

The Artist's Almanac

August 2004

Let's Do Away With August the title of a book by a late friend of mine, Elmer Hinton, a journalist and a wise country philosopher.

His argument for a throwaway month made some good points: August is the month of ticks, chiggers, crabgrass, poison ivy, burnt up flower gardens, scummy ponds, heat inversions, first football practice, back to school time, sweat bees, horseflies, on and on.

All true, but not truly all. We are comparing it to spring and early summer, or to glorious autumn. Think instead of February.

August and February are the two least popular months of the year, without even major holidays to relieve them. Both are the second month following a solstice. Yet they are exact opposites in every respect, August and February are; hot or cold, rainy or dry; muddy or dusty; darkness or light; stormy or still; barren or fruitful; sickly or healthy. Which set of these would we prefer?

We were spoiled last month by the most beautiful July of memory, with noon cloudscapes of Olympian grandeur, daily rainfall, blowsy green trees, northerly breezes, and cool days with long sleeve nights. Tomatoes are flourishing, along with bountiful squash, peaches, pears, green beans, watermelons, new potatoes, pie apples, cantaloupes and cucumbers. Daylilies and crepe myrtle are finishing, the roses have never stopped, and should carry us until frost.

August will bring corn and ripe figs for preserves and drying. Burley, and soybeans will follow, and cotton after that. Ripening and harvest can only take place when it is dry, and hot. Generous Mother Nature gives us a dry season in which to harvest, and harvest is what August is all about.

Next winter as we sort our summer photos into albums we will look at children in canoes at camp, posing at picnics, riding ponies and cavorting in swimming pools on the lawn and ask ourselves, in what green paradise did all this take place?

And as for holidays, the 17th is my birthday and the 31st the anniversary of my wedding to Claudia. Those august occasions are enough for me to make this month a keeper.