

ASK THE MASTER GARDENER

How to save a dead-looking lawn

Penn State Master Gardeners

The Penn State Extension of Berks County Master Gardeners will be featuring questions and answers to inquiries received through their Garden Hotline.

Q My lawn looks dead. What can I do to save it? Should I still mow?

A During drought conditions, the cool season turf grasses in Pennsylvania go dormant. It's best to leave the lawn in this condition rather than watering heavily to cause the grass to green-up again. Breaking dormancy drains reserves within the plant.

If the weather remains dry, the plant will not replace those reserves. You may apply ¼ to ½ inch

of water every 2 to 4 weeks to maintain moisture in the crown and roots so the turf can survive and resume growing when conditions improve. Mow lawns higher in the summer, 2 ½ to 3 inches if needed. Taller turf allows more shading and conservation of moisture in the soil.

Avoid applying excess nitrogen in hot summers. Wait until early September to fertilize. Limit foot traffic. Drought stress occurs faster in lawns with compacted soil and heavy thatch.

Q I'm seeing a lot of sycamore trees that are losing their leaves. Is there something affecting them?

A During these dry conditions, trees, especially sycamores, drop

their leaves as a stress response intended to help the trees preserve precious water as they ride out drought conditions. Because their leaves are large and thin, they require more water through the leaves as a cooling effect to prevent drying out and sunscald.

Sycamores are typically found along rivers and streams and areas with poor drainage and more longstanding water. Trees planted along roadsides are more prone to stress from the extra heat from asphalt. Mulch at the base of the tree and doing extra summer watering will help the tree in hot dry weather.

As a best practice, rake up and dispose of any fallen leaves. Other trees that also tend to lose their leaves early are river birch (*Betula*



READING EAGLE

nigra), tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), and redbud (*Cercis canadensis*). If conditions improve, the trees may replace the lost leaves on their own.

Penn State Master Gardeners with advanced diagnostic training staff the hotline, answering questions on lawn care, landscape plants, houseplants, fruits, vegetables and

herbs, insect and disease issues and identification of unknown plants or insects. Advice is based on Integrated Pest Management strategies and environmentally-friendly approaches. For more information on these and other gardening-related topics, email the Garden Hotline at berksmg@psu.edu or call 610-378-1327 to speak to a Master Gardener.

Calendar

JUNE 17:

▪ **Craft & Vendor Show plus outdoor yard sale**, West Lawn United Methodist Church, 15 Woodside Ave., West Lawn, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Preregister, limited spaces available. Walk-ins welcome. Breakfast, lunch and baked goods available. Information: Sharon Rutherford, 610-468-9427

JUNE 19:

▪ **Berks Photographic Society meeting**, GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, 201 Washington St., Suite 326, Reading, 7 p.m. Professional photographer Nic Stover will present "The Power to Create" via a hybrid Zoom session. Professional landscape photographer Nic Stover will share about an area of photography that is hard to quantify and takes some time to discover but is a critical part of the photographic process. For more information, visit berksphotographic.org

JUNE 22:

▪ **World trivia night**, Muhlenberg Community Library, 3619 Kutztown Road, Laureldale, 5:30 p.m. June trivia will focus on Europe and there will be authentic snacks from this area. Winner receives a prize. Free adult program. For more information, visit muhlenbergcommunitylibrary.org.

JUNE 24:

▪ **Church picnic**, St. Michael's Church, 529 St. Michaels Road, Tilden Township, 4-8 p.m. Rain or shine. Picnic food. Music by Rick Hartman and Friends at 5 p.m.

CULTURE

Entertainer living life to the fullest

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part column about Pat Garrett. The conclusion will run in next week's Berks Country. The full version is available online at readingeagle.com



Dave Kline
Mountain Folklore

One of Berks County's most famous entertainers, Pat Garrett is a businessman, singer-songwriter, country crooner, musician, entrepreneur and impresario, whom I also know personally as a show business colleague and friend.

His story is interesting and reflective of a life lived to the fullest. Having worked on stage with Pat and his excellent band at several live concerts, I know Pat to be a dedicated, hard-working man capable of grabbing a current topic in the news and then, seemingly with ease, writing a song to convey his point of view on that particular topic.

I think of Pat as a modern-day bard, a minstrel who conveys news, opinions, ironies, humor, truths and even sarcasm when needed. Creating the stage name Pat Garrett, he transformed from a local kid born as Pat Sickafus to an

entertainer known from Berks County to Nashville, Tenn., and back. This story is a condensed version of his life's journey.

According to Pat, the music and show business bug hit him during a talent assembly in Bethel High School when he was in 10th grade. A friend, Buddy Seigfried, lip-synched to Elvis' "Hound Dog," and as Pat watched him from the audience, with all the kids going nuts over him, Pat sank into his seat, thinking, "I could do this for real."

That summer, Pat's mom showed him three chords on her Spanish guitar. He then decided to take lessons from Hamburg's Ruth Leshner.

"I practiced 'til my fingers bled," he said. "After two months I had about four keys I could play songs in, and I thought I was ready for my debut. When school started back up, I told our music teacher, Harold Kremser, I would like to be in the talent assembly. He thought I was going to play my tenor sax, but I said, 'I got a guitar over the summer and learned some songs and I would like to try doing those.' He said, 'Great, bring the guitar in tomorrow, and let's see how you do.'"

The next day, Pat loaded his Harmony electric gui-

tar and little amp onto the school bus and hustled it into Kremser's music room. He got his guitar out and started to sing Ricky Nelson's "Lonesome Town."

After the first verse, Kremser exclaimed, "Wait, I have an idea!"

He went to the back of the music room and hauled out a big, blond acoustic bass and started plucking along.

"This is sounding good, I think they will like this!" Kremser said.

A few weeks later, it was time for the talent assembly, and Kremser saved him and Pat for last. Pat had practiced in the gym on his own a few times before soccer practice and learned to operate the PA system so he could crank it up when it was time to go on.

Kremser was on stage announcing the last act: "Pat Sickafus is going to do a couple songs for you with his guitar, and I am going to give him a hand."

Pat confidently twisted the volume up on the PA and carried his amp and guitar on stage. He plugged in the amp, stuck the cord in it and checked the mike. Everything was working.

Taking a breath, Pat then said: "Hi everybody, I'd like to do a couple of songs for you. The first

one is 'Lonesome Town' by Ricky Nelson."

Everyone knew that song because the Nelsons were on TV every Friday night, and Ricky would do a song during the show.

Pat started playing the chords, and after one round Kremser joined in with the bass, then Pat started to sing and remembers: "I kinda gulped but kept going, and as I was singing I could see the faces of the students and it seemed to be going OK. When I was done, they rose to their feet and yelled and cheered! Wow! Goosebumps went down my spine, and I started banging on my guitar in the key of E with 'That's Alright Mama.'"

"I have to tell you, the place exploded! I'll never forget the smile on Mr. Kremser's face as he was hammering that big bass. When we were done, the kids were standing on their chairs hollering and cheering. What a feeling. I'll never forget that reaction."

Soon veteran radio broadcaster Jack Gounder invited Pat to appear on WEEU. That went well, so Gounder took Pat to a couple of sock hops at other schools.

"The whole thing ruined me for life," Pat said. "I am always looking to get that kind of response again. There's no high like it when it works, and people love your music."

First record deal

Pat went to Kutztown State College (now Kutztown University) and got a four-piece band together with classmates Philip Noble on drums, Joe Cassada on sax, Speedy Shapell on lead guitar and Pat on bass. They played the dances, and the gym got so jammed that the floor could be seen going up and down as the kids danced. They also played gigs at all the area fire companies and at the Kutztown Armory on Friday nights. Pat graduated with a teaching degree, and ended up teaching for about six months, but he was making more money playing on weekends than teaching. Later on, a classmate, Carlton Becker, asked him to join a club band, and they formed a group called the Monterays.

"We played many of the clubs in Reading and around Berks County, like

the Melody Bar and the Sunshine Inn," Pat said.

After college, Pat met Keith Fister, a drummer from Hamburg, during a jam session and Fister asked Pat to play bass with his band, The Triumphs. That band played at the Hamburg Fieldhouse almost every Sunday night for five years. During part of these years, the other six nights of the week, the band played at Heisters Lounge in Reading.

A friend named Pat Ferraro offered to record the Triumphs, with an engineer from Orwigsburg, Schuylkill County, named Clay Barclay at Kingston Studios, Sinking Spring. Ferraro got the Triumphs a deal with Diamond Records in New York, and changed the name of the band to Pat Farrell and the Believers.

"We recorded mostly our originals, and had a couple of releases that made the Billboard pop charts," Pat said. "One of the songs was 'War Boy.' This was the era of the Vietnam War, and WRAW, with a Top 40 format in those days, played the song in heavy rotation."

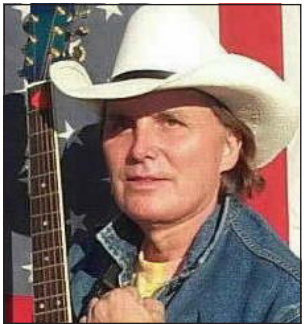
Thirty years later, Pat was contacted by Eric Lungren of Arf Arf Records, who wanted to put out compilation discs of local groups from the past. He put several recordings from Pat Farrell and the Believers on the disc. The disc got around, and about 10 years later, Pat got a call from a friend who said he saw his name in Rolling Stone magazine. A band from the UK called the Arctic Monkeys had recorded a song Pat had written called "Bad Woman."

From rock to country

Pat had a Mobil gas station at Route 183 and Interstate 78, near Strausstown, which is where his sheepskin business is located.

Country entertainer Shorty Long used to go there for gas when he and his band were playing in northern Pennsylvania. Long rolled up in his big blue-and-white caddy, and when he found out Pat played bass, he said if Pat was ever interested in getting out of rock 'n' roll and into country music, he could use a good bass player. Pat said yes.

Shorty had a great country show with his wife, Dolly; sons Barry and Dave; and brother Lou;



COURTESY OF PAT GARRETT

Musician Pat Garrett

and, of course, comedian Crazy Elmer, Leroy Geist. Pat played bass with Shorty for about two years and became great friends with his whole family.

Pat remembers that Long's band was one of the busiest bands he ever played in. Shorty owned Ontelaunee Park along Route 143, near New Tripoli, Lehigh County, which held concerts. There Pat met, mingled and opened for many country stars, including Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty and Mickey Gilley. Those country music stars became like a second family to Pat.

A second record deal

"I remember the first time I went to Nashville," Pat said. "I went with Shorty, who was booking acts for his park for the next year, so I got to learn my way around Nashville. I started recording there and formed my own record label, GoldDust Records."

"In the early '80s, I wrote and released a song called 'Sexy Ole' Lady' that made the national Billboard country charts. It went No. 1 in Fort Worth, Oklahoma City and Detroit. It was during this time I wrote my song 'Jumpin' John,' a funny song about a male exotic dancer, which got me a deal on Polygram Records. This song became one of the most requested songs some country stations ever had at that time."

"It was an exciting time, and I thought I was finally on my way. Unfortunately, when my song got to No. 50 in the national country charts, the owner of label I signed with got in a fight with Polygram and they dropped all of his records, one of which was mine. It was like an arrow to the heart. But I did sell quite a few copies of the 45."

Dave Kline is an award-winning writer, photographer, show host and producer, singer-songwriter, travel guide and community advocate. Reach him at davesmountainfolklore@gmail.com.

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