



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by
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STRATFORD FARM AND NATURE GUIDES BEWITCHED BY FALL'S SUNNY COLORFUL DAYS

The school children visiting Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road during the last month have experienced brilliant color days, wet and cloudy days, and a day with a record low early morning temperature of 22F on November 10. It really doesn't matter what the weather, only the amount of clothing, and there is plenty to share if kids arrive under-dressed. With the prospect of winter coming, the farm and nature guides were bewitched by the sunny days, and took advantage of numerous options to explore and learn. They kept the children outside and there were no complaints!

The only hitch on the fourth annual October family campfire held on Friday the thirteenth, was between the tractor and trailer providing the hayride to the pond. Each year, our volunteer leader Mary Kindred acknowledges that the more time allowed for families to discover what fun it is to fish off the dock, explore the prairie, visit the grazing animals, and cook their own hotdogs and roast marshmallows, the more relaxed and happy the evening turns out to be. It was very evident this year. The sound of Alex DAmore-Braver, a past education intern, singing and playing his guitar drew the families to the fire, to sit on boards between tree stumps and join in.

The raised beds in the Giving Garden have been planted with a variety of cover crops to prevent soil erosion during the winter. The beds will be monitored and used to demonstrate the wide choice of covers available, and to see how well they meet their purpose. The seeds are protected with a layer of straw to help maintain warmth and moisture during germination.

The spelt seed in parts of fields 1, 2 and 3 has germinated. It looks green, and is well established to combat the winter weather. Farmer Jeff followed the advice of his local seed representative to wait and frost-seed the Timothy grass and clover which he would normally plant with the spelt. When the soil freezes and cracks at night the seed falls to a natural depth for germination, and when the soil thaws during the day it covers those cracks. He is somewhat concerned about field conditions after some heavy rain, but hopefully he will find an opportunity to broadcast and the wait will prove worthwhile.

During a volunteer enrichment farm walk led by Farmer Jeff, on the last day of fall guiding, a strange tall light-colored turret was observed on the northern bank of the pond. It turned out to be a chimney swift tower. As their name implies chimney swifts nest in chimney-like structures. We want to attract them to protect our crops from insect damage. Dick Tuttle, a volunteer with a wide knowledge of birds,

shared that only one swift builds a nest in a "chimney." As many as twenty other swifts will shelter there during their migration to Peru, but on return they need to find their own to nest. The tower was built as an Eagle Scout project by Caleb Warrick and for his work he will receive the "Keep Delaware Beautiful" award. It is an intriguing structure, and we thank Caleb for adding another point of interest.

After much effort the Bradford Ornamental Pear trees, seeded by birds who feed on the popular trees found in the suburbs, have finally been removed from the pond bank. Ann Lokai-Owens, Browse Horticulturist for the Columbus Zoo, will supply us with native willow cuttings to replace them. We presently grow sterile willows to supply the zoo. Although these will not spread like native willow, they are not such vigorous growers. This is evident in the petit size of those growing on the south side of the pond.

It seems that trees do much better when planted in the fall, and allowed to develop to a hardy size before planting. There is more moisture in the soil, and they don't have to immediately face the hot summer sun and drought. Under the guidance of Bob Harter, the Tuesday farmhands and Boy Scouts are scheduled to plant the potted trees that grew all summer outside the small greenhouse. The locus trees will be planted in the eleven acres in the north-east corner of the property, where extensive removal of invasives has occurred all summer. We will continue to grow trees in pots, and discontinue planting bareroot seedlings in the spring.

Farmer Jeff would like to rent a new buck, preferably a Saanen, to mate with our smaller sized, moderate milk-producing Toggenburg goats. Saanen's are gentle, making them ideal to have around children, and are one of the best milk producers. Breeding is becoming crucial if we are to have kids in the spring, so we hope there is a wonderful buck just waiting in the wings for the opportunity to meet our nanny goats!

A fall meat sale started on November 10 and we invite you to come out and load up your freezers with delicious grass-fed lamb and beef. Pork will be available in December. We will be closed on Thanksgiving Day thru Sunday and re-open on Monday, November 27. We wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving.

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