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WEEKEND BREAK

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WHEN AUTUMN ARRIVES

Celebration, change and the banded woolly bear

By ED HUNT

It is an old feeling, older than human history, perhaps predating even humanity itself.

That feeling when autumn gives you time to prepare for winter, to pack in supplies, to find a place to hibernate. That sigh of relief and gratitude when you have stacked the last piece of firewood, finished the canning, stocked the pantry.

You take off your gloves and wipe your brow, grateful you got it done.

The word “harvest” derives from the old English word for autumn, both words linked inextricably with the feeling of preserving the plenty of the growing season. Agricultural summers were often lean times, as last year’s food was running out and this year’s crops were not yet ready to eat.

Little wonder then, that once those crops were safely gathered and preserved a feeling of relief and satisfaction washed over the farmers.

Harvest festivals are near universal among agricultural societies and date back at least as far as recorded history. Regardless of the season or the crops involved — from the Moon Festival in China to the ancient Roman Cerelia — all these human celebrations share an appreciation for what we have and a prayer for the coming year.

And though we have increasingly divorced our modern lives from the seasonality of agricultural cycles, we’ve preserved that feeling of thankfulness and hope in our holidays.

Cold sunshine

A sunny day in November is a bonus day not to be wasted inside in front of a screen.

Yet there are things to be done inside and out, and with each task marked off the to-do list, a small feeling of satisfaction and self reliance is reached. We have a barn full of hay put up for the year. We have weaned the calves, and they have stopped bawling for their mothers.

Chainsaws echo around the valley as we cut firewood that will season for next winter. (Our modern equivalent is stocking up wood pellets for our stove.) We dig up the garden, plant bulbs and gather windfall apples.

It has been cold and dry enough to rake leaves this year. Often, they are blown away in an early storm.

Thus, dry leaves are a sign of our good fortune.

We preserve what we can by canning pickles, tomatoes and apple cider. We fill the freezer with meat, some with what fall hunting and fishing trips provide.

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Photos by Ed Hunt

Baby calves get used to life after weaning.



LEFT: A woolly bear caterpillar sits on a pumpkin on a sunny autumn day as it seeks a place to hibernate for the winter. RIGHT: Cucumbers from the garden become pickles for winter. BELOW: Frosty mornings signal the coming end of summer in the Grays River valley.

