

The Barn Door

Seeing the world through midwestern eyes.

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Spring into Summer: Adventures with Plants, Animals and Minerals by Suzanne M. Brazil

Our little corner of the Midwest has exploded into spring and is fast galloping toward summer. Those of us in the frozen zone know the giddy atmosphere that accompanies the first warm sunny days. Surviving the most recent record-breaking winter has spun us all into a frenzy of outdoor activity. There are fests and carnivals and outdoor concerts as well as bikers, joggers, and dog walkers everywhere you turn.



Though the skies gifted us with snow well into May, we were eventually able to tend to our gardens. My husband manages the vegetables and I'm in charge of the flowers. Last year, we were too immersed in college activities (one graduate, one home on his first summer vacation) to break ground. All summer long, I regretted not having planted. It is a small but visual treat to ease into the driveway greeted by the curve and color of the flower beds and to pull the first fresh handfuls of raspberries or cherry tomatoes from the backyard.



Most of us have a favorite nursery or flower shop and my husband and I have settled on Mini Earth Greenhouses. They're wedged into a triangle of lush greenery created by three intersecting roads. They have knowledgeable help, reasonable prices, seven greenhouses and outside plots filled with even more choices.



Mini Earth in Grayslake, IL

With our planting done, we took a day trip into the country to watch our very first horse show. Minnesota cousins were in town with three of their horses entered in the 21st Anniversary Prairie State Classic Horse Show held in Roscoe, IL. Electric fans in the barn kept us, the horses and a surprising menagerie of canines fairly comfortable on a Sunday with temperatures that climbed well into the 80's.

The show featured mostly Morgans and Saddlebred horses cantering and posing to best highlight their majestic muscles, graceful coordination and well-groomed coats. A complicated world of its own, we got a brief peek into the judge's preferences, traditions and quirks of this breed-specific community. It was fascinating to watch elegant riders gain the cooperation of such powerful animals and to do so with love and respect. Plus, as a former horse owner, I love the smell of a horse barn.



Cousin Sarah showing the award winning "Moose"

Prior to attending a family picnic in another suburb, we drove about 20 miles to the inconspicuous shop of Humming Bird Soapstone and Woodworks. Ready to remodel our 20 year old bathroom, I had selected soapstone for our countertop but had difficulty finding anyone willing to commit to such a small job. Co-Owner Mike Wilson met us on a Saturday afternoon and spent

over an hour showing us around his shop, telling us how the soapstone was excavated; sharing the amazing properties that allow it to survive extreme temperatures and made me feel like I'd made the right choice.

In addition, we were treated to some amazing craftsmanship as we marveled at a form of cabinet making with doors over 1 ½ inches thick (industry standard is 3/4") using no glue, nails, etc. Mike is a true craftsman who also makes beautiful and unique furniture. He was generous with his time and knowledge.

Our next few weeks are tantalizingly unplanned. Maybe we'll attend another event as first timers, stop by a favorite old shop or learn something new from an expert. Just a short drive from our Chicago suburb, the Midwest summer awaits.

[Mini Earth Greenhouse](#), [Prairie State Classic Horse Show](#), [Humming Bird Soapstone](#)


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