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JUNE 2025

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**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16



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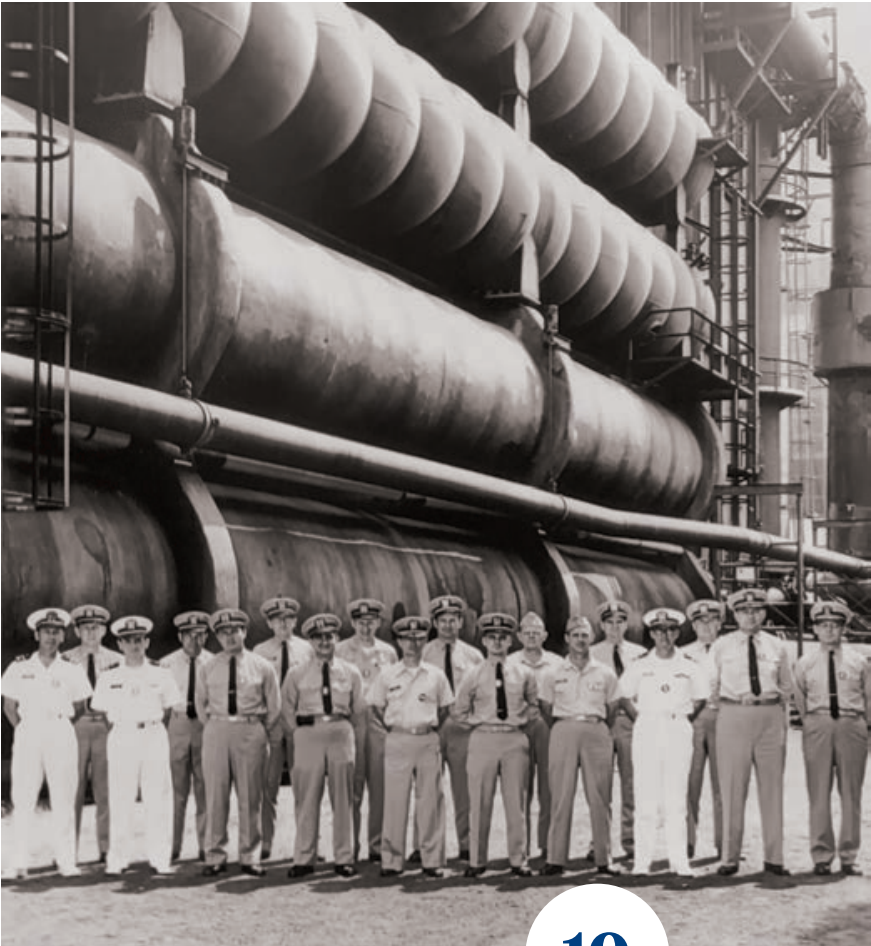


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June 2025



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ON THE COVER
Johnny takes a break from chomping through a neighborhood outside Austin.
Photo by Eric W. Pohl

ABOVE
Servicemen assigned to the Ordnance Aerophysics Laboratory at Lone Star Steel some 70 years ago.
Courtesy Ladies of Lone Star



Juneteenth Has a Home

MORE THAN THREE years after plans were announced to build a National Juneteenth Museum, Fort Worth officials have made way for the planned 50,000-square-foot museum, food hall, business incubator and theater.

The \$70 million museum of Black history will be built on a plot on the city's Historic Southside, with the city kicking in \$15 million. Opal Lee, the "Grandmother of Juneteenth," gave City Council members two thumbs up.

"Wow, I tell you, I could have hugged everyone, but they've got work to do," Lee told the Fort Worth Report.



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Stay Weather Aware

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Stay safe by staying connected to your co-op's advice in these pages and on its website and social media feeds.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

It's summer, and I'm ready for ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our April prompt: **The best view in Texas is ...**

A "Welcome to Texas" sign alongside any highway.

MIKE WEBER
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
GRANBURY

From my front porch every time my husband blows me a kiss as he passes on his tractor.

SUZY DOSS
PENTEX ENERGY
VALLEY VIEW

The Sabine River bridge in my rearview mirror and the afternoon sun shining in my face. I'm home!

JOHN STOLL
BANDERA EC
MICO

Getting home and seeing my wife and grandkids outside enjoying the spring weather.

RANDY HARDEE
WISE EC
BRIDGEPORT

Visit our website to see more responses.

APRIL 2025 Ode to a Mighty Hunter

“My daughter, Stella, and I are always excited to read through your publication and make collages. This story was especially inspiring for my future entomologist [left].”

MINDY WALKER
JASPER-NEWTON EC
KIRBYVILLE



COURTESY MINDY WALKER

Eyes and Hearts

Honestly, I'm not a bug person [*Ode to a Mighty Hunter*, April 2025]. But I do love dragonflies because they don't stick to me or bite me.

I never realized there were so many different species of them. These photos are incredible!

The close-up of the eyes is kind of scary. But my favorite part was Love on the Wing. They make a perfect heart.

Denise Sims
Bowie-Cass EC
Redwater

Inspiring Flyers, Part II

At 17 my dream was to fly [*The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater*, April 2025]. I applied twice for acceptance to the WASPs. I counted the days to hear from them.

It wasn't to be. To my disappointment they were deactivated. This led me to

serve in another form of communications, which continued the rest of my working life.

I will be 99 this year. Thanks for the memories.

Wanda Tackett
United Cooperative Services
Desdemona

Lake of Bluebonnets

Nanny's Blessing [March 2025] touched my heart. In the 1950s my grandparents turned two acres of their Walker County property into a Texas wildflower field, predominately with *Lupinus subcarnosus*, the sandyland bluebonnet.

For almost 50 years, those bluebonnets made their property look like a lake, and people often stopped to take photos. To this day the sandyland bluebonnet, with its gentle shade of blue, is my favorite, although, sadly, they seem to be migrating into obscurity.

Jan Lawrence
Sam Houston EC
San Jacinto County



COURTESY OFFICIAL NATIONAL WASP MUSEUM, SWEETWATER, TEXAS

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

Please include your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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GORGING A PATH

BY PAM LEBLANC

For those hard-to-remove, unwanted plants, goats may be the greatest of all time

IN a steep, overgrown ravine in the Steiner Ranch neighborhood west of Austin, dozens of goats are buzz sawing their way through a thicket of brambles.

The ruminants work through the brush like furry, four-legged locusts, pausing now and then to share a goofy grin accented with slobbery bits of greenery. Their jaws work nearly nonstop, chewing plants along a trail that winds between houses.

The goats are here to work, hired hands in an army deployed to reduce the risk of wildfire. A blaze in Steiner Ranch during the hot, dry summer of 2011 destroyed 23 homes, and officials are eager to prevent another disaster.

That's why a homeowners association there teamed with Lake Travis Fire Rescue to hire 100 goats from Rent-A-Ruminant as part of an experimental fire mitigation program. The animals spent a week clearing out brush on 7 hard-to-access acres. After they make a first pass, human volunteers finish the job, cutting down and removing downed trees and other fire fuel.

Goats, proponents say, are cheaper, greener and safer than humans with lawn mowers or herbicides that could work their way into waterways. And they're cute.

"They go where man, machine and chemicals can't go," says Carolyn Carr, co-owner of Rent-A-Ruminant.

Goatscaping, as it's sometimes called, is just one form of modern-day goat employment. Besides putting the animals to work clearing poison ivy from urban hiking trails or tidying up grass growing around solar panels, goats can inject a bit of fun into social activities such as yoga, wine tastings and parties.



Bleating and Eating

Carolyn and her husband, Kyle Carr, own a herd of about 600 goats in Brownwood. They hire their animals out to private landowners, municipalities and businesses. Goats, they say, are an eco-friendly solution to maintaining landscaping projects large and small.

The Carrs' herd is made up of nine breeds of goat. Almost all the animals have names, which are noted on brightly colored tags attached to their floppy ears.

"Goats are great," Carolyn says as they stream out of a trailer and into a cordoned-off area of land at Steiner Ranch. Curious residents have gathered to watch the proceedings.

The Carrs started their business after inheriting an overgrown piece of property in Brownwood, about 80 miles southeast of Abilene. Carolyn joked at the time that they needed a herd of "green grazers" to tidy things up.

It turned out to be a smart suggestion. Kyle's father had been a Xerox salesman, with plenty of connections at municipalities around the state. They quickly learned that many of those cities needed help controlling brushy overgrowth.

Goats can clamber up and down steep slopes and reach awkward spaces that heavy machinery can't access. They also clip vegetation growing along sensitive waterways where herbicides shouldn't be used. Best of all? They love plants that make humans itch or stab them with thorns or assault airways, including green briar, poison ivy, ragweed and blackberries.

LEFT Goats groom the terrain of Steiner Ranch outside Austin.

ABOVE Rent-A-Ruminant owners Kyle and Carolyn Carr manage a herd of about 600 goats that can landscape in hard-to-reach areas.

The Carrs travel the state with their herd, which has trimmed up Hermann Park in Houston, munched invasive species while all but ignoring the lush lawn at the Houston Arboretum, and cut back poison ivy along the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail around Lady Bird Lake in downtown Austin.

But not just any goat can make the Rent-A-Ruminant team. Only quiet goats that don't pester people for food can become part of the traveling work crew, Carolyn says.

Sometimes, onlookers set up chairs to watch the goats in action. That's fine with the Carrs, as long as the humans don't distract the animals by feeding or petting them.

"They have a job to do, and this is not a petting zoo," Carolyn says.

Sheep, she says, can do similar work, such as "mowing grass" that grows around rows of sun-collecting panels at solar farms. Both species have their niche—sheep prefer grass over leaves, making them good at keeping lawns and weeds in check. Goats prefer leaves, so they're better at tidying up unruly brush.

In Steiner Ranch, the experiment seems to be working. The HOA and fire department split the \$9,000 tab to hire the goats, and even after a few hours, the difference is obvious.

"We have a lot of area and so much poison ivy," says Debbie Tanner-Jacobs, president of the Steiner Ranch Residential Owners Association.

As a bonus, the goats leave behind a little fertilizer, in the form of their droppings. Goats, Carolyn Carr notes, sterilize seeds that pass through their bodies, so they can't repropagate those pesky plants.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: PAM LEBLANC





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Krystal Evans of Kyle and a new friend that is not at all sheepish at a Goat Shenanigans event at the Hive coffee shop in Austin. Shirley Marek cuddles a goat at Blue Lotus Winery in Seguin. Kids get to know each other at the Hive. Katie Knox with a baby goat at Blue Lotus.

Kidding Around

San Antonio-based Goat Shenanigans puts goats to work in a different way.

On a crisp afternoon in January, 10 goat enthusiasts convene at Blue Lotus Winery in Seguin, where they sip wine and cuddle a pair of Nigerian dwarf goats, each just three or four weeks old.

Besides happy hours with goats, the company organizes yoga classes, toddler gatherings, movie nights and beer tastings, all in the company of adorable baby goats.

They'll even deliver a "goat gram"—a livelier version of the traditional candy gram—to your home to celebrate a special occasion. A single-goat visit lasts 20–30 minutes, but you can add additional ruminants to the order.

Goat Shenanigans also offers ranch visits. Visitors can pay for a 10-, 30- or 60-minute session on the goats' home turf, on the northwest side of San Antonio.

"Whenever a goat is involved, it's going to be a good time," says Laura Romer, manager of Goat Shenanigans. "The best thing about them is they have different personalities. A cow is a cow, but a goat has its own unique personality. They're very loving, very playful and emotionally intelligent. They bring out so much joy in people."

The goats seem to enjoy their work. Aside from a chorus of high-pitched bleats that sound like out-of-tune harmonicas,

they zoom around an outdoor patio at the winery and accept an overflow of snuggles from their admirers.

"They're not afraid of people," Romer says. "They're motivated by food and love to be cuddled."

Allyson Marek of San Marcos learned about Goat Shenanigans through social media and bought tickets for the wine tasting with goats for herself and her parents for Christmas.

"They're just so cute and mischievous and silly," Marek says as she holds one, a bright-eyed armful of soft hair named Thor with a tongue that sticks out with each bleat. "Oh my gosh, amazing. They're so soft, so chill, so very awesome."

One day, when she has enough land, Marek says, she hopes to own her own herd. She dreams of raising goats for their milk and to make cheese and soap.

Another afternoon, a dozen children and their parents (along with a few adults who can't resist) gather at the Hive coffee shop in South Austin to mingle on an outdoor patio with four animated, beagle-sized baby goats.

"I like how they're kind of like dogs but cuter," says Evelyn Jackson, who has come to the event with her mother, a sister and a friend.

All around Jackson, kids—the human kind—offer the hardworking goats kibble and pet their soft bodies. Two of the goats wander into the coffee shop's garden, where they sample herbs growing in a raised bed. Another hops onto a picnic table and stares down a woman sitting there.

"How can you be upset with a baby goat in your arms?" asks goat wrangler Sarah O'Brien, who is doing her best to keep her charges in line.

You can't. And that's why we need more goats in the workforce. ■

TCP Watch the video on our website and get to know these hardworking and lovable animals.



BY PATTI PFEIFFER

Steel to the Stars

While a consequential steel mill rusts, locals ensure memories shine on

The Lone Star State is known around the world. The town of Lone Star, however, isn't well known—even among Texans.

But it should be. So says a group of 13 volunteers working to bring light to the East Texas town of 1,400 people about an hour southwest of Texarkana. They want to share the rich history of its steel plant, metal from which spanned the skies over Vietnam and the subsurface of the oil industry and deeply impacted the U.S. economy, environment and space exploration.

They call themselves the Ladies of Lone Star, and their goal is plain.

"We want to gather memories and record as much of the history of Lone Star Steel as possible for future generations," Lesley Dalme says.

It all began with an idea about décor.

Randy Hodges, former Lone Star mayor who was technical services manager when his 45-year career at the plant ended with its closing in 2020, proposed adorning the walls of the Lone Star Senior Citizens Center with pictures of the plant. The framed photos caught the attention of locals, and the project was born.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: COURTESY LADIES OF LONE STAR

The Ladies of Lone Star collect photos, documents and memorabilia to preserve and showcase the town's shuttered steel mill.



...s take are Robert Russell, E.H.
...ss, David Childress (inspection),
... and C.A. Burris.



Russell and O.N. Cape on the job.



John, Missa, and two of his kids, the wife and Missa, smiling for a photo who recently saw Bushling words.



Russell and Wilson Martin (an inspector)



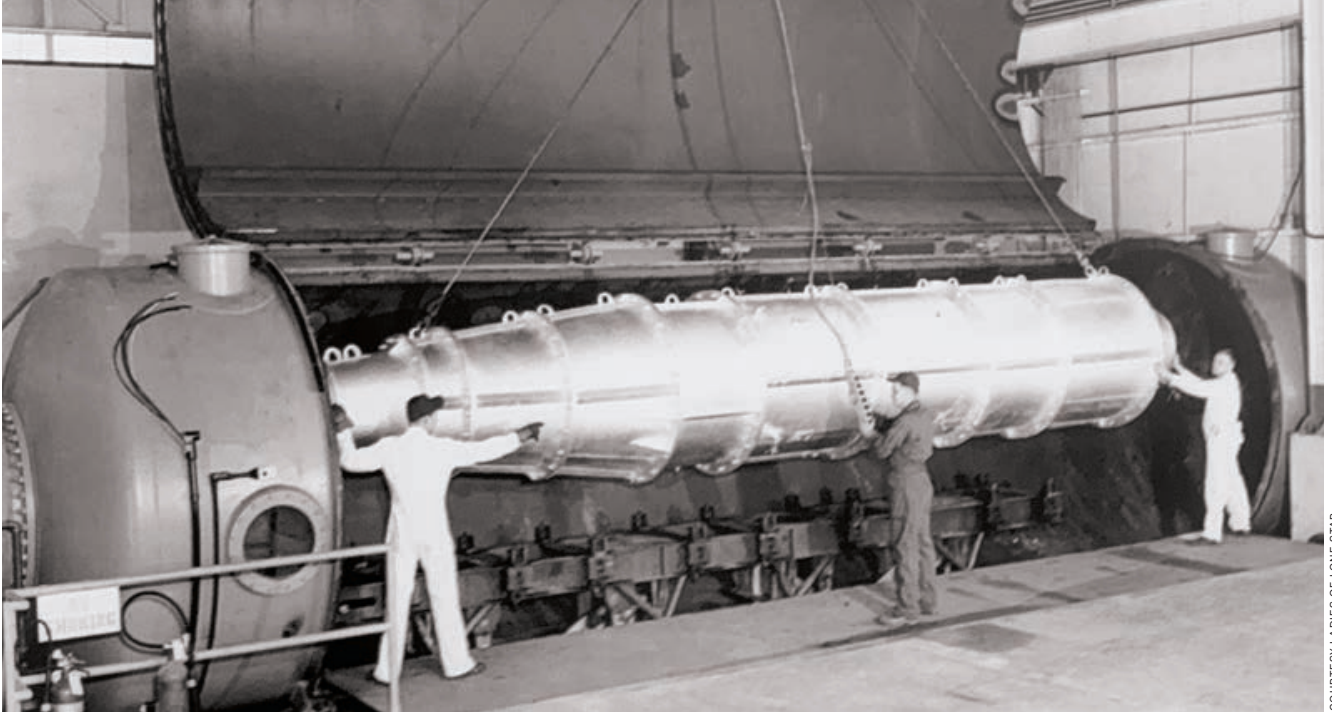
P.E. Moore, Orell Adams, E.E. Williams, G.G. Nickleberry, Alton Harris, Harnden Barber make up another cutoff crew.



... are finishing crew members Johnny Pettit, Jerry Smith, B.C. Dobby, J.M. Howard, Jr., W.J. McCarty

Photos and Text by Dave Lewis

EDITOR'S NOTE:—Due to mill scheduling requirements, some employees have been pictured more than once while working on different crews. There may also be some who participated in the record-setting finishing turns who aren't pictured. However, everyone involved is credited with the team effort required to set such records.



COURTESY LADIES OF LONE STAR



JAY PATRICK

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Several volunteers from the Ladies of Lone Star in the mill's chapel, the site of hundreds of plant employees' weddings over the years. A wind tunnel that could simulate the vacuum of space using blast blowers. Randy Hodges, the former mayor of Lone Star who worked at the plant for 45 years, with his father's hard hat. From left, former mill worker Bruce Shimpock and Lesley Dalme and Lanita Goodrum of Ladies of Lone Star look over artifacts.

I sat down with three members of the Ladies of Lone Star as well as Hodges and John Shivers, a former plant manager and vice president. For nearly two hours in the chapel on the grounds of the shuttered plant, I listened and learned about the steel industry, the plant's history and the impact it had on people, places and events far and wide.

The plant was built with federal funding during World War II in the small town of Lone Star, selected because of its strategic location. Nearby are ore, limestone and coal—the three essentials for steel production—and the Port of Houston is driving distance.

While the 600-acre plant came about because of the war, steel didn't start rolling out until the mid-1940s, after the war's end. In the early 1950s, the oil industry began booming and with it the market for pipe.

"An idea came about to buy surplus war project product

to manufacture oil pipe," Shivers says. "It took two years to adjust production and install necessary mills at a cost of \$76 million. The oil industry fluctuated, going from boom to bust. Likewise, LSS profited hugely and suffered severely."

LSS also played a role in the Vietnam War.

"We would make large-diameter tubes to be used as bomb casings, which would be cut to bomb length, shipped by rail or truck to an ammunition plant in Karnack, filled with ammo, a fin was attached, then they would be transported to the Port of Houston," Shivers says.

The steel mill had a wind tunnel that could simulate the vacuum of space using blast blowers. Known as the Ordnance Aerophysics Laboratory, the highly secure site operated from 1945 to 1968 and employed hundreds of scientists, technicians and engineers. Department of Defense contractors conducted thousands of tests for supersonic jet engines, guided missiles and spacecraft components for the military and NASA.

"The facility was well-known around the community, but because of security, it was not known around the country," Hodges says. "They researched and designed rocket engines here, including components used for the Saturn rocket. They would bring equipment in on a bread truck, and once inside the plant, securely situated behind closed metal doors, the bread truck doors would open, and parts would be unloaded."

Members of the project liked the area so much, amid the verdant Pineywoods and alongside the 1,500-acre reservoir



COURTESY LESLEY DALME

“We want to gather memories and record as much of the history of Lone Star Steel as possible for future generations.”

built for the steel plant, many of them stayed and went to work for LSS.

They brought with them a wealth of knowledge and talent that led to industry innovations. For example, a device that scrubbed smokestack emissions was developed at LSS, Shivers says.

“It cleaned better than anything on the market,” he says. “We sold it to other cities—Houston, Shreveport—a nuclear facility in Georgia, and other customers in the U.S. and abroad.”

However, economic downturns in the 1980s plagued the steel industry. In 1989, Lone Star Steel filed for bankruptcy.

“Our labor contract expired, and we worked two years without one,” Shivers says. “We just kept going, no contract and no complaints. It took a couple of years, but we came out of bankruptcy and paid off 85% of the debt, and a few years later were profitable again.”

In 2007, U.S. Steel purchased the plant for more than \$2 billion. Nine years later the mill was idled and then completely shuttered in 2020. At the height of production, the company reportedly employed more than 6,000. Now, other than security personnel, the facility is vacant. Equipment sits silent while rust and dust mount.

The Ladies of Lone Star are dedicated to preserving documents dating to the early 1940s and photographs showcasing the plant’s long and vibrant history. They also have begun meeting with former employees, recording and then transcribing their stories to be compiled into a book chronicling the mill’s story.

“The plant is being dismantled, and eventually it will be no more,” says Lanita Goodrum, one of the volunteers. “And it’s even more important that people know what made Lone Star, what those men did in that plant and the impact it had on our nation.”



JAY PATRICK

When our time together winds down, Hodges, who started at the steel plant in 1974, offers a trip to the senior center—an invite I eagerly accept. As we walk by each photo on the walls, he enthusiastically explains the images.

“I worked with World War II vets, young men with families—our plant was filled with people like that, hardworking parents who had to make a living regardless of the long hours, the hard and dangerous work,” he says. “In a world that was so divided, we were working for a common cause.”

On top of a piano is something that goes beyond mere nostalgia—Hodges’ father’s hard hat from his long career at the plant. “His first paycheck in 1953 is what paid for my mother to go and me to be born at a hospital,” Hodges says. “It was more than a job and career. We were family.”

And it was a family that survived, thrived, accomplished a lot and had an enormous impact. They are proud of LSS, still—its impact of 80 years, from Earth to the heavens, the industries it changed from oil to aerospace, and the lives it touched.

As Shivers says, “Our footprint ranges far beyond this steel plant.” ■

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BIG hopes

Lavender farms have firmly taken root, and more growers are experimenting with unusual crops across the Bluebonnet region

Story by Eric Webb ● Photos by Laura Skelding

IT'S SATURDAY morning, and you've filled your farmers market bag with the staples — tomatoes, carrots, melons, peppers and a few fresh herbs. Now your wandering eye spots something surprising — pomegranates, figs, turmeric, tea from a native plant and an assortment of fragrant flowers.

Those and other interesting items are popping up at farmers markets, farm-to-table restaurants and farmers' online shops in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area.

Some growers want to diversify their operations. Others are willing to invest sweat equity into cultivating something different (like the lavender farms profiled on the following pages). Some turn a common native plant, like yaupon holly leaves, into tea.

Then there are flower fans, such as the folks at Antique Rose Emporium in Washington County, who keep Texas' oldest rose varieties thriving.

"When you think of a small farm or ranch, they may only be able to sustain a handful of livestock," said Chase Brooke, a specialist on small farms and ranches for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

"Each farm and ranch is a connection for that community," Brooke said. The popularity of farm-to-table restaurants in both small towns and big cities proves those connections are valuable.

UNCOMMON CROPS IN THE REGION

Small Town Farm, Fentress, **Page 18**

Dell's Favorite Texas Olive Ranch, Elgin, **Page 19**

Lost Pines Yaupon Tea, Bastrop, **Page 20**

Twisted Timber Farms, Lexington, **Page 21**

Antique Rose Emporium, Independence, **Page 22**



Rebecca Michels, a visitor at Chappell Hill Lavender Farm, cuts blooms to take home. Luling Lavender Fields & Store, right, also offers lavender for trimming and a variety of scented products.

UNCOMMON crops

John Grange is Burleson County's agent for the extension service. For more than a decade, he has studied the county's farming and ranching community, overseen the farmers market, and advised both new and established producers on everything from weed management and livestock care to getting the most out of their property.

"The majority of new landowners are small-acreage farmers, most in the 5- to 20-acre tract size," he said. At the farmers market, Grange has seen the offerings expand from produce, meats and eggs to more varied items, such as baked goods, plants and homemade products like jellies and soaps.

His advice to any would-be producer: "Know your soil types and weather conditions of the area."

Chappell Hill Lavender Farm

On a clear spring day, driving down FM 1155 a few miles northeast of Brenham feels like tunneling through a kaleidoscope. Verdant trees curve overhead, their branches touching, giving way to a brilliant blue sky. On the landscape, patches of fiery Indian paintbrushes warm the palette.

Then, about half a mile down a side road, you hit the silvery purple payload.

Chappell Hill Lavender Farm cultivates its namesake perennial flowering shrub, renowned for a calming aroma and homeopathic properties, on about 4 acres. This farm and Luling Lavender Fields are the two largest operations dedicated to the tricky art of coaxing lavender to bloom in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area.

Lavender has been used for at least 2,500 years for everything from bathing and cleaning to medicine and mummification. Now it's likely to show up in soothing soaps, relaxing sleep aromatherapy and beauty products.

The plant has more than 450 varieties and is native to the Mediterranean, according to the U.S. Lavender Growers Association. It loves lots of sun, dry and rocky soil and temperatures in the 60- to

85-degree range. Stateside, you're most likely to find it flourishing on huge farms in the Pacific Northwest. That raises the question: How can it survive in Texas' hot, humid summers and occasional bitter winter freezes?

Growing lavender requires patience, practice, adaptability and a willingness to accept challenges. When conditions are right, a flourishing lavender crop — with

Continued on Page 18





Heat-tolerant plants like roses, passionflowers, zinnias, lemon balm, purslane and Jewels of Opar leaves are used to make Small Town Farm's signature Summer Happiness Rolls. *Small Town Farm photo*

SMALL TOWN FARM

Fentress

Turmeric, cardamom, papaya, curry leaf trees and more

Cristen Andrews and Miguel Guerra used to visit Caldwell County and find campsites around the area. After 20 years of visiting, they put down roots there in 2020.

The couple follows an expansive growing philosophy at Small Town Farm in Fentress. "We feel like it's really important to get to know the plants, seed to harvest," Andrews said. They stay mindful of their surroundings: what's native, what the local wildlife eats, what weeds tend to pop up. Different species mingle in their garden. It is not a place of orderly rows.

Small Town Farm's owners respond to what nature is saying by adapting their practices to the changing environment. "We've been picking more and more plants that tend to be able to survive in our current climate, not what we're used to," Guerra said.

IF YOU GO

San Marcos Farmers Market,
111 E. San Antonio St.

9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday (preorder
plants online)

smalltownfarmtx@gmail.com

smalltownfarm.com

Andrews and Guerra grow several crops that don't bring Texas to mind, like turmeric, the ginger relative native to Southeast Asia. The leafy flowering plant's rhizomes (or rootstalks), when dried and powdered, become a vibrant

yellow spice used in many Asian dishes.

The same is true with turmeric's cousin galangal, another leafy flowering plant whose rhizome is often used in Thai cuisine. The farm's cardamom, yet another ginger family member, also has similar growing preferences.

The two owners of Small Town Farm have dabbled with papaya, a tropical fruit native to Mexico and Central America. Their papaya trees grew from seeds from a grocery store fruit. If they can weather a winter, they grow fast and can shoot up taller than a house, making them great shade umbrellas. Guerra's favorite plants at the farm are the curry leaf trees, native to India. Small Town Farm has also grown Armenian cucumbers, which are melons, botanically speaking, but taste like cucumbers; Kajari melons, also known as Indian honeydews; and snake gourds, also known as snake beans.

"You can plant year-round," she said. "It just depends on what you're planting."

Chappell Hill Lavender Farm

2250 Dillard Road, Brenham

Farm and gift shop open March through November; 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Open by appointment only December-February; holiday hours vary.

979-251-8114

chappellhilllavender.com

Continued from Page 17

its calming scent and picturesque blooms — can draw a crowd.

"I read something that said two out of every three people are stressed out these days," said Debbie McDowell, who started the Chappell Hill farm with her husband, Jim, in 2003. "It's obvious with all the things going on, your work, your job, traffic, people are looking for something to help them relax."

The town of Chappell Hill is known for its Bluebonnet Festival every spring, but there's no bad blood between these blooms. McDowell happily welcomes guests whose floral preferences lie a notch over on the color spectrum. Visitors often come to the farm as part of Brenham day trips or weekend escapes, traveling from other areas in the Bluebonnet region, and the big cities not far beyond.

The McDowells lived in Houston before they sought retirement in paradise. "When we moved out here, it was all raw land," Debbie said. She and Jim saw potential in the shade trees and a green hill rolling down to a pond. They've added a gazebo, three miniature goats and, of course, orderly rows of lavender bursting out of the ground. By Debbie's estimate, around 1,500 plants are growing this spring.

Before they founded the farm, Debbie had some gardening experience but was no farmer. Admittedly, she thought of lavender as a laundry detergent scent. Inspired by a segment on a TV show, the couple bought a flat of lavender plants and stuck them in the ground, just to see what would happen.

The lavender did pretty well. So, they cleared the field and bet on purple.

The McDowells grow two varieties best suited to Washington County's climate: Provence and Sweet lavender, with blooms that are a cool, almost silvery shade of purple, more ethereal than royal.



In its gift shop, Chappell Hill Lavender Farm sells young lavender plants such as the Lavandula Provence variety.



Debbie McDowell, co-owner of Chappell Hill Lavender Farm, blends one of her lavender-based goods before bottling and labeling it for sale in the store. Debbie and Jim McDowell started the 23-acre farm in 2003.

Intensely purple varieties of lavender don't grow as well in Central Texas, Debbie said.

The Sweet lavender blooms first, between April and June. The Provence lavender, a culinary favorite, blooms July through September. Looking for another way to keep guests coming between lavender seasons, the McDowells planted fruit trees on their property a few years back. Peaches, figs, pears, persimmons and even blackberry bushes now grow a few yards away from the lavender beds.

Nature has been a tough teacher. Originally, the McDowells planted in long rows, but as the lavender grew close together, high humidity caused problems.

"They didn't get enough airflow to dry the plant out," Debbie said. "Moisture is lavender's number one enemy." They learned to space plants out and make rows shorter.

"In October or November, we plant and pray that we don't have a freeze," Debbie said. "If we have a hard freeze, we pull everything out, and we start over."

"The progress that we've made through the years, as far as learning what worked better for the plants and the products, I think that's what I'm most proud about," she said. "Because it takes time — a lot of ups and downs — to get there."

Leaving the gift shop, Debbie strolls along the rows of Sweet laven-

Continued on Page 20



Arbequina olive trees thrive in sandy, well-drained soil. The fruit ripens in late September and early October before being harvested and milled for oil. Dell's Favorite Texas Olive Ranch photo

DELL'S FAVORITE TEXAS OLIVE RANCH Elgin

Olive oil and private-label jars of olives

The party starts at Dell's Favorite Texas Olive Ranch when it's time to harvest the goods in the fall.

Frank and Renee Majowicz, who own the Elgin orchard, host a volunteer team that gets a crash course in olive picking and enjoys a community meal in exchange.

Frank should know a thing or two about hospitality, since he was a corporate chef for Hyatt Hotels for 43 years before retiring in 2020. Anticipating the need for a new project, the Majowiczes planted their first olive trees in the 3½-acre orchard in 2014. They primarily grow Arbequina olives, which are native to Spain, Renee said. The fruit is aromatic and purple to dark brown in color when ripe.

Dell's Favorite Texas Olive Ranch turns that fruit — yes, it's fruit — into olive oil, which they have pressed at a mill in Hallettsville. Arbequina oil is mild and subtly sweet. The Majowiczes also sell a private label of jarred olives from another source. The little guys that they grow themselves are used only for oil, Renee said.

Olive trees love the sandy loam of their Bastrop County orchard, which drains well. Like lavender, olives don't like wet feet. The trees start budding in March and mature from late September through early October.

Texas heat doesn't bother the trees much, Renee said, thanks to the orchard's irrigation system. But especially cold winters have been a challenge. The big freeze of 2021 took its toll on the orchard, and in 2024, the Majowiczes planted 450 new trees to replace those they lost.

"They are technically evergreen," Renee said. "So, if the weather stays right, the trees should stay green all year."

IF YOU GO

186 Youngs Prairie Road, Elgin
9 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
512-229-8443
fmajfarm@gmail.com
dellsfavorite.com



Lost Pines Yaupon Tea sells loose leaf or tea bags, as well as bottled flavored yaupon tea concentrates. A customer favorite is the bottled apple spice concentrate mixed with water or sparkling water.

Lost Pines Yaupon Tea photo

LOST PINES YAUPON TEA

Bastrop

Roasted yaupon tea leaves and flavored tea concentrates

A few years ago, Jason Ellis heard that the leaves of the yaupon holly, a native shrub in many Texas landscapes, could be brewed into a caffeinated tea. "It must taste awful if nobody's actually doing anything with it," he remembers thinking.

In fact, Indigenous people have made yaupon leaves into a beverage since ancient times. Colonists even exported it to Europe. Yaupon tea eventually faded from popular use, but the plant didn't go anywhere.

Yaupon is so plentiful in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region, particularly in Bastrop County's Lost Pines, that people are willing to pay to get rid of it. So, along with friends Heidi Wachter and John Seibold, Ellis founded Lost Pines Yaupon Tea, which turns the unwanted greenery into liquid gold. If you ask Ellis, it tastes great.

TRY YAUPON TEA

Purchase teas and merchandise on their website or find them at select retailers in Austin, San Marcos and Lockhart (store hours vary)

512-748-4546

lostpinesyaupontea.com

Yaupon is a native plant to the region and incredibly well-adapted to its home, Ellis said. After any brush-clearing, it is one of the first woody plants to reappear. Yaupon Tea crews drive to areas overgrown with the plant, then trim and remove branches. That work gives other native

plants a better chance to flourish, Ellis said.

Ellis and company take the yaupon back to their warehouse, let the leaves air dry and then roast them in a convection oven. Their light roast tastes like green tea, while the dark roast is comparable to a "really roasty, oaky, almost whiskey barrel-ish black tea," he said. The company also sells flavored yaupon tea concentrates, like mint, basil and peach.

Inevitably, the yaupon grows back, so Ellis and his crew return to trim again. There's no chance Lost Pines could ever run out of their tea supply, he said. They've even had to turn away some property owners who asked them to clear their yaupon.

"It's literally the predominant understory to the entire pine forest," Ellis said.



Continued from Page 19

der. She snips a single stem decorated with spiky flowers and holds it up. It gently bends to gravity, curving downward. The plants need more sunlight and time in the ground, she said, before they're ready for eager visitors to snip.

"The people that come out here are just very special people," Debbie said. "They're the type of people that appreciate nature, flowers, serenity, quiet."

Luling Lavender Fields

Luling Lavender Fields is owned by a couple who figured out the art of growing lavender in the region over time. Richard and Erin Leavitt wanted to make use of 10 acres of family land, easily accessible from the detour-friendly intersection of U.S. 183 and Interstate 10, a few miles southeast of downtown Luling. Erin's late father, Bill Watson, bought the land in 1955, the year she was born.

The Leavitts visited lavender farms in the state of Washington, where Erin's sister lives, doing field research to find a crop that could generate income. Once back in Luling, Richard set up an irrigation system on their land, punched the ground with a post-hole digger and sprinkled a little nitrogen-rich bone meal into the soil to help achieve the neutral pH that lavender likes. In 2017, they planted 2,000 lavender plants on 2 acres.

The planter boxes where their lavender grows are painted the color of their contents. Elsewhere in the field, a gazebo, a bicycle, an old flatbed truck and a flamingo figure are the same hue.

The Leavitts grow a few lavender varieties, including Super Blue and English. Once the tall Super Blue starts blooming in the spring, it doesn't stop until the first freeze of winter, Erin said. Its flowers make great dried bundles, Richard said. The shrubby English lavender, often used in cooking, is more seasonal, usually blooming in April and fading by June.

Unpredictable weather isn't the only challenge this farm deals with. Richard regularly faces off against thirsty fire ants that move into the drip lines and gophers' tunnels that disrupt the plants' root systems.

"This used to be a rock quarry in the '40s," Erin said. "My family gave it to me because nobody wanted it."

Thanks to those rocks, the fields have great drainage. Lavender hates wet feet, which leads to root rot. Many amateur gardeners

Luling Lavender Fields

5 Arrow Lane, Luling

Fields and gift shop open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily

830-351-4609

lulinglavenderfields.com



Top: Richard and Erin Leavitt's farm rests on 10 acres of Watson Ranch near Luling. **Above:** Their store sells a variety of products using lavender from their fields.

make the mistake of giving lavender too much water, Erin said.

The Leavitts' shop sells a variety of starter plants that visitors can take home (as does Chappell Hill Lavender Farm). Erin always asks where folks live before giving out advice. Land with sandy soil works best for growing lavender in the Bluebonnet region, especially with all-day sun and a little fertilizer. Clay soil traps moisture, though, so folks in those regions should opt for a raised bed or a pot that gets morning sun and afternoon shade.

"The way I water, I call it 'drowned and dry,'" Richard said. His advice to home growers: "Let that pot dry out. When it's dry, then you just want to drown it with water — pour way more water than you'd ever think — and then let it dry out for a couple days."

Until recently, rows of lavender were there simply to admire. But last June, they allowed visitors to snip their own souvenirs for a change. It was a hit, so they let folks pick their own bundles again this spring.

"We couldn't believe how many people did it in 100-degree heat, when the blooms were not great," Erin said. "We realized it isn't hard to do, and our visitors love it."

Perfect scents

By late April, it's cutting time back at Chappell Hill Lavender Farm. On a perfect spring Saturday, sunny enough for a body to sweat but windy enough to dry it off, visitors pack the gift shop.

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Native Texas persimmons grow on Kathleen Canales' farm. They ripen on the branch, turning black when fully mature. These drought-tolerant fruits are a valuable food source for wildlife and can be eaten fresh when fully soft. *Wild Edible Texas photo*

TWISTED TIMBER FARMS

Lexington

Persimmons, jujubes, pond plants and more

When the COVID-19 pandemic strained food supply chains, it inspired Kathleen Canales to take action. She now spreads the gospel of growing good stuff to feed the community.

Canales moved to Lexington from Hutto about six years ago. She runs Lee County Garden Club, which aims to make sustainable food production available to anyone, offering meetups, seed swaps, farm tours, classes and more. She also grows a variety of plants on her 10 acres called Twisted Timber Farms.

She speaks excitedly about all the crops people might not know they can grow in the area. Pomegranates and figs can do well in Lee County, Canales said. Mustang grapes thrive, and some folks turn them into jelly to sell at the Lee County Farmers Market.

Native Texas persimmons grow on Canales' land. The trees aren't very big (under 10 feet) and the fruit they bear is small, too. One

of the more interesting plants she grows is the jujube. Not to be confused with the candy of that name, the fruit is also known as red date or Chinese date. The deciduous tree originated

in China but is well adapted to Texas, she said. Canales started her jujubes from seed. The sandy soil in the region provides sufficient drainage. The jujube fruit looks a bit like a long kiwi, she said, and tastes a little like a banana.

Twisted Timber Farms grows and sells pond plants, too: floating lettuce, lilies, Texas hibiscus, floating lotus and more. These need to live in water, but they'll grow anywhere, especially in sunny Texas. "Even in the shade, the sun filters through our trees," she said. "Mine are out in full sun."

Canales specializes in companion planting at every scale, from small garden beds to an entire food forest. Teaching people about the latter is her passion. If you do it right, it just takes one acre to feed a community, she said.

WANT TO FORAGE OR SHOP?

Call 512-818-5278 for information to plan a visit

Get event details on the Lee County Gardening Club Facebook group

Buy products at the Buffalo Bazaar Community Market, 119 N Burleson St., Giddings; 9 a.m.-2 p.m., second Saturday, March-November



An Old Blush Rose from the Antique Rose Emporium blooms in the garden. The emporium specializes in antique roses, including varieties like this rose, known for its disease resistance and fragrant, soft pink blooms. *Antique Rose Emporium photo*

ANTIQUE ROSE EMPORIUM

Independence, Washington County

Old Blush Rose and other antique Texas rose varieties

There's no shortage of roses in the Bluebonnet region, but among the 330 varieties available at the Antique Rose Emporium, 11 miles north of Brenham, there is one with a particularly rich history. Old Blush is one of the first rose varieties grown in Texas, brought by European settlers in the mid-1800s. Also known as Parsons' Pink China, this rose

bush with soft lilac-pink blooms originated about a thousand years ago in China, and appeared in Europe in the mid- to late-1700s.

The emporium sells about 45 true antique or old garden roses

IF YOU GO

10000 FM 50, Brenham

Nursery and gardens open 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Sunday

979-836-5548

antiqueroseemporium.com

— defined as varieties existing before 1867, according to the American Rose Society. Old roses in Texas have been found growing wild in cemeteries, vacant lots and near old homes, including in eastern Central Texas.

An Old Blush bush was rediscovered in the 1970s, according to a story in Texas Monthly magazine, when rose aficionado Pamela Puryear said she found it growing in front of an 1824 log house in Washington County.

Old Blush, like many heirloom roses, is tough, disease-resistant and can flourish in rugged soil without much human help. Its medium-sized, semi-double blooms have a soft fruity fragrance. Like other old roses, it can grow as a hedge, border or the bushy star of a garden.



The store at Luling Lavender Fields is open daily and offers bath, body and culinary products made with the fragrant flower.

Continued from Page 21

Debbie McDowell and two assistants do it all — ring up customers, bundle fresh-snipped lavender and pour lemonade.

The gift shop offers proof that lavender can be used in myriad ways. The shelves feature several different spice blends. You can pick up lavender fudge or the farm's signature crunchy cookie with lavender. There are aromatherapy products made with essential oil. Handmade soaps rival anything you'd find at a big-box store. Lavender mosquito spray is a bestseller.

Debbie makes some of the products herself, as does Erin Leavitt for her own well-stocked gift shop in Luling. On the shelves, visitors will find Erin's lotions and potions. A painted shelf reading "lots of love, laughter and lavender" holds body products, like sugar scrubs, foaming bath salts and bars of soap. Elsewhere, there are sachets of dried lavender and boxes of lavender tea.

The Leavitts sell some of Luling Lavender Fields' blooms in bundles, but they also source many of the gift shop's goods from outside suppliers, including other small farms.

At Chappell Hill Lavender Farm, employees give a pair of scissors and a flat-bottomed wicker basket to anyone looking to snip something. Bees and butterflies flit around people's fingers. Bursts of fragrance hit their noses whenever their scissors sever a stem from its sisters.

It's calming carnage.

That soothing effect is what draws visitors to Luling Lavender Fields, too. "Lavender has reached the consciousness of the public as something that's really good for you," Erin said. "It's natural. It's relaxing." Their field welcomes all kinds of folks looking for the purplish peacemaker — girlfriends on weekend excursions, families with rowdy kids, curious groups from assisted living facilities.

Lavender plants often flummox Central Texas gardeners. On that April day at Chappell Hill Lavender Farm, hopes sprang eternal. Undoubtedly, many of the day's visitors drove out the gate and into the kaleidoscope, their car thick with that clean, soothing scent and their minds filled with visions of lavender blooms in their back yards. ■

— Melissa Segrest contributed to this story

SAVE THESE HANDY SITES FOR HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS TIPS

- tdem.texas.gov
- texasready.gov
- redcross.org

For more resources and outage information, visit bluebonnet.coop/hurricanes.

Are you ready for HURRICANE SEASON?

Atlantic storm season
is June 1 through Nov. 30

Bluebonnet to compete at Texas Lineman's Rodeo in July

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative will send lineworker interns, journeymen, judges and a barbecue team to compete in the annual Texas Lineman's Rodeo, set for July 19 at Nolte Island Recreation Area near Seguin.

This rodeo is not for cattle and cowboys. Lineworkers compete against others from electric utilities across the state in intense, timed challenges that showcase skills they perform every day, such as climbing utility poles, repairing power lines and fixing equipment.

One of the most challenging events is the pole-top rescue. Competitors must simulate saving an injured lineworker, using a human-sized mannequin. These events test their precision, speed and safety under pressure.

Bluebonnet's teams will be joined by families and guests to support the event.

The competition takes place in a field near the Guadalupe River, with de-energized utility poles set up for the events, and is open to the public.

Come cheer on Bluebonnet's team members or follow their progress on Bluebonnet's social media pages throughout the day. For more details, visit tlra.org.



Bluebonnet's 2024 senior journeyman team members test their skills in safely replacing an electrical disconnect switch, a critical task when restoring power. For the second year in a row, the team — Brandon Johnson, left, Michael Guajardo, right, and Kenneth Roush, not pictured — won first place in the senior journeyman division. A senior team will compete again in July. *Sarah Beal photo*



Traveling this summer?

Here's how to save on electricity while you're away

As you get ready for your summer vacation, you're probably thinking about bumping up your thermostat to save electricity and money. There are more ways to save electricity costs and keep your home safe while you're away. Try these simple tips to save money and conserve electricity:

Raise your thermostat just 4 to 5 degrees higher. Turning it up too much can cause your refrigerator to work harder, using more electricity. Keeping your AC running at a slightly higher temperature also helps control humidity, reducing the risk of mold and mildew.

Before leaving, also:

- **Turn off water:** Shut off water to sinks, toilets and washers to prevent leaks or flooding.
- **Close blinds or shades:** Partially close blinds or shades. This blocks out the sun's heat but creates the perception that someone is home.
- **Use light timers:** Set lights on timers or use your smart home system to simulate activity at home and avoid wasting electricity.

For more tips, go to bluebonnet.coop/energy-saving-tips.

4 TIPS TO HELP YOU PREPARE

1. Put together an emergency supply kit containing medications, important family documents, cash and hygienic supplies.
2. Discuss evacuation routes from each room of your house as well as from your neighborhood.
3. Identify safe travel routes and official shelters in advance.
4. Make sure all family members know how to get in touch with one another, even if phone services are disrupted, and establish a designated place to meet.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Thursday, June 19, for Juneteenth. If your power goes out, report it by texting OUT to 44141, using bluebonnet.coop or the MyBluebonnet mobile app, or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay your bills anytime online, on the mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (select Option 2 when prompted).

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Amazing Grace Danforth

The trailblazing doctor was a champion of women's rights

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

THE DALLAS *Daily Times-Herald* tried to compliment Dr. Grace Danforth by saying she was “a woman with a man’s mind,” but the pioneering physician had a mind all her own.

Danforth was the first woman accepted as a member of the Dallas County Medical Association, the first woman to practice medicine in Williamson County and a founding member of the Texas Equal Rights Association.

Danforth was also a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, which made her death from a drug overdose all the more puzzling.

Born in Wisconsin in 1849, she lived

most of her life in Texas, moving with her family to northeast Texas as a young child.

For a while it appeared she would follow in her father’s footsteps as a traveling music teacher, but she found the classroom too confining. She considered bookkeeping and pharmacy before deciding on medicine, studying at the Woman’s Medical College of Chicago, where she first became involved in the campaign for women’s voting rights.

She returned to Texas as a licensed physician and dedicated suffragist.

By 1889, she was practicing medicine in the small town of Granger, north of Austin, at a time when there were only

a few thousand female doctors in the U.S. She organized local suffrage groups and promoted their activities. She advocated for inviting visionary suffragist Susan B. Anthony to Texas.

We know now that Danforth suffered from cluster headaches, which are uncommon, unpredictable and debilitating. And even though Danforth may have prescribed laudanum, a tincture of opium dissolved in alcohol, to treat pain and other ailments in her patients, she didn’t take it herself.

It’s possible she only took it once, on the night of her 46th birthday, February 21, 1895, when she died of an overdose. Stories about her death vary. Some say she overdosed on the drug antipyrine; others say laudanum.

Armies and expeditions of the day didn’t leave home without laudanum. Lewis and Clark took the drug, along with some raw opium, on their voyage of discovery. Doctors in the 19th century prescribed laudanum for nearly everything: colds, meningitis and even heart diseases.

Laudanum, it seems, never failed to make patients feel better. Unless it killed them.

Wayne Bethard, a pharmacist and historian in Texas, wrote in his book *Lotions, Potions, and Deadly Elixirs* that laudanum, like today’s opiates, lowers a patient’s pain threshold. Over time it takes more medicine to treat the same pain, but someone who doesn’t take narcotic pain medication has no tolerance to the drug. A dose large enough to calm a cluster headache could be fatal.

“Dr. Danforth was one of the most remarkable women in Texas,” the *Daily Times-Herald* wrote the day after her death. She was buried in the Granger City Cemetery.

“There was a great prejudice existing against her sex entering the learned professions, and it is not likely she got much practice,” the newspaper wrote. “But she was a woman of a vigorous and active mind, and she soon took a leading part in all reforms.” ■

Summer Pastas

We say summer, but you'll be turning to these dishes all year

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

A pan of homemade lasagna bubbling away in the oven is so dreamy, but this food editor is busy, so I'm busting out a skillet to re-create the dream in under 30 minutes on the stovetop. I finish by quickly broiling the cheese—an optional step but so worth it.

Turkey Skillet Lasagna

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 pound ground turkey
½ medium onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 jar marinara sauce (24 ounces)
1½ cups chicken broth
1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
10 uncooked lasagna noodles, broken into 2-inch pieces
1 cup ricotta cheese
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1. Heat olive oil in a 12-inch oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Add ground turkey and onion. Break up turkey with spoon and cook until turkey is fully cooked, about 8 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook an additional 2 minutes.
2. Add marinara sauce and broth. Bring to a boil.
3. Add mushrooms and lasagna noodles and stir to separate noodles. Return to a boil, then reduce heat, cover and cook 10–12 minutes or until noodles are tender, stirring occasionally. If using broiler, pre-heat it while the noodles cook.
4. In a bowl, stir together ricotta, Parmesan, Italian seasoning and salt.
5. Dollop cheese mixture by the spoonful on top of pasta. Cover and cook 5 minutes, until cheese is warmed through. Uncover skillet and top with mozzarella. If desired, broil 3 minutes or until cheese is melted and lightly browned. Serve warm.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Queso Mac and Cheese.





Summer Corn Pasta Salad

NANCY GRIFFITH
BANDERA EC

Griffith's dish is a tasty combination of fresh veggies and pantry staples, making it a new addition to my list of rotating meal plans. As the pasta cooks, I can quickly chop up the veggies, and the dressing is a snap to whisk together. I served it with baked chicken, but it would also be amazing with fried chicken or baked salmon.

- 16 ounces uncooked rotini
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ cup avocado oil
- 1 can black beans (15 ounces), rinsed and drained
- 1½ cups corn kernels
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup sliced black olives
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup diced green onions
- ¼ cup diced red onion

1. Cook rotini according to package directions.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together vinegar, oregano, cumin, salt and pepper. Whisk in avocado oil.
3. Add rotini to the dressing and stir to coat. Stir in beans, corn, tomatoes, bell pepper, olives, cilantro, green onions and red onion until thoroughly combined.
4. Cover and chill until ready to serve.

SERVES 8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Pickle Popper Pasta Salad

PATRICIA STEHLING
CENTRAL TEXAS EC



Pickle pasta, where have you been all my life? The way I devoured this pasta—it's so, so good and even easier to whip up. I mean, c'mon—pickles, ranch and bacon ... winner, winner.

- 12 ounces uncooked large elbow macaroni
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup pickle juice
- 2 tablespoons ranch seasoning
- ¼ cup diced dill pickles
- 8–10 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill, minced (optional)

1. Cook macaroni according to package directions and allow to cool.
2. In a large bowl, stir together mayonnaise, sour cream, pickle juice and ranch seasoning.
3. Add macaroni, pickles, bacon and tomatoes and stir until well combined.
4. Serve garnished with fresh dill, if desired.

SERVES 6–8

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

TURKEY TIME DUE JUNE 10

We're already thinking about the holidays, and you could win \$500 if you do too. Tell us about your main dish or what you do with that mountain of leftover turkey. Enter by June 10.

UPCOMING: HOLIDAY BREAKFAST DUE JULY 10





Pasta With Prosciutto and Peas

KERRI RUSS
TRINITY VALLEY EC

I appreciate a pasta dish with texture. I want it to be crispy or crunchy, and this pasta gives it to me. I enjoyed this dish when I first made it but even more the next day for lunch.

12 ounces uncooked fusilli
10 ounces frozen peas
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil,
divided use

3 ounces prosciutto, diced
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
cheese, divided use
½ cup chopped fresh parsley,
divided use

1. Cook fusilli according to package directions and set aside.
2. Steam peas according to package directions and drain.
3. In a skillet, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high heat. Add prosciutto to the skillet in a single layer and fry until crispy. Place on paper towels to drain.
4. Add remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil to skillet, along with garlic. Cook until garlic begins to brown.
5. Pour garlic mixture into a large bowl, and add prosciutto, fusilli, peas, lemon juice, salt and pepper to bowl. Stir to coat.

Water Wise

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Next time you're making spaghetti or fettuccine Alfredo, don't toss the water used for cooking pasta. Save a few cups before draining and reap the tasty benefits. It's loaded with rich starch from the pasta. Adding a cup or so of pasta water can help emulsify any sauce. It enhances flavor absorption, prevents pasta from drying out and helps sauce cling to pasta.

6. Stir in ¾ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano and ¼ cup parsley.
7. Serve garnished with remaining ¼ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano and ¼ cup parsley.

SERVES 4

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Enter the Bare Cage

Lace up for an eerie hike among former zoo pens in this boomtown

BY CHET GARNER

THE CAGES WERE all empty—at least what was left of them. But that didn't stop me from having the strange feeling that something was watching me as I hiked through the remnants of an abandoned zoo just outside Cisco.

This small town is about 100 miles west of Fort Worth and boasts a couple claims to fame. First is the Mobley Hotel—the initial hotel purchased by Conrad Hilton, in 1919—and second is an infamous 1927 bank robbery led by a man dressed as Santa Claus.

And third is the old zoo nature trails on the banks of Lake Cisco.

The zoo was built in 1923, during the height of an oil boom. It was to be the crown jewel of a tourist camp that also included a huge swimming pool just below the newly formed lake.

At its peak, the zoo had a number of cages built into the sandstone cliffs and held a strange menagerie of animals, including a bear, deer and flamingo. Sadly, its heyday was short-lived as animals died under “unusual circumstances,” and by the 1930s, everything was abandoned.

For decades, the ruins of the zoo were known to only a few, and it seems most of them were graffiti artists. It wasn't until 2021 that a local nonprofit got permission to clear the paths, haul out the garbage and turn the old zoo into a public nature trail.

Walking the paths and peering into the old cages makes for an interesting, albeit creepy, nature walk. Pieces of rusted metal mark the outlines of the former enclaves. The only sounds you'll hear are the wind and the occasional bird or squirrel scampering up a tree.

But it isn't hard to imagine the growls of bears and howls of monkeys or those beady little eyes peering back at you. ■

ABOVE The empty habitats of an abandoned zoo embolden Chet.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all Chet's Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

JUNE
7

Brenham Highwaymen Show: The Great American Outlaws, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Grapevine Dairy Day, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

13

Fredericksburg [13–14] Craft Beer Festival, fbcraftbeerfestival.com

14

East Bernard Czech Kolache-Klobase Festival, (979) 533-1902, kkfest.com

El Campo Kids Fishing Tournament, (979) 275-1600, eclostagoon.com

Slaton Texas Air Museum Airshow, (806) 779-7332, thetexasairmuseum.org

Granbury [14–15] Lone Star Street Rod Association State Run, (817) 573-5548, visitgranbury.com

Terrell [14–15] North Texas Antique Tractor and Engine Club Show and Pull, (214) 497-1611, north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net

16

Denton [16–21] Juneteenth Celebration, (940) 735-6311, dentonjuneteenth.com

21

Freeport Fort Velasco Day, (979) 233-0066, freeportmuseum.com

26

Luling [26-29] Watermelon Thump, (830) 875-3878, watermelonthump.com

28

Teague Putt Fore a Purpose, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Belton [28, July 2-5] 4th of July Celebration, (254) 939-3551, beltonchamber.com

Llano [28-Sept. 28] Canvas and Quilts: The Art of Ira and Kathy Kennedy, (325) 247-4839, llanofineartsguild.com

JULY

3

Waxahachie [3-4] Grape Myrtle Festival, (469) 309-4045, waxahachiecvb.com

4

Carthage Lake Murvaul Fourth of July Celebration, (903) 693-6562, panolacountytexas.com

Corsicana Freedom Festival, (903) 654-4874, visitcorsicana.com

Grapevine 4th of July Extravaganza, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Port Arthur Fireworks on the Seawall, (409) 985-7822, visitportarthurtx.com

Tomball July 4th Celebration & Street Fest, (281) 290-1035, tomballtx.gov

Granbury [4-6] Hometown 4th of July Celebration, (817) 573-1622, granburrychamber.com

TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your September event by July 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.



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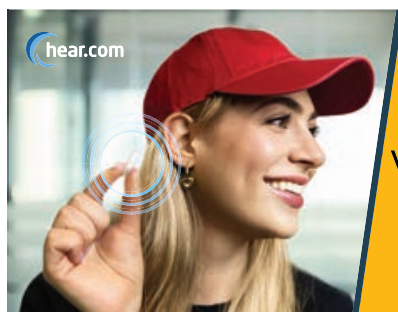
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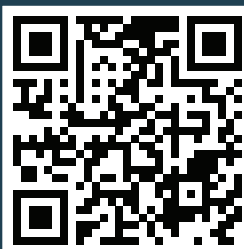
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Family Vacation

Whether going overseas or just over yonder, these readers love picnicking, beach combing, hiking, riding the rivers and cheering on their favorite teams as a family. Now pile in the family van, and let's have some fun!

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 BLAIR RINCONES, PEDERNALES EC

"The first time our kids experienced the Gulf Coast, the heart-shaped sunset made it truly a magical experience."

2 TARYN JENKINS, TRINITY VALLEY EC

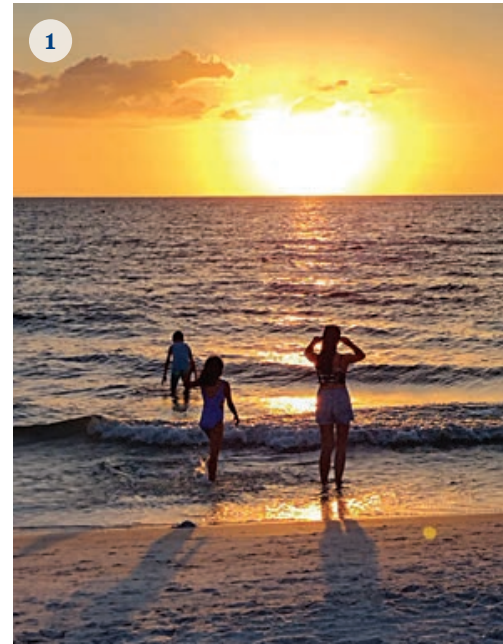
"A beach trip before a college send-off."

3 ELIZABETH WEBB, CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

"Climbing up to the summit of Enchanted Rock."

4 DANICA PETERS, PEDERNALES EC

"Summer lake days and jumping off the boat."



Upcoming Contests

DUE JUN 10 **Heroes**

DUE JUL 10 **Abstract**

DUE AUG 10 **Country Life**



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Family Vacation photos from readers.





Cutting Through

Sometimes it takes a chain saw to get through the undergrowth of life

BY PATTI JONES MORGAN
ILLUSTRATION BY
HEATHER GATLEY

ONE MORNING AS I walked along a nearby lane, a chain saw's rough growl cut through the early morning peace. Startled, I discovered its source was a trim-looking man bent almost double, systematically attacking dense undergrowth along his fence line.

"Good morning!" I called out.

Finally hearing my voice over the sound of the machine, the man straightened up. "Good morning!" he replied.

"You have a lot of work there!" I called back.

He took my greeting as a welcome excuse to take a break and struggled to disengage from a tangle of old wire fencing, clinging branches and thorny tendrils. Over time, they had wound around the trees and bushes, roots, and fence posts to create a near impenetrable barrier.

Slipping off the mask that had been protecting him from clouds of wood shavings and dust, he tipped back his broad-brimmed hat with a friendly smile. He had just bought the 10 acres, he explained, and planned to build a house on it for him and his wife.

"A lot of wires, mostly rusted, and old brush have wrapped around the fence posts," he said, waving at the stringy assortment of tethers once intended to define the acreage and warn away trespassers.

Left uncontrolled, however, nature had ravenously begun converting old and new companions into little more than an unmanageable thorny fortress. No wonder wire cutters and a chain saw were needed to hack through the knots and reveal what lay hidden.

We bid our goodbyes after the neighborly visit, and the chain saw resumed its noisy attack on the underbrush jungle.

But not before I saw my own tangle—of old literary aspirations in need of similar treatment. The cacophony inspired me to clear out yesterday's words and give light, air, time and space to new ones.

A long sweltering summer arrived, partnered with the pandemic. My neighbor's sporadic chain saw activity diminished to rock gathering and wheelbarrow work.

Curious neighbors, eager to chat, began stopping by. Robert Frost's oft-quoted line from his poem *Mending Wall* sprang to mind: "Good fences make good neighbors." A conversation hub during those communication-cramped months, the gathering place had served us all well.

Completed, his low rock wall continued to speak simply about what mattered: people, purpose and permanence.

It spoke my language too. Half-hidden beneath my writing clutter lay the lyrical sounds and familiar rhythms of my old love, poetry. Revealed anew, its purpose suddenly mattered more than ever.

The chain saw's discordant sound that first morning had, it seemed, pealed an unexpected welcome. Its clarion call was sweet music to my ears. ■



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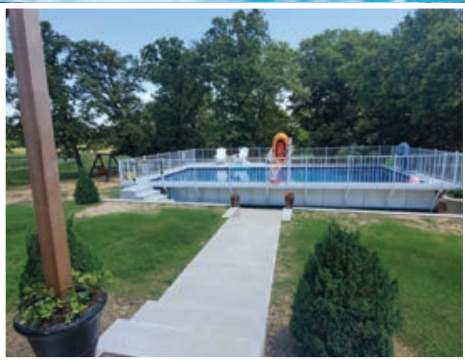
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