

# Spring is here!

With temperatures warming more than 30 degrees above normal last month, March offered a rare treat. On my morning walks, I can't help but marvel at the quickly changing landscapes. Daffodils are bursting everywhere, and the first forsythia are emerging on the scene. They provide a blast of sunshine to liven up a rainy day like no other.

Farmers are tending to the preparations for the planting season. They clean out grain bins, refuel, restock supplies, and order fertilizer. They also make sure the tractors, discs, plows, wagons, and trailers are ready on time.

Even at our place, there is bush trimming to do and limbs to pick up in the yard. The winter's debris must be swept and washed from the porch and the patio. The front door needs a new paint job, and the pesky squirrels have made holes that need to be mended.

Garden spots are measured, cleaned, and burned off in preparation for early planting. Radishes are always my favorite to plant as the results come up quickly, and oh, they are so tasty! Our neighbors were digging holes and planting potatoes, soon to be followed by onion slips.

Our friends over in New Concord were trimming their grapevines and cleaning off their asparagus beds this past week, clearing the old cane to encourage new growth. Like the farmers on our side of the county, they cleared downed trees and debris from around the fields, a time-consuming but necessary job.

No tobacco will be

produced on Smith Farms again this year, but memories of years gone by still linger. Lest we forget about those long-ago days, here is a short recap of what my daddy told me from his childhood about preparing for the tobacco crop.

Plant beds would have been sown back in February, around Valentine's Day. A space about six to 12 feet wide by 30 to 150 feet long was prepared for planting the bed, depending on how many acres of tobacco were to be set. The plant bed soil was burned off to kill the existing weeds and grass seed, and the soil was worked until it was shallow and fine. The farmer then mixed a tablespoon of tobacco seed with a small bucket of ashes and sowed the seed by hand.

He would then cut long logs, six to 10 inches in diameter, and position them around the plant bed to hold the canvas off the ground. Once planted, the entire bed was covered with canvas. The seeds were left

## Hometown Ramblings

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to grow for the next three months, and the canvas would stay on the beds until the risk of frost was past.

When conditions were right, usually by mid-May, the farmers went to the beds in the mornings to draw or pull plants by hand. They were usually on their knees or stooped over, which was strenuous work. They pulled one plant at a time until they had enough to set that afternoon. The number of plants to pull depended on how many people they had to help set. Everyone, including children, pulled the tobacco plants or slips. They were then placed in big washtubs in preparation for setting.

Thankfully, the back-breaking chore of growing tobacco slips to set evolved over time. Now,

farmers can buy their plants at a local greenhouse. I'm guessing there are a few farmers in Calhoun County who are itching to get underway with this annual ritual just as local gardeners await the right phase of the moon for their plantings.

The worst of the long, cold days of winter are behind us. The farm has awakened from its winter's sleep. The cheerful chirping of sparrows, orioles, and finch fills the cool morning air. As I watch the spray rigs amble across the field next door and reminisce about the old days, I eagerly await the days ahead. Spring is finally here!

To read more of Bobbie Smith Bryant's writing, visit [bobbiesmithbryant.com](http://bobbiesmithbryant.com) ■



Smith Farms photo

Nothing brings back memories of growing up on a farm like a warm, sunny spring day.