

62-15 for Newsletter

Seasons on the Flower Farm at 62-15

Spring

Yes. It really was a flower farm. Living in the city of New York, I just never thought of it that way, but like the farmers in the mid-west our days, weeks and months were controlled by the weather and the changing seasons.

F.G. Frank, Florist and Gardener, was also controlled by the weather and the weather and the changing seasons.

“April is the cruelest month,” a line from T.S. Eliot’s **Waste Land**. For us that was a yes and no situation. It was the awakening from the cold earth’s winter coma. Pansies, planted in the cold-frames Labor Day weekend began to respond to the lengthening days and the increasing angle of direct sunlight.

It is a common misconception that it is increasing temperature that wakes up trees, shrubs, and flowering herbaceous plants. Not so! It is the changing length of night and day. It’s called photoperiodism. Look it up! Some flowering plants are called long-day plants, and at the other end there are short-day plants like chrysanthemums, or in florist lingo, mums.

Pansies are great spring flowers because they survive the winter having reached maturity quickly in September through October. They thrive when covered by a blanket of snow, which, by the way, is great for plants. It protects them from harsh wind burn and waters them gradually with every thaw.

How does one tell if pansies, with their happy little faces, are waking up? Why, they bud like crazy providing lots more happy little faces.

The pansies, all ten cold-frames of them, needed to be dug out and put in portable shallow wooden boxes called flats. Today, you buy your seasonal annuals in flats made of plastic.

Our wooden flats were used over and over again every year. They were also very heavy. When filled, the flats were loaded on the bed of my dad's 1947 green and black Dodge pick-up.

It was still cold in April. I helped carry those flats from the cold-frames to the truck, and my hands froze, and my nose ran, and it felt so good to come into my grandma's (she was call Bob-cha) kitchen.

My dad and his crew dug up the pansies, the rest of us moved the flats. Me, after school. And the truck was loaded for the trips to the cemetery across the street. The cemetery plots also slept through the winter, the soil needing prep before the new plantings.

That was the start of our year of flowers. What I remember most was how cold it was to be working in the yard and the basement. But at the same time, there was that hint of spring. Violets were poking their heads toward the sun as well as iris and sedum. The sweet aroma of pansies permeated the yard and basement when the flats needed to be brought in during a freeze.

The grass showed a hint of green, and better than that, pansies meant Easter, a holiday my Polish family celebrated with special food, and the church smelling like Easter lilies, and Easter outfits, and Easter baskets filled with jellybeans and chocolate eggs and eggs we colored, all happy observances.

So, the cold hands and feet, the bundling up in many layers, and the constant runny nose would soon be a memory of April as May warmed our bodies and began to feel like summer and NO SCHOOL.