



Cold Enough For Ya?

Most of you are aware of my love/hate (mostly hate) relationship with winter. The lack of green, the icy wind, oh, and did I mention the cold?

It seems the cold is trying to pass us by this year. It's not all bad as the summer's lack of rain was very hard on my pastures and as a result we have had to feed much more hay this winter than last. The colder it is, the more hay the cows consume. Also, I have been working on a major greenhouse project that has been a twinge in my stern (the nicest way I can put it in this missive). Problems with wrong parts and slow shipping over the holidays has pushed me to the limit. And my tolerance to pain and aggravation is nearly limitless! Although as I age I find more things less tolerable than in days past. Am I alone in that?

One of the potential downsides to the lack of sustained cold spells is the insect larvae overwintering just beneath the soil or the leaves. They can handle a bit of sub-freezing temperatures just fine but to really knock them back a bit we need a certain number of days-in-a-row of really cold weather. Flies can be a problem for me and my cattle. We employ fly predators, as well as a variety of traps for a variety of flies so the cows won't have to suffer with swarms of blood-meal seeking flies.

For the rest of you flies can certainly be a nuisance, but skeeters are the real problem for most. Did you know mosquito larvae can overwinter in moist soil? If that soil freezes solid for a length of time then a depressed population would be the result. This applies to many other creepy-crawlies as well. Those of you with pets should be on the look-out for fleas and ticks once the warmth begins.

It is disconcerting to find myself wishing for some good cold spells, but it would be for the best. Of course, I would be happy living where the cold never comes but Patti likes the seasons. If not for that I might be in some tropical paradise but we can't have that, can we?!?

The Buzz Is...

...about to return. Yep, it's that time of year again. Time to think about Carpenter Bees.

After the rousing success of last year's trapping, we are gearing up early to keep your home from being riddled like Swiss cheese. Our target for setting out traps this year is the middle of March. If the traps are in place *before* the bees come out, then we are ahead of the game. It's best to capture the bees when they first emerge from winter's hibernation instead of trying to play catch-up after they are already scouting out new places to drill into your homes exterior.

Also, the capture of the bees seems to have a cascading effect as far as the attraction of new bees. They can sense the presence of the bees in the trap and decide to drop in to see if they can exploit the situation to their advantage. At this point they become trapped themselves and continue to attract more bees to their doom.

With the winter being unusually warm, we expect the bees to emerge a bit earlier than usual. We have already seen the Pileated woodpeckers chiseling away at the exterior of some homes to get to the tasty morsels inside. The more bees we trap, the less of that we will see as well. Unless the woodpeckers discover how to get into the traps. Then we will have to come up with a trap for them. Just not made out of wood.

If you are interested in signing up for our Carpenter Bee Trap Service this year then contact us without delay so we can get you on the schedule. It does take a bit of time to get out to all the locations and hang all the traps. Luckily, we have the tall ladders needed to reach the lofty heights that are crucial for proper placement in order to entice the bees into the traps in the first place. Our service includes placing the traps, monitoring, emptying and removal at the end of the season, usually around September.

The average home, sans outbuildings, takes at least 4 traps to provide adequate coverage. Some larger homes with chopped up rooflines can use 6 traps. Same with homes with outbuildings that need protecting. The longer you wait, the less effective the traps will be.

Hey there kiddies! It's time for another exciting installment of...

Did You Know?

Whilst there are plenty of food scares out there, there are the little everyday things that often go un-noticed. Take lemon wedges for example.

"What would you like to drink?" asks the waitress. Being health and weight conscious you say, "Water, please."

The waitress brings you a nice glass of water. In said water floats an unrequested wedge of lemon. Not that you mind the lemon, after all, you can simply remove it if you wish. But what exactly resides on that wedge of lemon?

That is the question that was in the mind of Anne LaGrange Loving, assistant professor at Passaic County Community College in New Jersey. After a similar encounter at a local restaurant she decided to do a study. They sampled a total of 76 lemon wedges served with water or soda at 21 eateries for microbial growth. The study found 69.7% of the lemon wedges sampled produced some form of microbial growth from the rind and/or flesh, encompassing 25 different microorganisms including bacteria and yeasts. The study noted that "The microbes found on the lemon samples all have the potential to cause infectious diseases."

Now the study, published in the *Journal of Environmental Health* in December 2007, did not show the likelihood of one actually contracting an infectious disease, nor did it identify the source of the contamination. But that is all beside the fact that it was *present on food served to a customer!* Lemons certainly aren't grown locally in most locales of the United States. Imagine how far they travel and how many hands touch them on their way to your table. Not to mention, although I will, all of the road dust, bird poop, bug leavings and various other fragments the lemon picked up in its travels. Did anyone wash the lemon before they served them? Of course this brings to mind all of the other fruits, vegetables and garnishes we consume on a daily basis.

As someone who has raised many types and numbers of animals, I am no stranger to the plethora of bacteria oozing around. My immune system eats E. coli for breakfast. I can hardly remember the last time I was sick. But what about someone with a compromised immune system? Whether one knows it or not?

The bottom line is there are microorganisms everywhere. In, on and around everything. Most of them won't hurt a relatively healthy person. Many actually help you. In fact, without many of them, you could not exist!

So, far from being an alarmist, I just wanted to know... lemon anyone?

...a note from Cindy

Spring is in the air a little earlier than usual this year! This weather always reminds us of spring cleaning, so with the thought of cleaning in mind I am pleased to announce a change which has taken place within Complete Home Services. Rebekah Hunter whom many of you know as "Bekah" is now the manager of the cleaning department. She will be the one to schedule cleanings, let you know cleanings have been completed, monitor quality control and a variety of other tasks which fall upon that department. In addition, I am hoping we can convince her to contribute an article or two for the newsletter.

Bekah was born and raised in this area, knows every back road, half the population and could probably teach Paula Deen a thing or two about country cooking. She is very conscientious and well loved here in the Complete Home Services family. Her promotion will help us to continue to run efficiently. For your records her e-mail address is beka@gahomeservices.com and her direct number is 706-994-4850. Of course you can still direct your correspondence to me as I love hearing from ya'll and I will get the information to Bekah. Daffodils are springing up, birds are singing! Come on up to the mountains!