

Taking time to smell the flowers, if the rabbits don’t eat them first

This spring, we had at least four baby bunnies living in the foliage in our yard, along with a couple of bigger rabbits. Is there anything cuter than a baby bunny?

It’s funny how less cute they are when they eat all your flowers. They turned our hibiscus into a goodbye-biscus. They ate all of our sunflower starts and half of the zinnias. I’m thinking maybe I should give Hasenpfeffer a try.

Anyone growing up in the 60s and 70s has heard of Hasenpfeffer, which is German rabbit stew, made famous by Yosemite Sam. As a kid, I always thought he was saying “possum feffer,” which would be a whole different kind of meal. He actually was saying “hoss and feathers.”

I’m especially disappointed that the hibiscus has been decimated. It’s a gorgeous flower with blooms as wide as your stretched-out hand. It’s a tropical plant that doesn’t do well over winter; we lost last year’s flower to the cold temperatures. Some do better than others; ours was one of the others.

Aside from having such remarkable blooms, it’s an expensive plant. That’s the most disappointing part for me. If I wanted to spend \$40 on a meal, it would be a filet mignon for me. Next year, we might have to keep the hibiscus potted so the bunnies can’t get to it, and it can be brought inside over winter.

I didn’t know until recently that rose of sharon is in the hibiscus family. That makes sense; the blooms look very similar but are not nearly as large. Our rose of sharon comes from a bush I had in Mt. Vernon. I transplanted it when I moved to Springfield



in 2006 and then brought seeds to Tuscola when I moved here. I had 24 sprouts of which four survived to plant outside, and of those, only one made it. I think rabbits got the other three.

A few years ago, I planted pumpkins outside and had 36 wonderful blooms, all of which disappeared overnight. I also planted a stand of broom corn, which grew to about 4 inches tall until it, too, disappeared overnight. I’m getting a little tired of feeding the rabbits, regardless of how cute they are. I’m not in the hare care business.

Our milkweed is doing great this year. We planted it several years ago to attract monarch butterflies. I haven’t seen any monarchs yet, but they do seem to attract Japanese beetles, which rank well below rabbits on my list.

The milkweed blooms are small but colorful, and they have a strong aroma. I haven’t decided whether I

like it or not.

They have a pungency like marigolds. Marigolds are supposed to keep mosquitoes away, but I’m leery of their efficacy, which seems to have a range of about 3 inches.

I really don’t care for the aroma of marigolds, but it brings back fond childhood memories. Growing up, my 90-year-old neighbor, Josie Kennedy, had hundreds of marigolds in her yard, and each fall, I’d help her collect the seeds to plant the following spring. She also had two huge lilac bushes, which is why I planted lilacs in our front yard. I think about her when I go out to sniff the blooms, which don’t last nearly long enough.

Yes, I go out and smell the flowers. I don’t care what anyone thinks. They’re not just for looking at.

Wisteria has a beautiful bloom like upside-down lilacs and just as fragrant. I had them when I lived in Springfield but don’t really have room for them now. They’re an invasive weed, so you have to keep them in check.

My wife has more of a green thumb than I do. My job is mostly to water the plants and enjoy them. We’re about out of room in our yard, but if I can find a variety that repels rabbits, I might plant a fence row of that.

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I didn’t do my homework for last week’s column. I was in a hurry, right at deadline. I violated one of my own home-spun precepts: “I don’t have time to be in a hurry.” Mea culpa. More on this topic later. So...

I owe an apology to John J. Cafaro, who only played a small role in the debacle of the Reflecting Pool. In the present instance, it seems he only was hired to install the ozone generators to combat algae, which he did. The problem is, the system isn’t anywhere close to being up to the job. For ordinary swimming pools, such systems work quite well. But not in an algae-breeding paradise nearly seven and a half acres in size - especially when it’s nice and warm, thanks to a new liner made of dark material, and primed with thou-

sands of feet of leaky, algae-laden pipes to the filtration station. And the contract with Cafaro’s company was only for the 1.4 million dollars originally publicized.

The contract to “paint” the Pool, and the rest of the 16 million dollars, including a 20% profit margin, went to Atlantic Industrial Coatings, a company founded in 2017. It describes itself as a “woman-owned” company. However, the only person listed as “Owner” is one Curtis E. “Eddie” Wood, who is also Vice President and CEO. His photograph shows not a woman, but a man with short gray hair wearing a plaid shirt and dark brown jacket. There is a sales rep named Chauncey Starkey, and a top applicator named Alex Starkey. Upper management positions - operations,

products, engineering - seem mainly to be held not by US citizens, but by young Filipinos, most of them women.

The company applied polyurea, which is commonly used to seal concrete slabs, pool decks, and pools. For the coating to stick, the concrete has to be ground to a “surface profile” similar to 60-grit sandpaper. All oil, grease, dirt, and concrete dust must be removed. And the concrete must be dry. If, e.g. moisture is permeating through the concrete from the other side, the coating won’t stick. For what it’s worth, either that, or improperly sealed leaks, or both, are my best guesses for why the stuff started peeling off in less than two weeks. And although the peeling may not indicate “failure of the liner” as per the company statement, the fact that pieces are shredding off and floating to the surface does. Let’s hope that the company’s statement that the work will be done “as part of the warranty” actually means it’s covered by the warranty.

However, the Admin’s fairy tales about “vandals” might constitute an excuse to give this shady company even more

taxpayer money, since deliberate damage usually voids any warranty. Be it noted, though, that there is not a scintilla of evidence for anything other than bad workmanship causing the liner to start peeling off within 2 weeks of application. A properly applied polyurea coating would be proof against removal by vandals armed with anything less than jackhammers.

Anyway, this whole situation illustrates why it’s not good to do things in a hurry. The original job had to be ready for the prez’s birthday party. And now, the prez wants the repair job done in time for the Fourth of July.

Another situation illustrating how haste leads to mistakes is the short-term Memorandum of Understanding that - hooray! - does have gas prices dipping below \$4.00 per gallon for the first time since March. The agreement is universally assessed as being less good than the situation before Operation Epic Fury began, which was already much less good than the situation under the 2015 agreement, which this country abandoned in 2018. Oil company executives

recently warned the prez that, if the Strait of Hormuz didn’t reopen by some time in July, fuel prices were going to skyrocket. Refining inventories were being drawn down so low, the oil companies would have to raise prices to avoid a sudden transition from high gas prices to “Sorry, no gas.” So we got a hastily-drafted, very shaky agreement that doesn’t actually address the stated objectives of Epic Fury. Which term now perfectly describes the reaction of pundits from all across the political spectrum to the Memorandum of Understanding.

The inspiration for coining my precept had much humbler origins - my being in a hurry resulted in me cutting

a knuckle, leading to a number of things I didn’t have time for - several hours in the ER, two visits to a hand doctor’s office to get the stitches out and start rehab, and a couple of long phone conversations to resolve billing errors.

After deadline, news stories came out, complete with video, showing that on May 7 the Presidential motorcade, including the ten-ton presidential limousine, drove through the freshly-coated Reflecting Pool. But I’m sure that has nothing to do with the coating now peeling off in strips which are shredding apart.

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Philo Library weekly news

We’ve had a busy week at Philo Library. Last Wednesday was the last Champaign County Park District presentation - “Scaly Encounters”. The audience was double the size of the first two presentations as they got to not only see but also touch the live turtle and rat snake and learn about their habitats and habits. On Thursday our paint a birdhouse or heart box doubled its attendance as well. We have one more session, outdoor games, scheduled for

Tuesday, June 30, at 1:00 p.m.

It’s been a month of fun and games for those who attended and the Philo Library staff have had a good time with all the activities and participants. I’ve been asked about programs in July - keep checking this column, it may happen.

We’re still looking for recipes for the Community Cookbook. We’d love for you to share special recipes that are favorites of your family. Please, stop in and pick up

the form, fill it out and return it by August 1.

Another activity with an August 1 deadline is the kids’ reading program. We’ve given out a lot of Barnes and Noble gift cards already and there’s still over a month until the end of the offer. For the younger kids, 60 minutes of reading (or being read to) will get them one gift card. Reading and filing up the reading log will get them 3 (the maximum) gift cards for B & N. Older kids have to read a bit

more and the same prizes will be awarded. The goal of this program is to keep the kids’ proficiency in reading at the same level, or even improve their reading, since over the summer it’s reading for fun and prizes.

We’re adding new books to the shelves - we should be receiving some new ones that will be hot off the press the first week of July so stop in and see what we have to offer. In the meantime, Happy 4th of July and thanks for reading.





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