



Farm Connection
by
Pauline Scott
Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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IT'S BEEN A GREAT SUMMER AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

Farm camp for three to five year olds at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road ended last Friday, in time for school starting this week. This year we offered both morning and afternoon sessions. We changed the order of the week-long camps and started in early June with the 9-12 age groups, followed by the 6-8 year olds. The older kids require a lot of energy from the camp interns, and we didn't want them to burn out before summer was over! The new strategy worked well.

The adults accompanying the youngest children are just as sad as the kids when camp is over. It was a delight to discover, during their camp, fairy houses dotting the dry stream bed near the amphitheater. They were constructed out of tree bark, moss, sticks and stones and some had tiny yards with ponds.

The third "hands-on" Garden Tea Party for young people was evidently a success. A grandmother called and told us her granddaughters could talk of nothing else the day afterwards, only what they had collected, prepared, ate and drank at the Tea. The children started by arranging flowers in tiny vases, courtesy of the thrift stores, to double as table decorations. It was lovely to hear the gasps of surprise when it was announced they could take them home.

Adult Farm Camp weekend and overnight fell on the heels of the Tea. We wanted the eleven adults to feel like kids, to enjoy the freedom of an extended period in beautiful surroundings, to learn, AND just be. They were very happy campers, even if the mosquitoes drove some from their hammocks to sleep in the Ed. Building.

One camper remarked she was on sensory overload. Another shared that she anticipated shoveling and mucking, but we were kind and did not ask this of her. We plied our guests with plenty of wholesome food including Stratford meats, fresh coleslaw, corn, watermelon, pasta salad, blueberry crisp, pancakes with Stratford maple syrup, and Stratford scrambled eggs.

A highlight for our youngest would-be homesteader, in her late twenties, was the extended period fishing at the pond. Ed Nagel provided the rods, bait and know-how to catch the sunfish, crappies and small mouth bass. Most were returned, except those filleted and cooked in a cast iron skillet over the fire. The white flesh filled out as it cooked, and of course the taste was perfect.

During preparations for camp, I had the pleasure of meeting a group of people on tour from the Delaware Court Senior Living Residence. In particular, Orpha Hyde, who is a long term fan of this monthly Gazette article. We have spoken on the phone, and she calls Stratford if she has a question. Orpha was raised on a farm, and she loves being in touch with a local working farm. It was great to meet her in person, to learn that she shares the column with other residents, and to know that she has finally visited Stratford!

A second cut of grass for hay was made a couple of weeks ago. The pasture in field #5 was rich with worms after the cattle grazed and fertilized it. Due to the rains, heat, microbes, and the worms "pulling" the cut grass under the earth, there was no hay to make in that field!

We managed to salvage some hay off field #1 and the straw from the spelt in #2.

The good news is we baled oat hay and ragweed in field #6, before the ragweed went to seed. The corn is tasseling and pollinating well.

The Tuesday women planted cool weather crops of broccoli and cabbage in the Giving Garden, and in the waist-high wooden boxes next to the small greenhouse. The latter were built to allow easy access to the plants for anyone. It has been said that gardeners need a hinge in their back to allow for all the bending necessary in gardening.

Saturday, August 15 is the long awaited day of our sold out annual fund raiser, Enchanted Evening. Once again two hundred guests will dine under a huge tent. For the second year the food will be donated and served by eleven local restaurants. Our Guest speaker is Tom Burns from the Perkins Observatory with a presentation on the "Night Sky." The event will wind up with star gazing and dancing under the stars.

Pauline Scott is a farm and nature guide at Stratford Ecological Center, 3083 Liberty Road, Delaware. She can be reached at 740-363-2548 or by email at office@stratfordecologicalcenter.org Website: StratfordEcologicalCenter.org

Stratford Ecological Center
3083 Liberty Road • Delaware • Ohio • 43015
740-363-2548 • info@stratfordecologicalcenter.org
www.stratfordecologicalcenter.org