

The Artist's Almanac

March 2004

March is Nature's way of sorting things out

Wind thrashes the trees, pruning the deadwood, twisting buds from bare branches. Creeks run high, flushing a year's trash from their banks, while each variety of clouds chases the last from windswept skies.

Kayakers in their wetsuits practice climbing the swollen falls below the millpond on Bledsoe, now a Class 3 stream. Fathers use weekends, kites and children as reasons to feel the throb and ebb of wind. Gardeners scrutinize fall's plantings for signs of life and prune back to greenwood. It is time for spring housecleaning.

The wise farmer waits for wind to work its magic with his medium, the soil. A week's wind can suck a winter's worth of wet from the earth. He learned well from father and grandfathers the folly of plowing wet ground, and he waits for a "good season" in the soil. They still enjoy in Cedar Grove the stories of the weekend farmer who insisted on plowing his ground on *his* schedule rather than that set by the skies and spent the next three years sorting unbreakable clay bricks with his disk and harrow.

They also plant by the sign. The zodiac still holds sway with large numbers of people, as seen in the astrology columns in magazines and newspapers. This is the month of superstitions. "Beware the Ides of March", was the advice Julius Caesar chose to ignore. My grandfather would not have his hair cut in March. It was vile superstitions that St. Patrick really drove from snakeless Ireland.

It must be the wind. Golfers are advised to slow their swing and concentrate more when it's windy. Spring winds can cause an old house to writhe and moan in the night and generate unearthly thoughts. Winds claim our attention, whether driving on the highway or lying in bed. The most violent of winds is a tornado and we have them now. My grandfather witnessed the devastation of the worst tornado ever to hit the county near Graball, where they stacked the bodies like cordwood. Afterwards, he came home and built a tornado shelter. Perhaps that's when he became superstitious.

March is named for Mars, the mythical god of war, or contending forces. On the 21st, the Vernal Equinox, the contending forces are equal. Night and day, winter and spring, come into perfect balance. Spring wins, and afterwards, we may venture from our dark caves to plant our gardens in the sunlit hope of March.