some of you my have noticed that this, the latest edition of the newsletter, is a little tardy. Like, by a month! Well, I have been going at it hot and heavy. We have had some large landscaping projects to complete before Summer and another extra-large one coming up for a soon to be completed lake house. We normally prefer to do landscape projects in the fall as it is easier on the plants. They just require so much more water in the Summer. Miss a watering and you could lose some plants real quick. So if we have done any landscaping for you... WATER THOSE PLANTS!!!!!!!

"So what does all of that have to do with our monthly epistle?" you may ask. Well, you're right of course. I should have been writing it at home in my *spare* time. I've just been trying to find it... my spare time that is. Also, having the inspiration it takes to come up with some original content when one is fatigued has been a bit lacking as of late. I do apologize. But it's your own fault really. Many of you guys have decided you are finally ready for the 2nd home improvement projects that you have been putting off or weren't really done well to begin with. We have gotten really good at building integrated landscape steps as of late.

All work and no words makes Donald's wife tired as she has to listen to the sporadic ramblings of a pent-up mind without the outlet the keystroke normally provides. As the farmer's market will be starting up soon I will be building a separate customer base and subsequent email list. As a result I suppose this will spawn another farm newsletter. I wrote a weekly newsletter for our former CSA for years. I really liked writing it because I could be more personal and feel less *constrained* in my writing style. Mostly, less edited than a business style newsletter. I suppose that selling food is technically still a business but I never considered our members mere customers. They were more shareholders than customers and as such were interested in every little detail and the story that went with it. They wanted me to give it to them no-holds-barred style. That's the way I write best.

Of course from a business perspective, with a personal touch that was at first resisted by *some* in the office here, you also get my best. I try to be entertaining and informative. As with everything I do I always strive to do my best. Why should you expect anything less? Sometimes it's just a little more difficult to extricate than others.

MULCH MADNESS!

A word about Mulch. It is a wonderful thing and serves a variety of functions. In addition to beautifying your landscape it controls erosion and helps to maintain moisture in your soil for your plants. Some people think that once the mulch is down, the mission is accomplished. They now have a maintenance free yard that will continue to look perfect. While Mulch is great it is not maintenance free, in fact nothing is totally maintenance free. Yes, it will suppress weeds but... weed seeds will continue to fall and germinate on top of your newly mulched area. Once you have mulched you should be diligent in your weed removal. To maintain your mulch it should be top dressed on a regular basis and kept at a depth of 3 inches.

The other area of confusion is the type of mulch to use. There are several choices, single ground hardwood/softwood mulch, double ground hardwood mulch, pine straw, rubber mulch, red or black mulch and stone. All of these options have pros and cons: SINGLE GROUND is reasonably priced and blends in with the woodlands very well. DOUBLE GROUND is a little more expensive but hugs the ground very well. PINE STRAW is about the same price as single ground, is slippery on slopes but a good option to define beds in a single ground mulched yard. RUBBER MULCH is crazy expensive, almost 10 times that of mulch and hard to keep debris out of. RED AND BLACK MULCH is chemically dyed but can look great in certain situations to define an area. STONE MULCH, which can be pea gravel, white stone or the larger flat river rock. While more expensive it does not degrade and is easy to maintain.

We do A LOT of Mulching!!! Up here in the hills where grass yards are not always a good option, or wanted, mulch is the answer. We do all types in quantities large and small. If you are short on time or the task is just too overwhelming give us a call.

Of course it is great exercise if you wish to do your own mulching. You could even cut out that gym membership, get some fresh air and commune with Nature! While all that is great you should probably just call us. We don't mind the heat and can toss mulch and swat bugs at the same time. We're crazy like that!

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