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# Slim Pickings

by Hana Newcomb

One of the cardinal rules of CSA communications is that the farmer is never supposed to complain or tell sad stories or look for sympathy... or be defensive or full of excuses.

It is never my inclination to do any of those things, and yet I think it is always good to say what is true. It is becoming clear that this summer season is not going as well as we would hope. There have been no big disasters, and some things have gone quite well (onions, potatoes, squash, melons). But all in all, this has been more of a struggle than usual. The tomatoes have been a disappointment – not in quality or flavor, but in quantity.

Anecdotally, we are hearing that people's home gardens are not thriving this summer. And farmers all around us are sharing our experience. That month of extreme heat and no rain was more drastic than usual. The plants are alive but not producing as much as they should.

Today at the Vienna CSA, at one time or another, we had 23 items out. I say "at one time or another" because some of these items only lasted a few hours before they ran out. We had watermelons, Sun Jewel, cantaloupes, butternut squash, zucchini, scallions, Kabocha squash, beets, beans, garlic, potatoes, Poblano and Serrano peppers, onions, garlic, sorrel, tomatoes in pints, cherry tomatoes, chard, zinnias, figs, herbs, okra and grains. While that is a long list, it is not the best list for the middle of August. It is missing mountains of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, basil, lots of beans, cucumbers.

I got a report that a customer noted the "slim pickings." She wasn't wrong. There was lots of food, but not what she was hoping for. Someone else was looking for carrots, but that was just an uninformed person who doesn't know that it isn't carrot season.



photo courtesy of oscar ruth

Light from the sunrise beaming behind echinacea purpurea.

We are looking ahead to fall with optimism. The carrots are germinating after the rain, and the sweet potatoes are looking incredible. Eating local foods in season can be a culinary roller coaster – sometimes squash is unlimited and sometimes you are allowed to "take 2." We are glad that you are on this unpredictable ride with us, and we hope you are finding some joy in the avalanche of Sun Jewels (that will end very soon). They are getting sweeter and sweeter.

So, this is not an apology. It is a reality check. We are feeling the same disappointment that the pollen dropped off the tomato plants in that blast furnace of July and we can only wait for them to recover. We have been experiencing slim pickings for a couple of weeks, but this too shall pass.



# Snake Alert

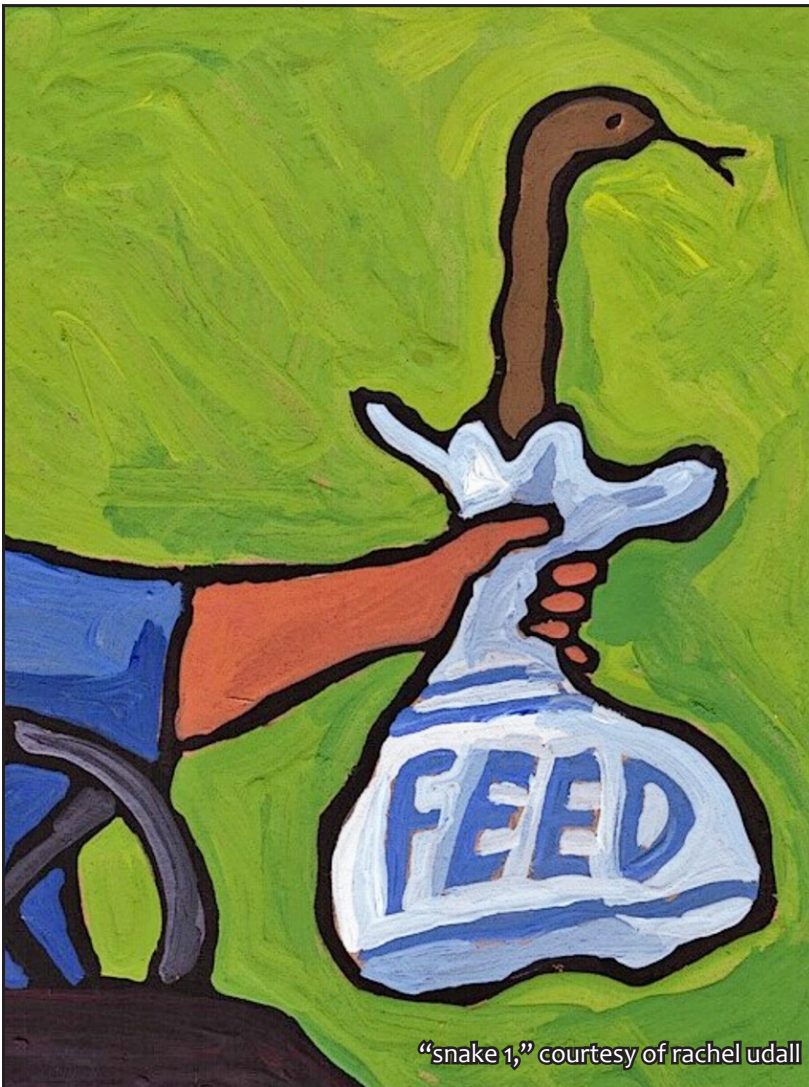
by Lani Newcomb

So who knew that snakes had homing mechanisms. I guess why not. A couple of weeks ago I got home after dark, went to collect the eggs, stuck my hand in a nest and poked a very warm, hard hen. So I thought hmmm, that ain't right, and turn on my light to find an enormous (and full) black snake. I chased it around with a stick for a little bit, though I'm not sure what I thought that would do as it sauntered from nest to nest, so I finally said Screw it, picked it up and dropped it into a feed bag. It was over 6-7' long and very fat. I figured I would drive it far away, or at least away, but evidently I didn't take it seriously enough. I hopped on my four-wheeler and started speeding across the farm, only to have its head and about two feet stick out of the top of the bag that I was holding scrunched up in one hand. It looked like the people on the front of the Titanic, leaning into the wind. I wondered what would happen when he looked to the right, so I managed to get about 3/4 mile away before I chickened out and dropped it, then shooed it towards another farm.

I didn't completely just fall off the turnip truck, so when the egg numbers in this particular house started going down again I said hmm, and tonight when I got home after dark I thought I'll just use the light on my phone and look around and by golly, there he was in the same nest, coiled around the remaining eggs. I can't prove it was the same snake, but it was huge and in the same nest so hey. I learned a little from the last time so I put a feed bag below his head and kept poking his tail and he crawled right in, and I rolled the top up really tightly.

I drove down the back roads with one hand for 5 miles, and he was determined to get out, poking the top of the bag as hard as he could, which was a lot, then checking all the sides of the bag. I was hoping I hadn't picked a bag with any holes in it, because if he got out into my truck I was going to be very very annoyed, but I made it as far as I thought was safe then leaped out of the truck and dumped him into the grass up against the edge of the mountain.

When do you think he'll be back?



"snake 1," courtesy of rachel udall



"snake 2," courtesy of rachel udall



# Snake

by Chip Planck

At Bill's the story accompanying the work on our mower has shifted from stink bugs in the garden to stink bugs in church. The church is New Jerusalem Lutheran, maybe a hundred yards from the shop, where Bill is not just a regular but a pillar. There is probably no official building maintenance committee, just Bill and his shifting adjuncts.

The story: two angelic little girls were alone in the front row during the sermon ("everybody probably half asleep") when a stink bug landed in the hair of the younger one, causing a horror-movie scream. Her sister picked out the bug, stomped on it, all was quiet again, and the minister said "Are you all right, darling?"

That unvarnished, every day anecdote jogged a further story of wildlife in the church to trump all others. Paraphrasing roughly here:

*For fifty years we've had the same snake living in the church. Nobody has ever seen its tail and head at one time. But since it likes to lie along the top of one upright bookshelf, which is backed by a 4 x 8 sheet of plywood, it's at least 8 feet long and surely more. The head is 2 1/2" across and its body even thicker. I think it's probably not a regular black snake but a King snake.*

*Another place we see (part of) it is lying along a*

*ledge of electrical switches in the utility room. Once when we didn't have any heat in a third floor room, I told George Hoopgartner to go down and flick on a certain switch. The snake was there and he wouldn't go near it.*

*It's not the only snake. When electricians removed some paneling to make a repair, we counted 23, most small. Francis Painter said of the larger ones two were male, one female, and asked George if he wanted to know how to tell. George said absolutely not. This spot was thick with years of sloughed off skins. The electricians left them there as insulation. It's just a masonry wall with paneling.*

Bill doesn't reach for theological jokes. The facts, and the fact of, the snake are sufficient. I noticed in my lengthy visit that he said twice "to make a long story short". I've never heard any concession to the dangers of long-windedness. Of course, I'm a glutton for these tales, and certainly never worry that the pace of the story will dictate the pace of the work. But maybe some new customers do? Maybe he feels time's winged chariot hurrying near? Forty eight years in one place at one line of work is a long stint. It's probably more that he realizes how many anecdotes there are to get out, that editing may be called for.

*This account is from May, 2015. Bill Moore died of a heart attack at 63 on July 26, 2022.*

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sections of entire men or women, and clung to that. They were being destroyed, when Zeus in pity of them invented a new plan: he turned the parts of generation round to the front, for this had not been always their position and they sowed the seed no longer as hitherto like grasshoppers in the ground, but in one another; and after the transposition the male generated in the female in order that by the mutual embraces of man and woman they might breed, and the race might continue; or if man came to man they might be satisfied, and rest, and go their ways to the business of life: so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing

the state of man.

Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of a man, and he is always looking for his other half. Men who are a section of that double nature which was once called Androgynous are lovers of women; adulterers are generally of this breed, and also adulterous women who lust after men: the women who are a section of the woman do not care for men, but have female attachments; the female companions are of this sort. But they who are a section of the male follow the male, and while they are young, being slices of the original man, they hang about men and embrace them, and they are themselves the best of boys and youths, because they have the most manly nature.



# Love Speech

Excerpt from Plato's *Symposium*—  
Aristophanes' speech regarding love

Selection by Storm Ford White

Aristophanes professed to open another vein of discourse; he had a mind to praise Love in another way, unlike that either of Pausanias or Eryximachus. Mankind; he said, judging by their neglect of him, have never, as I think, at all understood the power of Love. For if they had understood him they would surely have built noble temples and altars, and offered solemn sacrifices in his honour; but this is not done, and most certainly ought to be done: since of all the gods he is the best friend of men, the helper and the healer of the ills which are the great impediment to the happiness of the race. I will try to describe his power to you, and you shall teach the rest of the world what I am teaching you. In the first place, let me treat of the nature of man and what has happened to it; for the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman,

and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word "Androgynous" is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men now do, backwards or forwards as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four feet, eight in all, like tumblers going over and over with their legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast. Now the sexes were three, and such as I have described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round: like their parents. [...]

At last, after a good deal of reflection, Zeus discovered a way. He said: "Methinks I have a plan which will humble their pride and improve their manners; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg." He spoke and cut men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with



a hair; and as he cut them one after another, he bade Apollo give the face and the half of the neck a turn in order that the man might contemplate the section of himself: he would thus learn a lesson of humility. Apollo was also bidden to heal their wounds and compose their forms. So he gave a turn to the face and pulled the skin from the sides all over that which in our language is called the belly, like the purses which draw in, and he made one mouth at the centre, which he fastened in a knot (the same which is called the navel); he also moulded the breast and took out most of the wrinkles, much as a shoemaker might smooth leather upon a last; he left a few, however, in the region of the belly and navel, as a memorial of the primeval state. After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one, they were on the point of dying from hunger and self-neglect, because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate, man or woman as we call them, being the



photo courtesy of storm white

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