

Murphy Runs Rampant In The Garden

Remember Murphy's Law? It goes something like this: If anything can go wrong, it will, and at the worst possible time.

Well, in a recent magazine article I read the author humorously recalled her own list of Murphy's Laws of Gardening.

Only, for some reason (perhaps a future article in another magazine?) she's left out some of the most widely-accepted laws of the field.

I've been polling fellow gardeners, both the serious and puttering-about types, and we've come up with some of our own Murphy's Laws of Gardening. William Manning, whose garden is at the edge of the Green Swamp, says his No. 1 law is, "If the bugs don't get it, the dogs will."

But then, he also remembers the time a deer accidentally discovered his supersweet, yellow-fleshed watermelons. On his or her way to some other tempting crop, the deer crushed a ripening melon, sampled, and stayed to gorge on the entire field.

My sister Carol, whose acre-size garden in Winnabow is surrounded by woodlands on two sides, has wildlife tales to tell as well. It seems at her house this law pre-



Susan Usher

vails: The raccoons claim any crop the deer don't beat them to.

As soon as her peas sprout, it never fails: They're clipped clean by deer.

Local raccoons must post a night watchman at midsummer or else they have an internal clock. They always know when it's the Fourth of July, time for the corn silks to begin to turn. The patch is stripped clean overnight. Every ear has either been picked, or stripped back to check for ripeness and rejected.

Compared to my tiny patch of garden, Carol's garden looks like a commercial truck operation. She plants so much there ought to be plenty for her family, the neighbors and all of the critters and bugs that come to dinner.

For small-scale gardeners like myself, uninvited guests wreak

more havoc, because usually there's nothing left at all in their wake. Like the time the Army worms marched through my garden one Tuesday while I was at work.

Some general laws:
 ■Just as soon as you spray bug powder on the vegetables, a hard rain falls.

■Start canning tomatoes and a long-lost relative stops to visit, or your sister calls—long distance and she's paying.

■Transplant a tender vegetable the day after the latest hard frost we've ever had and, sure enough, there will come a hard frost, or better yet, a hailstorm.

■Return from a long weekend in the mountains to find that you were on a vacation exchange and didn't know it. Apparently every Japanese beetle west of Raleigh came to stay at the coast while you were gone, and really enjoyed the hospitality, especially the cantaloupes.

■Remember the mini-cantaloupes you tried growing in a pot on the deck last summer. Nothing happened and you dumped the dirt, seeds and all in the compost bin. Guess what? The cantaloupes just came up in the front flower bed and they're looking good. Pretty good

germination rate for year-old seed.

■Everyone said slugs were drawn to beer. What they didn't say was that, after reveling through the night with your "trap" cup of beer, they would then wipe out an entire row of cabbages.

■Wildflowers seemed like such a good idea, and the blossoms were so pretty that first year. Nothing on the package said that "wild" equates to "spreads like a weed".

■The garden catalog "secret grab bag" guarantees items worth twice the value paid. You open up the \$15 box to find...the same items that were in last year's \$10 box.

■Reseeding your lawn in the spring is a sure-fire way to guarantee a rainy spell—and a new lawn for your neighbor down the street after the gullywashers finally stop.

Maybe you've shared some similarly delightful experiences, and come up with a few "Murphy's Laws of Gardening" of your own. If for any reason you think this panel has committed a serious error of omission, please write immediately with your additions to the list.

You'll receive a free T-shirt, or some other, equally appropriate gift. Really.

But don't expect to share the by-line when our book is published.



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER
 THESE IMMATURE WHITE IBISES photographed in a Shallotte residential neighborhood may have become separated from their nest during Saturday's storm.

Huffin' And Puffin'

BY BILL FAVER

Once again we experience the mighty force of nature in terms of a winter storm. We watch the weather maps and the fronts rolling across the country and expect some wind and rain and colder temperatures. We become so accustomed to the routines, it takes us by real surprise when a mighty storm dumps its fury on us.

With hurricanes, we get can do all sorts of preparing with watches and warnings and evacuation plans. We track their progress and guess their directions arid impacts.

But with the kind of winter storm we experienced last weekend, it was more of a surprise. Someone suggested it was equal to a "Category 2" hurricane and was much more widespread than a hurricane would have been.

At any rate, nature came "huffin' and puffin' and trying to blow our houses down." We had a good deal of damage, but once again, we can give our thanks for being spared a worse disaster.

Roofs and shingles can be fixed and siding can be restored. Decks and steps can be rebuilt and houses moved where necessary. Sand will come in with the spring and summer waves and restore some of the dunes. No doubt, we'll once again plant some beach grass!

We'll soon forget the howling winds and nights without electricity and they'll only be recalled when the next storm comes our way and we are waiting to see what will happen then.

Such phenomena remind us of how powerful the forces of nature still can be, even with our technology and scientific manipulations. Such things help us put our lives in perspective in determining what really is important to us. Perhaps these may be some of the reasons these events happen to us — to help increase our awareness and understanding of what we can try to control and what we cannot control. The "huffin' and puffin'" we just experienced can help us in many ways, if we will let it!



FAVER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Schools Can Improve Only From Bottom Up

To the editor:

Our education officials have just re-arranged the mirrors and placed a mere handful of parents on a committee, and this is all billed as a serious, almost revolutionary step forward!

The crowning oft-repeated statement by Superintendent (Ralph) Johnston this time: "...parents must be involved in the schools..."

The reasons why the mirrors show nothing new is because (1) the criteria to be considered come from the state; (2) educators don't listen to parents anyway, and (3) parents are not informed about what the school program is.

I wonder how many years it will take before the big political education establishment recognizes that the parents' children are the "consumers" of the product attempt, and that teachers in reality work for the parents' satisfaction of what is done for the children and not for the state.

Laws require manufacturers and food processors to itemize the contents of their products, and mislabeling is frowned upon.

But parents don't get any real idea of the curriculum planned for their children.

Now if Superintendent Johnston really wants parental involvement in the schools, the first revolutionary turn would be to require teachers to deliver to parents before each school year a synopsis of the range of knowledge the student is expected to absorb, a list of the reading and other content materials of the instruction, and a list of the intangible habits or character-building traits the instruction intends to inculcate at the same time.

Beyond which the teacher should be relieved of making out so many reports to the administration and state and provide parents every four weeks with a detailed report on the progress of the child according to the synopsis delivered.

Now these things would really pave the way for parent-teacher cooperation.

And the state criteria should be abandoned and instead local administrators ought to listen to parents for a change and construct improvements and methods based upon what parents perceive as needed.

Improvement in public service never proceeds from the top down but from the bottom up. If education politicians had been listening to parents, children would not have to suffer all these sex education, AIDS, self-esteem and values programs which detract from academic learning.

In fact, the silliest aspect of the "identified" ten goals for improvement is the absence of reading ability.

Parents know this is the chief

weakness, and none of the other goals can be achieved without improved reading?

When teachers are allowed to teach to the greatest satisfaction of parents instead of to administration, teachers will suddenly become a whole lot more competent. They won't need "lead teachers," only administrators who can be consulted for suggestions and backups to discipline problems.

State and federal educational criteria are bunk. Achievement may occasionally be compared to other schools as a guide, perhaps, but ultimately it must be the parents who set the standards, put into usable local form by administrators after they have listened to parents.

Karl E. Brandt
 Shallotte

Visit Museum

To the editor:

I am going to tell you about a man who came up with the idea and built the Museum of Coastal Carolina at Ocean Isle.

Stuart Ingram is my friendly and funny neighbor. I have known him and his wife for the past three years. He is a resident in Charlotte but loves to live at Ocean Isle. He is an intelligent man who graduated from Duke University. He has a wonderful sense of humor.

Stuart and his wife, Louise, had a wild animal collection which they gave to Discovery Place in Charlotte. He was dreaming about building a museum for years, and finally his dreams came true three years ago.

It is amazing. Since the museum opened, they have drawn a lot of visitors. They also put up a donation box to help build a large addition. Stuart made a plan to build another room behind the Reef Room, a Green Swamp Room. The construction workers are still working on the room, but he hopes he will have the donations to open it soon.

I am telling you about my funny neighbor because he always has good ideas and knows how to achieve them. He also planned a first annual Christmas parade at Ocean Isle last year. I will never forget this man.

I believe everybody should come visit the Museum of Coastal Carolina because it is an interesting museum. I will never forget the beautiful name of the museum. It is the best museum I have ever gone to.

You would learn many interesting things about the coast of North Carolina and our local wildlife. If you haven't already been, be sure to visit our great museum.

Kathryn Holcombe
 Ocean Isle Beach

EDITOR'S NOTE: Kathryn Holcombe is an eighth-grader at Shallotte Middle School.

GUEST COLUMN

'Sin Taxes:' Big Brother Knows Best?

BY KAREN A. MORRISON

Buried in the rhetoric surrounding President Clinton's plans for the budget and health care reform is an interesting notion. Call it "Big Brother knows best."

This philosophy surfaced in comments from Budget Director Leon Panetta. He said they are considering higher taxes on cigarettes and alcohol to pay for their health care package, because by having large taxes on these products, you could "prevent the kind of behavior" that adds to health care costs in this country.

Well. Not only can we rely on government to protect us from womb to tomb, we can rest safe in the knowledge that our government is now going to use its tax authority to help us make the "right" choices along the way. Thank goodness.

Granted, the types of "sin" taxes that the Clinton Administration is talking about are considered fair game, given their current non-politically correct status. Most groups are too busy fighting tax threats in their own backyards to give much attention to these types of taxes. And, many have all too readily accepted the notion that the government does need more money, and if it comes out of the other guy's pocket, maybe that will give the tax hawks enough nourishment to divert their attention.

But before we give in too easily, let's take a closer look at where this tax philosophy could lead us. Rather than feeling safer because we are getting this unexpected "government" service, we should lament the loss of freedom and the erosion of individual rights this represents.

Panetta argues that alcohol and tobacco help cause health problems, so the government ought to do what it can to discourage these "bad health habits" (as Clinton himself described them), and those who consume those products ought to pay more to the government so it can provide health care for everyone.

Even if we accept that argument as is, why stop there? After all, lots

of other products and activities impact our health as well. Think back over the past few years just how many types of foods have joined the "anti" list. Bacon. Red meat. Butter. Eggs. Coffee. Fast food. The list goes on and on. Fat, found in many foods, has been found to lead to many health problems. Why not raise taxes on, say, hamburgers? Just think what a service the government could provide for American by charging an extra dollar for every fast food cheeseburger we buy.

Follow this path of using taxes to make us healthier, and it quickly becomes sick. A California psychologist noted recently that marriage has a greater impact on a man's mortality than smoking does. (Married men live longer.) Does that mean that we should have a hefty tax on single men, simply because their lifestyle is not as healthy as men who are married?

If you still hold a fondness for taxing "sinful" products, whose standards of morality shall we accept? This kind of moral judgment should have no place in the making of tax policy, because its potential for abuse is too great.

You might be comfortable with today's definition of "sinful" products, but once we give that decision-making-right to the government, someone will be looking over our shoulders to see what kind of unwise or unpopular personal food/lifestyle choices are being made which could be tapped for revenue.

We are giving away more ground here than we realize. We are losing our freedoms. One well-known Wall Streeter seems to agree. Joseph Rosenberg, whom the *Washington Post* calls "one of Wall Street's most successful traders," strongly opposes

Clinton's program. He calls it a "tax program with a lot of spending initiatives," which will prove to be harmful for economic recovery.

But what bothers Rosenberg most is the plan's impact on freedom. "I feel terrible about all this, not only as an investment manager, but as an American citizen. We are looking at an era of less personal freedom rather than more. Philosophically, I value personal freedom above all other things."

Rosenberg is not the only American with that concern. The Clinton plan will give the government greater controls over the individual's right to live his life the way he sees fit, a notion that was popular among our founding fathers. This idea is one Americans care strongly about. A national poll conducted late last year by the National Association to Protect Individual Rights (NAPIR) found that Americans feel their individual rights have eroded during their lifetimes, and that their children would enjoy fewer rights dur-

ing their lives.

The need to protect our individual rights was ranked right up there with concerns about creating good jobs, improving education and fighting crime and drugs.

Our precious rights are too important to let them slip away, no matter how much our new leaders claim that higher taxes will lead to better health. So tell President Clinton we appreciate the sincere concern for our well-being, but we've grown up enough to make our own choices now. And while those choices might not please the politically correct, they feel right to us.

Finally, if Washington is so worried about the issue of health, maybe they ought to worry less about yours and mine, and more about that of the American economy.

Karen Morrison is president of the National Association to Protect Individual Rights, a nonprofit, non-partisan public interest organization.

William Temple Allen, CPA

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