

This time of transition as winter is not quite on its last legs but spring is several weeks off is my least favorite time of the year. It isn't even mud season, just slush and running water over ice that gets even more slippery when wet. Our skis still stand by the fence where we placed them when we came home from our last ski tour. We had hopes of more ventures to the beaver ponds, woods, and fields that day.

But, it doesn't look as if that is in the plans, at least, if the weather forecast is correct. And, we really have too much to do to take whole afternoons off to roam the woods anyway.

Runo is busy today moving materials into the hay barn to once again convert it to a lambing facility. He has the little lamb jugs set up along the west wall, and in another month, there will be ewes and their new offspring ensconced in them, bonding before we move them to communal mixing pens.

Between now and then, though, we have to house the flock inside both night and day in large pens, and we need to shear them.

We don't hurry at the job. In between our morning and evening barn chores, we clip a few sheep. Before that last week of March brings the possibility of some new lambs, the ewes should all be shorn.

Then, again, March may decide to be a winter month. We might even get those skis on again if we have a spell of cold weather and new snow. There is plenty of snow cover now, but it is hard and packed, not anything to induce us to try it out.

Runo tapped a couple of trees in the yard to keep track of the sap run. When these maples begin to reliably drip, we will tap our other "backyard" trees and cook some maple syrup. So, far, though, in spite of a warming trend and water running down the lane to the road, the maples have not considered that it is time for the sap flow.

There is no "unbusy" or "slack" time of year, but the months ahead are among the most demanding. Sheepshearing and sugar making—usually at the same time—are closely followed by lambing, then docking and castrating the lambs and vaccinating and ear-tagging them. Before we are entirely finished with that job, the grass begins to green, fences need repair after winter, and sheep need to be out on pasture again. And, in the evening, it is time to plant tomato and pepper seeds and eventually to transplant the tiny seedlings to larger containers. In the other barn, while the tiny "baas" are still confined to inside quarters, the cattle have calving on their minds, and they, too, are looking forward to green pastures.

Somehow, it all seems to work out, and in May, when gardening begins to come to the forefront, we take some deep breaths and begin to look ahead to the next intense time—the haying season.