

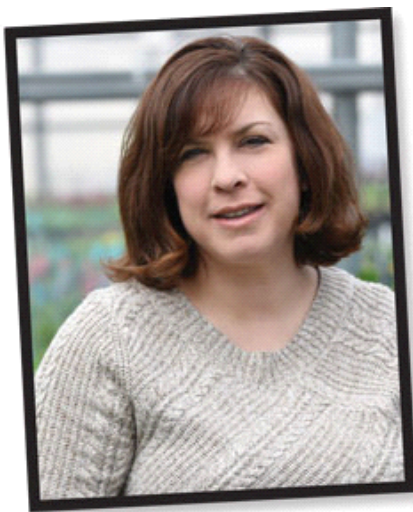
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Home Schooling

Jennifer Zurko



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As I type this, the Zurko Abode is in the process of getting a new furnace. If it was currently below 40F outside, we would literally have no heat to turn on. Our furnace decided at the end of last winter that it had had enough. Thankfully, it happens to be in the 80s in Chicago during mid-September.

And since it quit on us right when the weather was changing, we just held off until now to get a new one. Because guess what? Furnaces aren't cheap. And I don't include them in the "Fun Home Improvement" category, like new countertops or carpeting. Stuff you have fun picking out and that people can see when they visit.

A furnace is in the "I Guess We Need It, But Holy Cats It's Expensive" category. Kinda like a new roof or septic system.

I hear people complain that kids don't learn "actual life skills" in school anymore, like how to balance a checkbook (or even how to write a check!). But what they should really teach is homeownership life skills. My dad was very handy, so anything that broke down in the house, he just fixed. A leaky faucet in the morning magically worked a day later. I never had to worry about changing the filter in the furnace or learn how to properly hang a curtain rod without drilling a million holes in the walls.

During my years as a homeowner, I've had to educate myself out of my blissful ignorance. My husband didn't pick up any handyman tips growing up either (his dad wasn't real handy), so we've been slogging through homeownership together. After a few snags and teasings from our more handy friends, we've managed to keep the house from collapsing on our heads. We've even managed to get through some major upgrades. Yay to homeownership!

What I've learned during my homeowner's education is that you really have to research when you make a large investment or find someone you can trust to help you make a decision. The same can be said for any of the major equipment investments you make for your operation. This month's cover story centers around one of those—heating systems, specifically boilers. A boiler may not be in the "fun" category like a new transplanter or flat filler, but just like not having a functioning furnace in your house, having no heat is absolutely no fun.

I wanted to do something a little different than how we normally treat these types of article topics. Instead of asking Jim Rearden, president of BioTherm, to write something for us, I sat down and interviewed him about the latest

advancements and regulations, what to look for if you're in the market for a new boiler, and what growers can expect to see in the future. It was a great chance to extend my education.

If you're looking for information beyond boilers, you can learn how using the template method can help upgrade your production, how to build an e-commerce program for your wholesale customers, how to use root-zone heating for cold-tolerant crops, how to get the most out of your water quality and fertilizer programs, and how to find pandemic-related funding. I'd say there's quite a bit of educational opportunities there.

Another thing I've learned in homeowner's ed is that, even if the new investment isn't "sexy" or "fun," you still get a sense of relief and accomplishment when it's installed. I'd like to think that, if I was a grower, I would appreciate that nice, shiny, new boiler just as much as I do whenever I walk into the laundry room and see my gleaming new furnace.

P.S. Congratulations to John Friel on his 20th anniversary of being a Ball Publishing columnist! His word craft makes me want to be a better writer and his dart skills make me want to concentrate on my aim. I look forward to sharing another beer with him soon.