

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

CRAWFISH, Y'ALL

Mudbug-loving Texans pull up a seat at the communal table

BLUEBONNET NEWS
SEE PAGE 18



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Crawfish and good times at Repka's in Brookshire.

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TexasCoopPower.com

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By Gene Fowler

ON THE COVER For many Texans, a crawfish boil marks more than the arrival of spring. Photo by Eric W. Pohl

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Keeping in Touch

I am 84 and rely on good reading material to keep in touch with “all.”

Seldom have I enjoyed such fine articles as your November issue. I began with interesting Letters, then the woman behind Wreaths Across America and the magnificent photos accompanying the one-of-a-kind artists. Then comes my favorite subject—history.

BRENNNA QUEBBEMANN | BLANCO PEDERNALES EC AND CECA

Startling Conclusion

The star on the coin looks nothing like the lone star on the flag [*A Star Is Born*, December 2019]. There were stars for centuries on flags, shields and emblems of nations. Our Texas founding fathers . . . considered Texas a “lone star”—alone as a region fighting the tyrannical dictatorship of Santa Anna.

To try to stretch so far to connect these patriots to an insignificant star on a coin minted in 1817 is a thin presumption and certainly not clear. The Long Expedition in 1819, usually given credibility for being the first image of the lone star, is proven history.

COY PRATHER | MONTALBA TRINITY VALLEY EC

Made in Texas

It is great that you are celebrating the makers in our areas [*In the Making*, November 2019]. Nice photos and nice story.

TRAVIS FROELICH | BASTROP BLUEBONNET EC

So many of us artisans here in Texas! . . . My husband and I have been making soap for

Clip-and-Save Recipes

Being in my 20s, I know that I am in the minority of your readership, but that also makes me the future of your readership. I read your articles monthly, but I only ever save the recipes, just like my mother and my mother’s mother before her. I clip them out and keep them in my homemade recipe book/binder/scrapbook.

KASEY MENN | BRYAN | BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES



the past 17 years using the milk from our award-winning Nubian dairy goats.

CAROLINE LAWSON | VIA FACEBOOK NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

Ryan Drapela [above] is an awesome young man. He works hard to be the best craftsman he can be.

MARK WOODS | VIA FACEBOOK

Hamil to the Rescue

President Richard Nixon’s failure to thwart REA was a huge

success for rural electrification nationwide [*Nixon’s Attack on Co-ops*, December 2019]. Pictured behind Nixon was REA administrator Dave Hamil, a dear friend of mine.

Hamil almost single-handedly organized national leadership to save co-ops. Nixon was forced to sign legislation that restored federally funded loans and even greater financial health to co-ops.

BILL MULDOON | KERRVILLE CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Co-ops and VFDs

I applaud your recognition of the critical importance and needs of volunteer fire departments in the communities they serve [*Putting Others First*, October 2019]. There are several volunteer fire departments served by our local co-op, Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative, including the McQueeney Volunteer Fire Department.

In October, the McQueeney VFD was the recipient of a Power-Up Grant of \$20,000 for the purchase of lifesaving extrication equipment. This is one of the many ways in which GVEC has helped our department to better serve our community.

MARILYN MARSHALL | NEW BRAUNFELS GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

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

   Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

Chopin and Friends

Classical music lovers are in for a treat when distinguished Canadian pianist Ryo Yanagitani performs **CHOPIN AND FRIENDS: ROMANTIC GENIUS** at the Cailloux Theater in **KERRVILLE** on **FEBRUARY 27**.

Frédéric Chopin was a 19th-century Polish composer and virtuoso pianist who was close friends with French composer Hector Berlioz and sometimes friend, sometimes rival of Franz Liszt. The concert will feature pieces by all three and one by Johann Sebastian Bach, one of Chopin's greatest influences.

"This concert is all about showmanship," says Eugene Dowdy, conductor and artistic director for Symphony of the Hills, host of the event. "Ryo is a wonderful showman as a performer, super energetic. And even Chopin, himself a famous piano performer, also hung out with other showy composers like Hector Berlioz—composer of a piece named *Symphony Fantastique*, by the way. Who writes a symphony and names it that?"

INFO ▶ (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

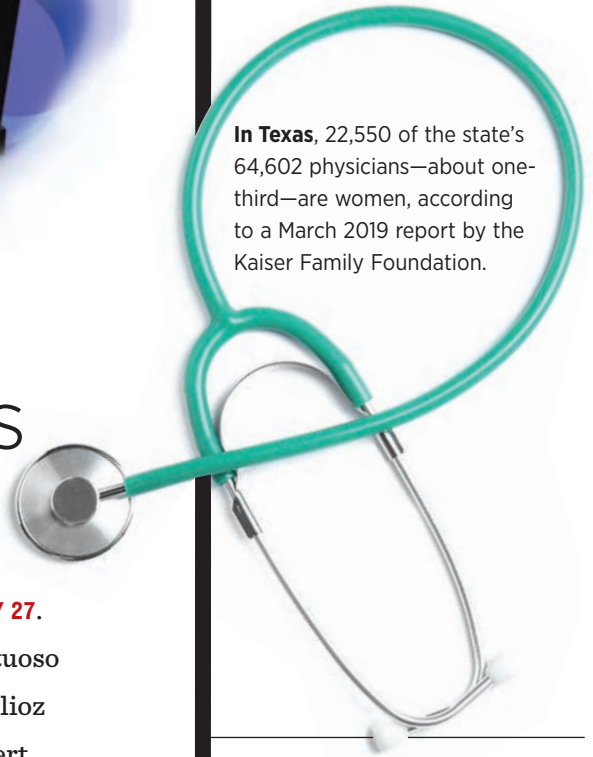
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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

PIONEERING M.D.

National Women Physicians Day is February 3. The date marks the birthday of Elizabeth Blackwell in 1821. When Blackwell graduated from New York's Geneva Medical College in 1849, she became the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States.

In Texas, 22,550 of the state's 64,602 physicians—about one-third—are women, according to a March 2019 report by the Kaiser Family Foundation.



LIFESTYLE

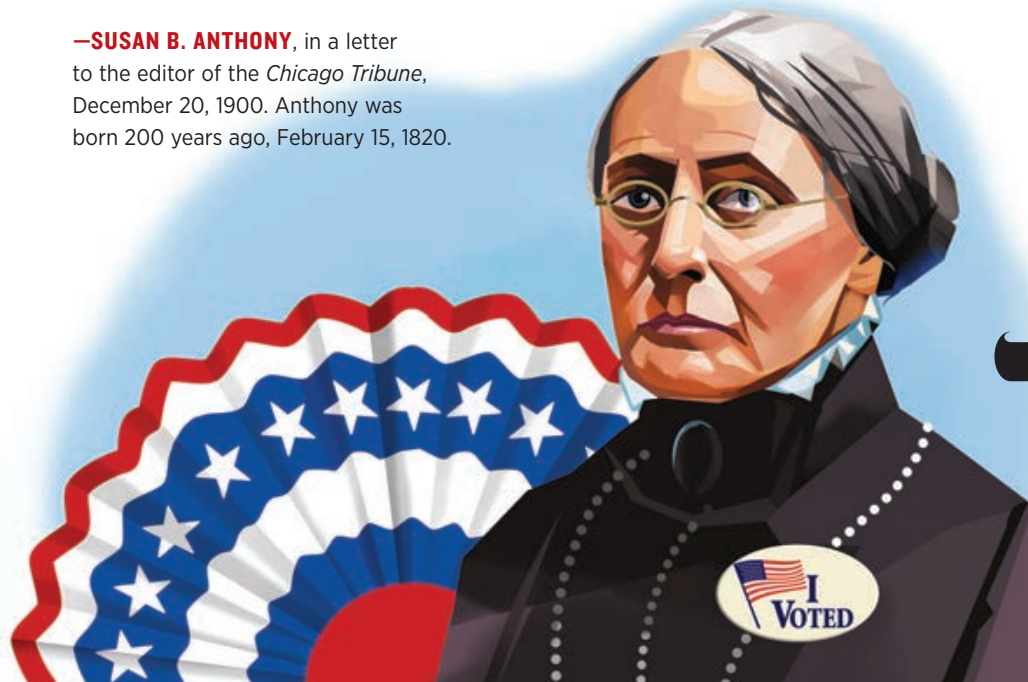
Cut It Out!

Have you witnessed crape murder—the horrific and drastic pruning of innocent crape myrtles? Or seen the gnarled, knotty scars left by previous crimes?

Read *Crape Murder* on Page 8, then tell us about your experience by emailing letters@TexasCoopPower.com or posting on our Facebook page. Include your name, co-op and city. (We won't turn you in to the pruning police.)

“There is no history about which there is so much ignorance as this great movement for the establishment of equal political rights for women. I hope the twentieth century will see the triumph of our cause.”

—**SUSAN B. ANTHONY**, in a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 1900. Anthony was born 200 years ago, February 15, 1820.



BY THE NUMBERS

5,200

That's the number of choking deaths in the U.S. in 2017, according to the National Safety Council. Surgeon Henry Heimlich, who in the 1970s invented a technique used to help choking victims dislodge an obstruction from their airways, was born 100 years ago—February 3, 1920, in Delaware. The Heimlich maneuver is credited with saving thousands of lives.

➔ *Did you know?*

In 2016, at the age of 96, Heimlich himself used his technique for the first time to save the life of a woman choking at his retirement home in Cincinnati.

NATURE



Desolate Skies

The New York Times, reporting on an analysis in the journal *Science*, said in September that there are 2.9 billion fewer birds in the United States and Canada than there were in 1970.

While the study was not designed to determine the cause of the 29% drop in population, scientists suggest likely culprits are habitat loss and pesticides.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My most unforgettable first date was . . .

Last month we asked readers to finish a sentence that we started. Your snappy answers are still coming in, and we'll share them next month. Meanwhile, amid thoughts of romance and Valentine's Day, how would you finish the sentence above?

Your answers can be silly, serious, deep or superficial. Post your responses on our Facebook page or email them to letters@TexasCoopPower.com. Please include your name, city and co-op.

EVERY FEBRUARY, horticulturist Greg Grant dreads the sight of tree trunks topped by sawed-off limbs. The annual chain saw massacre generally targets only one kind of tree: crape myrtles. “I’m *never* going to get used to that horrifically wrong way of pruning them,” huffs Grant, a Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension agent for Smith County. “Someone’s *got* to stop the madness.”

That madness is known as “crape murder.” No one’s sure how or why the excessive shearing got started, though Grant, a member of Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative, has some theories. Despite efforts to counter it, the crime against nature continues.

Crape myrtles have long been loved in the South as ornamental shrubs and trees for their peeling bark, prolific blooms and colorful fall foliage. Their tolerance of hot, dry climates makes them especially suited for Texas landscapes.

AS HEALTHY TREES are hacked in the prime of their lives, an expert pleads: **“STOP THE MADNESS!”**

Crape Murder

In part, their name refers to the flowers’ crinkly crepe paper appearance. However, crape myrtles, which are native to India and southeast Asia, are not true myrtle trees, which bear white, star-shaped flowers. Instead, crape myrtle blooms—which range from white to pink, red and lavender—look more like lilacs, hence its nickname, “Lilac of the South.” Today, more than 110 crape myrtle varieties range in size from 3 feet tall to more than 30 feet.

Their earliest cultivation traces back to the Chinese gardens of the Tang dynasty, which ruled from 618 to 907 A.D. In 1786, French botanist André Michaux planted crape myrtles in his gardens in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1799, the ship *George Berkeley* ferried plants and seeds from India, including crape myrtles, to George Washington for his Mount Vernon plantation in Virginia. Thomas Jefferson also planted them at Monticello, his home in Virginia. The tree’s popularity spread across the South.

Marilda Maxey, wife of Confederate Gen. Samuel Bell Maxey, is believed to have brought the first crape myrtles to Texas in 1857, when the couple moved from Kentucky to Lamar County.

A decade later, she tended a formal garden, which showcased crape myrtles, at their new Italian villa-style home in Paris, Texas, now the Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site. Paris residents planted crape myrtles after fire destroyed almost half the town in 1916. They planted more for the state’s centennial, in 1936.

In 1997, the 75th Texas Legislature declared the crape myrtle as the official state shrub. (Texas purple sage was deemed the official state native shrub in 2005.) It also designated Paris as the state’s official Crape Myrtle City and Lamar County as Crape Myrtle County Capital. Not to leave anyone out, the Legislature also named Waxahachie as the Crape Myrtle Capital of Texas and Brazos County as an official Crape Myrtle County. McKinney, billed as America’s Crape Myrtle City, boasts some 65,000 crape myrtles across the city and in its 7-acre World Collection Park.

Despite its official standing, not even Paris is immune to crape murder. “It’s an ongoing issue here,” sighs Billie Paskin, former president of the Lamar County Master Gardeners and a Lamar Electric member. “We talk to people, and they still cut





off their crape myrtles.”

Likewise, Grant—who’s introduced 49 plants, including two crape myrtle hybrids, to the nursery trade—regularly writes about the foibles of crape murder. “I’m not the crape myrtle police,” Grant says. “People can do whatever they want with their trees. But it’s the No. 1 horticultural phenomenon that you see, and there’s not a single word in any horticultural publication that condones the practice.”

Grant theorizes that the severe style of pruning originated in Europe, where upper branches of some trees were pollarded—cut back to the trunk—to provide fuel. “Perhaps the practice came with the Spanish, who brought it with them to Mexico,” he says. “From Mexico, it spread across the South.”

These days, motives for crape murder vary, depending on who’s wielding the saw. “Homeowners tell me they cut off their crape myrtles because they’re too tall,” Grant says. “So it’s important that people know what size crape myrtle they want and then buy the right one for the site. Don’t plant one that can

grow 30 feet high under a utility line.”

Crape murder disfigures the shrubs, spurs growth of more suckers (new shoots) at a tree’s base and decreases a tree’s cold hardiness. Grant also suspects that pruning wounds and new growth attract crape myrtle bark scale, an introduced pest that’s spread across most of the Southeast. Sooty black mold and white, feltlike encrustations on higher limbs indicate a likely infestation. Though not a death sentence, the scale can turn healthy trees into eyesores and reduce their vigor by about one-third.

Bottom line: Crape murder costs money, wastes time and adds debris to landfills. It’s dangerous, too—chain saws and ladders don’t mix. Left alone, crape myrtles grow into graceful sculptures worthy of admiration.

“The only pruning they need is removal of dead wood, branches that cross and suckers from the base,” Grant says. “The prettiest ones I’ve seen have never been touched. And I mean *never*.”

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers of Blanco blogs about her gardening adventures at sherylsmithrodgers.blogspot.com.

A top-down view of a large platter of boiled crawfish. The crawfish are bright red and glistening, scattered across the platter. Interspersed among them are several ears of yellow corn on the cob and several whole, red-skinned potatoes. The entire dish is served on a bed of newspaper, with some text visible in the background. A yellow dashed circle is drawn around the central text.

A TALE OF TEXAS CRAWFISH

TASTY CRUSTACEANS

CREATE A FEASTING FRENZY EVERY SPRING

CRAWFISH. CRAWDADS. MUDBUGS. Whatever you call them, they swim at the heart of a Southern tradition that's as much about eating the tasty freshwater crustaceans in a messy jubilee of divine spiciness as it is about bringing friends, family—and even strangers—together.

From out-of-the-way eateries and exuberant festivals to backyard shindigs and community celebrations, mudbug-loving Texans happily pull up a seat at a communal table and peel tails. Steam and aromatic spices fill the air as piping hot, bright-red crawfish tumble from giant pots onto paper-covered tables.

Then it's on! Time to twist off the tails and pull out the sweet, tender lobsterlike tail meat. The more adventurous devourers, keeping with time-honored crawfish tradition, suck the rich, flavorful yellow "fat" (it's actually a digestive organ called the hepatopancreas) from the head. Aficionados insist this is the best part.

Crawfish season varies depending on whom you ask, but it is usually in full swing by the start of Lent in late February, with the peak for size and quality covering March, April and May. Seasonal specialty restaurants like the Crawfish Shack in Crosby attract crawfish-crazed patrons by the dozens.

"The first day we open up for the year, we'll have 60 cars in line just to get to-go food," says owner Dan Meaux. "Some people are waiting two hours." The Crawfish Shack has erupted in popularity in the past few years, making it one of the top crawfish spots in the country.



A crawfish boil encourages friends and family to dig in and eat from a shared plate or right off the table.

"As of the last two years, we cook more crawfish than anyone in the country," Meaux says. He credits the explosive growth to the backyard party atmosphere and never compromising on quality.

Mudbug-themed festivals feature live music, parades, pageants, carnival rides and literal tons of crawfish. In 2017, Guinness World Records recognized the Bigass Crawfish Bash in La Marque for the most crawfish prepared in eight hours: more than 58,000 pounds.

Across Texas, every crawfish chef and backyard boiler has a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14





THE TAIL TRAIL: WHERE TO FIND

THE BEST CRAWFISH

BROOKSHIRE REPKA'S GROCERY

What started as a 1940s icehouse and convenience store, Repka's, a member of San Bernard Electric Cooperative, serves Cajun-style cuisine year-round. If you blink, you'll miss the nondescript building even though it is packed during crawfish season. Wood-paneled walls boast bar swag and autographed headshots of famous diners, including country music star Tim McGraw. Pool tables, vintage arcade games

and a jukebox add to the dive bar vibe, and patron-inscribed dollar bills adorn the ceiling. Plan on trying fried gator, crawfish étouffée and home-made pork cracklings.

CROSBY CRAWFISH SHACK

One could argue the Crawfish Shack is Texas' most popular BYOB boiling pot restaurant. During peak season, loyal patrons lug beer-filled coolers and happily endure 200-person lines to get their hands on Dan Meaux's

savory mudbugs. During the season (typically January–June), the Crawfish Shack serves more than 6,000 pounds of crawfish daily. The open-air, red steel building exudes a garage-party-meets-sports-bar energy characterized by football memorabilia on the walls and sports on big-screen TVs. Get ready for boiled crawfish, shrimp, snow crab and sausage with corn, potatoes and mushrooms.

EL CAMPO PINCHERS BOIL'N POT RESTAURANT

With lakeside dining on a large deck and fresh-daily crawfish from their farm, Pinchers is a cut above your average crawfish shack. Just off U.S. Highway 59 South, the restaurant's conspicuous yellow facade and



Left: Carl Kokemor and Isabell Cavazos dig in at a crawfish boil at Repka's in Brookshire.

BYOB. For those who like to get saucy, JuJu's offers three dipping options: red sauce (ketchup and spices), pink sauce (ketchup, mayo and spices) and melted butter.

GALVESTON BENNO'S ON THE BEACH

On the island's far east end, Benno's serves fresh Cajun seafood on an outdoor patio with unencumbered postcard views of the Gulf of Mexico. Sea gulls and pelicans soar on the briny breeze while diners enjoy crawfish, shrimp po'boys, grilled oysters and deep-fried Cajun crabs.

GROVES LARRY'S FRENCH MARKET & CAJUN RESTAURANT

There's nothing like Cajun food and live Cajun music to spice up an evening in the Golden Triangle—an area known for its Cajun influence and anchored by Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange. Tables covered by checkered cloth define the front half of Larry's. Walls are clad with vintage photos of local fishermen and mounted trophy fish. The restaurant's back half enshrines a dance floor featuring live music under a neon glow. Reserve a table on the dance floor and order crawfish in season or step up to the year-round Cajun seafood buffet groaning with fried seafood, frog legs, boudin, étouffée and barbecued crab.

PORT ARANSAS CRAZY CAJUN

This no-frills hot spot for Cajun cuisine has been a favorite among locals and tourists since 1987. Stepping inside the unassuming teal and pink hut reveals a boisterous atmosphere as patrons enjoy heaping mounds of steaming seafood on white butcher-papered tables. The menu is mostly à la carte but features the Hungry Cajun—a spicy sampler

of boiled crab legs, crawfish, shrimp, corn, potatoes and sausage. It's also known for gumbo, shrimp Creole and fresh sourdough bread.

ROCKPORT THE BOILING POT

Strings of colored lights, neon beer logos and loads of kitsch create a partylike setting in this lively establishment celebrating 35 years. Every surface, from the corrugated steel exterior to the inside walls and ceilings, is adorned with graffiti, art and caricatures. Hungry diners don white plastic bibs, smash open crab legs with wooden mallets and polish off loads of Cajun seafood, family-style. It has a sizable beer cooler offering more selections than typical seafood joints. One block from the beach, the fishing pier and marina are also within walking distance.

SANTA FE POOK'S CRAWFISH HOLE

In addition to boiled crawfish, this BYOB shack, about 20 miles west of Galveston, offers deep-fried boudin balls, crawfish pie and gumbo. Expect Pook's to be packed with patrons at wooden octagonal tables peeling crawfish or cracking open huge snow crab legs while listening to live music.

sparkling blue lake beckon passersby to a trifecta eatery, fuel station and RV park. Visitors are greeted by a life-size shark and a large sign inviting them to "EAT TAIL." The novelty lake, complete with ducks, geese and light-up palm trees, sprawls across the restaurant's front. Patrons can walk the adjacent pier, feed the catfish and koi, or watch as the staff bags the purged crawfish.

FANNETT JUJU'S CAJUN CRAWFISH SHAK

JuJu's does one thing and does it right. Along a pastoral stretch of FM 365, 15 miles southwest of Beaumont, JuJu's serves boiled crawfish, corn, potatoes and sausage. Ambiance of the modest red building is defined by exposed plywood walls and a blackboard menu. And it's





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

recipe. Most popular is the Cajun style, which calls for infusing boiled crawfish with peppery spices and serving them with boiled corn and potatoes. Another popular offshoot is the Vietnamese-Cajun style, in which the boiled crustaceans are sautéed with butter, garlic and aromatic ingredients such as lemongrass and citrus.

GETTING THE MUDBUGS The first chapters of crawfish scripture were written in Louisiana's Atchafalaya Basin, where wild harvests began in the 1880s. By the 1950s, cold storage and the introduction of wire crawfish traps boosted harvest volume. Crawfish farmers found they could raise an excellent crop in flooded rice fields and produce consistently larger crops year over year.

WEB EXTRAS

► **Crawfish watch the weather.** Read this story on our website to learn more.

That farming tradition continues with folks like Craig Radley, who converted 50 acres of rice fields near El Campo, in Wharton County Electric Cooperative's service area, into a swampy crawfish heaven.

Radley calls his operation Pinchers Crawfish Farm, and on one sunny afternoon, he readied his flat-bottomed aluminum boat for harvesting mudbugs. He navigated the specially designed craft through the muddy water with help from a hydraulic, cleat-studded wheel that pushed along the slushy bottom.

Radley hoisted each pyramid-shaped, crawfish-filled trap from the water and emptied the catch into a sorting area in front of his cockpit. As he went, he rebaited each trap with commercial crawfish pellets and put it back into the water to capture more.

As he sorted and cleaned his harvest, Radley removed debris and tossed the smaller mudbugs back so they could grow larger. With a full load, he motored back to his nearby seafood restaurant, Pinchers Boil'n Pot. The crawfish are submerged in fresh water for 24 hours to purge them of internal impurities. After that, they get weighed and are ready for their starring role in the restaurant.

Writer and photographer **Eric W. Pohl**, a member of Pedernales EC, lives in Dripping Springs.

Craig Radley of Pinchers Crawfish Farm empties a crawfish trap into a boat's sorting area.

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TEARS FROM A VOLCANO

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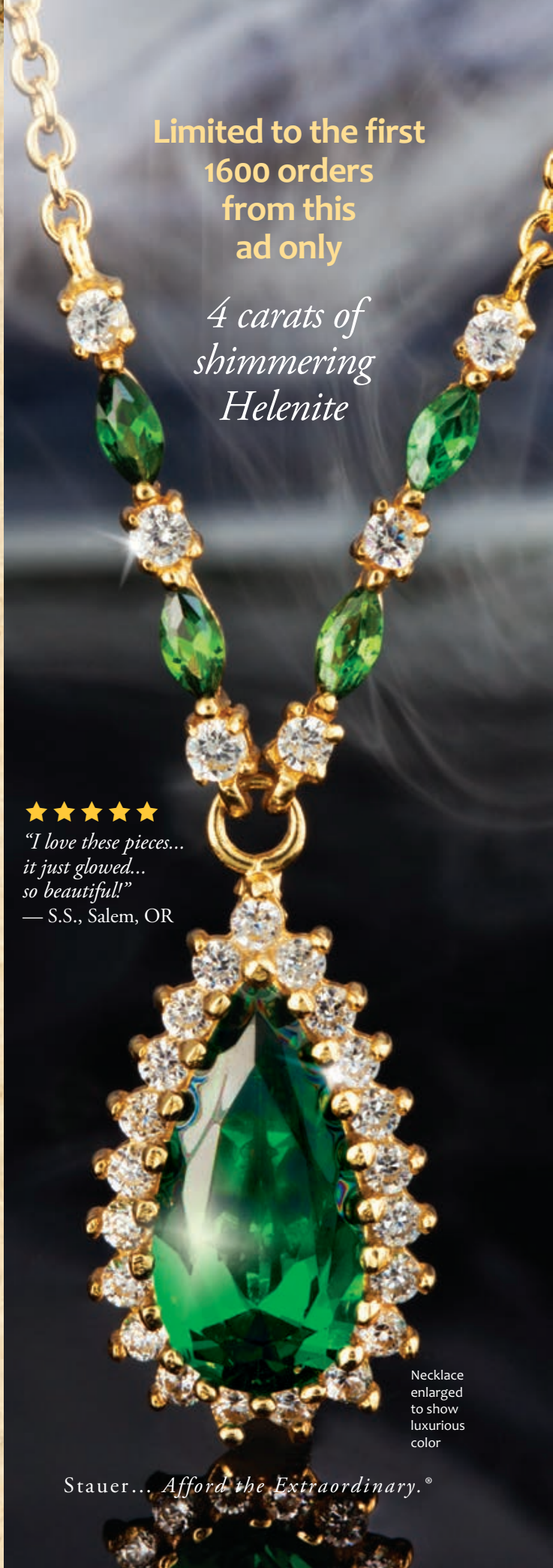
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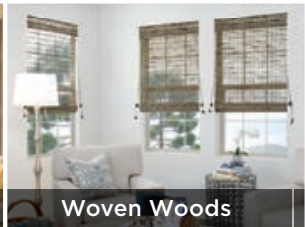
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WATERMELON: THE PRIDE OF LULING

Luling residents love their watermelons. They love eating them, growing them, and celebrating them.

Commercial watermelon production in Luling began in the 1930s and steadily increased until the 1980s, according to Wayne Morse, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent for Caldwell County. “Early watermelon growers found the Luling area had the perfect soil and climate” to grow this West African native fruit, he said.

“It’s all about the soil,” added Skip Richter, another Texas A&M extension agent. “Watermelons like a well-drained, sandy-type soil.”

During the heyday of watermelon production in the Luling area — the 1950s to the 1980s — hundreds of acres produced the large, sweet fruit, with much of it exported to Canada, Morse said. Finding laborers to harvest the fruit became increasingly difficult, and watermelon-craving feral hogs cut into the yield. Although production has decreased, the fruit remains an important part of the city’s history and culture and is a favorite at farmers’ markets and roadside stands, according to Trey Bailey, executive director of the Luling Economic Development Corporation.

The annual Luling Watermelon Thump, which has been held at the end of every June since 1954, continues to draw about 30,000 revelers for food and entertainment. The four-day celebration is the site of the world-champion seed-spitting contest. Plus there’s the parade, presided over by the Thump Queen, a high school junior who is elected by residents.

Best picks: Watermelons to grow in Central Texas

- Black diamond (red flesh, sweet)
- Crimson sweet (crisp, fiberless)
- Charleston gray (juicy heirloom)
- Bush sugar baby (flavorful)
- Jubilee (crisp, flavorful)



Photo: W.D. and Dolphia Bransford, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Purple horsemint

Other common names: Lemon beebalm, lemon mint, plains horsemint, lemon horsemint, horsemint, purple lemon mint

Scientific name: *Monarda citriodora*

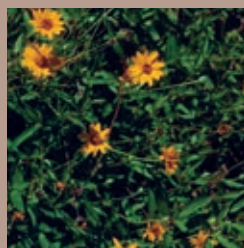
Characteristics: Annual native herb grows 1-2 feet tall with lavender-to-pink tufted flower spikes; when leaves are crushed, plant emits a citrus scent; attracts bees and butterflies

Water requirements: Drought tolerant

More native annuals to consider



Blackfoot daisy
Oenothera speciosa



Zexmenia
Wedelia acapulcensis
var. *hispida*



Desert zinnia
Zinnia acerosa

Photos, above from left: stock image; Andy and Sally Wasowski, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; Stan Shebs, Wikimedia Commons



Lindheimer Muhly grass

Other common names: Creek muhly, big muhly, blue muhly

Scientific name:
Muhlenbergia lindheimeri

Characteristics: Perennial native clumping grass that can grow to 4 feet; its fine foliage takes on a fountain-like form; seed heads are silvery

Light requirements: Does best in full sun

Water requirements: Drought tolerant

Photo: Sam C. Strickland, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

FIELD NOTES

A guide to the flora that flourishes in Central Texas

Texas plants, like Texas residents, generally come in two varieties: natives and transplants.

Despite our sweltering summers, nature has given us more than enough native and adapted flowers, bushes and trees to keep our landscapes looking picture perfect.

Native plants, such as bluebonnets, were born here. They evolved to thrive in our heat, humidity, dry periods and sometimes unforgiving soils. The transplants — such as crape myrtle and shrimp plant — arrived from elsewhere but got to Texas as fast as they could. Some of them have adapted so well and been here long enough that they've put down permanent Texas roots.

In Texas, we know that one size does not fit all. In fact, the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area alone, at 3,800 square miles, is large enough to be in two of the state's 10 "ecoregions," as defined by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In these regions, different soils and conditions accommodate different plants. Sun, shade, drainage and drought tolerance help determine where a particular plant will thrive.

Spring is the most popular time to get growing in Central Texas, although there is plenty to plant in the fall. To help you get started, we've compiled

short profiles and expert tips about what grows best in the Bluebonnet area.

"Have your soil sampled so you know what you're starting with," said Skip Richter, a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent. You can buy a test online or at a local garden center for about \$15, he said. Then mail in your dirt and get a report back telling you the pH (acidity/alkalinity) of your soil, its salt and organic matter content, and whether your dirt is nutrient-heavy or in need of fertilizer.

If you have alkaline soil, but are determined to plant acid-loving azaleas that grow well in states such as Georgia and Alabama, you might have to switch plans, said Lisa Blum, a master gardener in Burleson County. "I have a friend from Louisiana who wanted azaleas" in her garden, Blum said. "I recommended the 'Encore' azaleas because they were specifically developed to be less picky about their soil, and to do well in the heat."

Texas' tough conditions don't make it easy. On top of the weather, some plants come armed, like the razor-sharp fronds of sago palm or the piercing thorns of roses. Preparing soil could call for some hard labor, and bugs (mosquitoes, fire ants) will be after you or your plants (aphids, caterpillars).

Ready to roll up your sleeves?

BY GRETCHEN HEBER

American Beautyberry

Other common names: French mulberry, Spanish mulberry

Scientific name: *Callicarpa americana*

Characteristics: Native shrubby beauty that can grow 6 feet tall and just as wide.

Light requirements: Partial shade; good understory plant

Water requirements: Drought tolerant; wilts if it gets too parched

Photo: Eric Hunt, Wikimedia Commons



FOR THE LOVE OF LOBLOLLY

Among the most revered plant life in Central Texas are the loblolly (*Pinus taeda*) pines of Bastrop County. These towering evergreens can reach 100 feet but typically top out at 50-80 feet tall with a trunk about 3 feet wide. They are fast growers, shooting up about 2 feet each year. They can live more than 150 years.

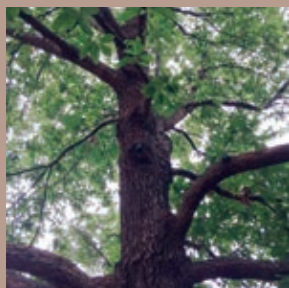
The “lost pines” of Bastrop are a testament to nature’s adaptability. The swatch was once part of a vast expanse of pine trees that covered much of the southeastern United States, including much of East Texas. As the Texas climate became drier over thousands of years, the territory of these pines shrank.

But Bastrop’s sandy and gravelly soils, including a subsurface layer of water-preserving clay and plentiful aquifer-fed springs and seeps, allowed the trees to thrive. They gradually adapted to require 30 percent less rain than loblollies in East Texas and adjacent states. The Bastrop stand is one-of-a-kind, genetically.

“The pines add a uniqueness to our area,” said Rachel Williams Bauer of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

If you’d like to help build the loblolly population by adding a pine or two to your yard, it’s probably best to buy a young sapling from a local nursery center. A 15-gallon container with a 5-foot tree can make a nice addition to your landscape immediately and then grow into a true beauty.

More native trees to consider



Mexican white oak
Quercus polymorpha



Cedar elm
Ulmus crassifolia



Rusty blackhaw
Viburnum rufidulum



Post oak
Quercus stellata

Photos, clockwise from top left: Gretchen Heber; Andy and Sally Wasowski, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; Stephanie Brundage, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; Kathleen Phillips, Texas A&M Agrilife



The Antique Rose Emporium welcomes visitors and shoppers alike to its landscaped gardens.



Rose Emporium photos by Ralph Barrera

Roses can be paired with other Texas natives such as ornamental grasses, said Mike Shoup, a horticulturalist who started the nursery.

THE SWEET SMELL OF OLD ROSES

The Antique Rose Emporium is a fragrant, lush 8-acre floral paradise that draws rose lovers from around Texas and beyond.

Antique roses are typically grown in residential yards on rambling bushes or vines. In contrast, hybrid tea roses are grown commercially, perhaps for inclusion in this month's Valentine's Day bouquets.

The Antique Rose Emporium, located in Independence, about 11 miles north of Brenham, was founded in the mid-1980s by horticulturalist Mike Shoup as a "labor of love." A chance encounter with a spectacular rose clambering with abandon over a chain-link fence led to the enterprise that has rescued dozens of

Antique Rose Emporium

10000 FM 50, Brenham
(979) 836-5548
antiquerosemporium.com

old rose varieties, giving them new life in Texas landscapes.

"These roses were mail-ordered by early Texas settlers to enhance their gardens," Shoup said. The people who lovingly tended their plants and the homes the roses beautified are lost to time, but nature endures. "I was finding roses that were time-tested survivors for a hundred years," he said. "You have a plant that's the best of natural selection."

The nursery and garden have 300-400 rose varieties for sale at any time, some originally imported to Texas. Others are Lone Star State natives. Many were first collected along roadsides or in cemeteries. "Cemeteries are fruitful hunting grounds for these old



The Souvenir de la Malmaison was developed in France in 1843. It's very fragrant and less thorny than some roses.

roses," Shoup said. "They are micro-environments of what will do well in an area."

Shoup and his team develop their own cultivars — plants bred to shine in the Central Texas heat — while highlighting Shoup's favorite qualities: personality and fragrance.

"Old roses embellish the architecture of the home. They're so endearing," Shoup said. "And the fragrance. You can see the tears welling up when a customer smells a certain rose smell."

Many people are intimidated by growing roses, thinking they are fussy, Shoup said. "But they're not. I want to dispel the myth that roses are difficult. They're just not."

He encourages mixing roses in your landscape with other Texas natives. At the Antique Rose Emporium, for example, roses are paired with salvias and ornamental grasses.

A visit to the nursery and garden (open seven days a week) can fill an afternoon. "I don't mind people coming and just hanging out," Shoup said. "That's the spirit of a garden. That's what a garden is for."



Shoup offers hundreds of rose varieties for sale at his nursery in Independence, about 11 miles north of Brenham.

Mike Shoup's rose-growing tips

- Plant in early spring or late fall
- Plant into a mixture of existing soil and compost
- Don't add synthetic fertilizer
- Add plenty of organic matter
- Mulch well around planting site



Drummond's phlox

Other common names:

phlox, annual phlox

Scientific name: *Phlox drummondii*

Characteristics: Annual native herb that grows 6-20 inches tall; displays delicate, 1-inch pink, red, white, peach or lavender flowers

Light requirements: Sun, partial shade

Water requirements: Drought tolerant

TEXAS ECOREGIONS

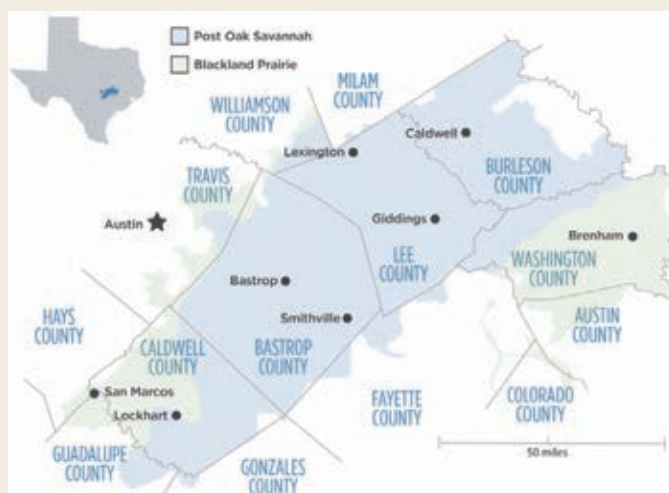
Texans like to boast about the glorious magnitude of our state, and one example is our whopping 10 ecoregions, as determined by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Ecoregions are areas defined by distinctive geography, uniform sun and precipitation. There are variations in climate, topography and landscapes. The state has southern subtropical areas, where palms and citrus grow, and northern temperate areas where you might see fields of daisy-like coreopsis. Some regions can get as much as 56 inches of rain a year, while others are lucky to get eight. Like Texans, our lands are diverse, too.

Plants that grow well in the high desert Big Bend region of Far West Texas — such as the spindly, flowering shrub ocotillo — likely won't do well in Dime Box in Lee County. Most of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's members are in the Post Oak Savannah region (also known as East Central Texas Plains), but much of Washington County and parts of western Caldwell County are in the Blackland Prairie region. Because these ecoregions are next to each other and have similar annual rainfall totals of around 30 inches, plenty of plants will do well in both.

Post Oak Savannah

The Post Oak Savannah region has an arid climate and dense, compact soil with a high clay content. The Post Oak Savannah is mostly gently rolling, wooded plain. The area was historically characterized by high grasses — such as little bluestem, Indiangrass and switchgrass — and wildflowers such as verbena, yarrow and winecup. Clumps of trees such as cedar elm, common persimmon, sugarberry and eastern red cedar punctuate the Post Oak Savannah.



Parts of Bastrop County are in a separate, smaller ecosystem with an unusual, native area of loblolly pine.

Blackland Prairie

This area is known and named for its fertile dark clay soil. Full of nutrients, Blackland Prairie soil is known as some of the richest in the world. The dominant grass of this once tall-grass prairie is little bluestem, but big bluestem, Indiangrass, eastern gammagrass, switchgrass and side oats grama can also be found, according to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. The Blacklands are largely prairieland, but a number of trees have found a home in this region, including pecan, black walnut, sycamore, bur (or burr) oak, cedar elm and Mexican plum.



Photo: Joseph A. Marcus, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Chickasaw plum

Other common name: Sandhill plum

Scientific name: *Prunus angustifolia* 'Marshall'

Characteristics: Native tree grows from 15 to 30 feet tall; produces red fruit that's tasty eaten fresh or in jellies

Light requirements: Full sun, tolerates light shade

Water requirements: Drought tolerant

Carolina buckthorn

Other common names: Carolina false buckthorn, yellow buckthorn, Indian cherry, yellowwood

Scientific name: *Frangula caroliniana*

Characteristics: Deciduous native tree usually grows 12-15 feet tall, but can reach 20 feet; can also be kept pruned to shrub size

Light requirements: Sun, partial shade

Water requirements: Drought tolerant



Photo: Andy and Sally Wasowski, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

More native perennials to consider



Mexican petunia
Ruellia



Yellow bells
Tecoma stans



Autumn sage
Salvia greggii

Photos, above right and above left, Gretchen Heber; center photo, Andy and Sally Wasowski, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



Butterfly weed

Other common names: Butterfly milkweed, orange milkweed, pleurisy root, chigger flower

Scientific name: *Asclepias tuberosa*

Characteristics: Bushy, 1-2 foot perennial produces bright orange flowers attractive to butterflies

Light requirements: Full sun; tolerates light shade, but produces fewer flowers

Water requirements: Drought tolerant

Bluebonnet, LCRA grants assist Burton nonprofit, Carmine VFD

The Lower Colorado River Authority and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative provided two grants in Bluebonnet's service area recently. The grants are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program to give back to the communities it serves. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and a partner in the grant program. Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted in July. More information is available at lcra.org/cdpp.

LCRA and Bluebonnet representatives present a \$21,250 grant to the Burton American Legion Auxiliary 242 for upgrades to the heating and air-conditioning system and accessible parking at the Martin Louis Post 242. Pictured, left to right, are: Nancy Patterson, Auxiliary 242 president; Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board assistant secretary/treasurer; Edna Meyer, Auxiliary 242 commander; Harold Kelm, Auxiliary 242 adjutant; Judith Finke, Auxiliary 242 treasurer; Ronnie Hohlt, Sons of American Legion commander; state Rep. Ben Leman, who represents Washington County; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; John Durrenberger, Washington County judge; Phil Wilson, LCRA general manager; Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet general manager; Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board secretary/treasurer; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Joy Fuchs, Washington County commissioner for Precinct 4; Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet Board chairman; Rodney Maurer, grant writer; Johnny Sanders, Bluebonnet community and development services manager; and Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet community representative.



LCRA and Bluebonnet representatives present a \$25,000 grant to the Carmine Volunteer Fire Department for four new service bays. Pictured, from left to right, are: Kate Holman, LCRA regional affairs representative; Greg Cox, LCRA chief of staff; Jason Carmean, VFD chief and Bluebonnet crew supervisor; Russell Jurk, Bluebonnet Board member; Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet community development representative; Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board assistant secretary/treasurer; William "Daryl" Ray, VFD secretary; Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board secretary/treasurer; Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet general manager; Phil Wilson, LCRA general manager; Joe Weber, Fayette County judge; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Luke Sternadel, Fayette County commissioner; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet community representative; state Rep. Ben Leman, who represents Fayette County; Robbie Tovey, firefighter; Johnny Sanders, Bluebonnet community and development services manager; Dennis Gerland, VFD vice president; and J.C. Pohl, VFD president.

How much energy does a digital assistant use?

Turning off the lights or listening to the news has become as easy as talking out loud for more than 66.5 million U.S. users of voice-activated digital assistants.

Although they require a wireless connection to the internet, now 1 in 4 Americans own a smart speaker, and 40 percent of them have more than one smart speaker at home.

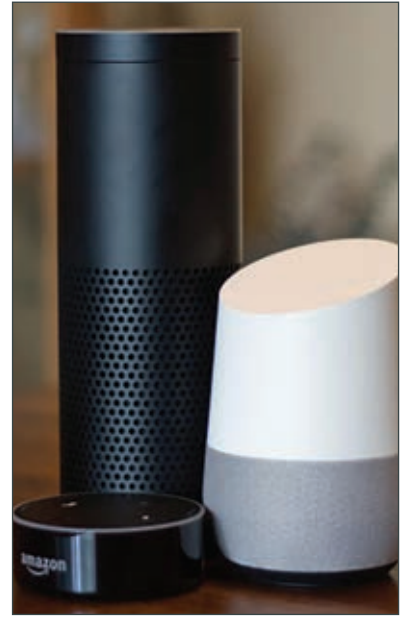
The most popular of these devices is the Amazon Echo, although Google Home products are selling at a rapid rate. Other top brands include Apple's HomePod, the Sonos One and the JBL Link 10.

Google Home starts at about \$129, and the Amazon Echo starts at about \$180. However, there are smaller, more basic versions that can be purchased for \$35-\$50, such as the Amazon Echo Dot and Google Home Mini. These smart speakers can help you set reminders, inform you of today's top news stories, help you order products online, play music and even tell jokes.

As smart speakers become more prevalent, you may be wondering how these products affect your energy bills: Turns out, not a lot.

Tests have shown that the Amazon Echo uses 3 watts of electricity while on standby mode, which means that if the Echo were left on standby mode for one year, it would consume about \$3.15 in electricity. When moderately in use (like telling a joke or playing music at a medium volume), the Echo uses 4 watts. At its highest power use (like playing music at full volume), it uses 6.6 watts; if used consistently at this level, it would consume about \$6.93 of electricity in a year. By comparison, the Google Home uses slightly less energy than the Echo at 2 watts while in standby mode, saving about \$1 a year in total energy costs.

On the other hand, heavy use of a laptop costs about \$10 a year and heavy use of a video game system costs about \$20 a year. See how much power other electronics use with Energy.gov's appliance energy calculator: bit.ly/2iGdxiq.



CONTACT US

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative
P.O. Box 729
Bastrop, TX 78602

Member services: **800-842-7708**, email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or visit one of our five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

OFFICE CLOSING

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Feb. 17 in observance of **Presidents' Day**.

BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet's Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. **Feb. 18** at Bluebonnet's Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop.

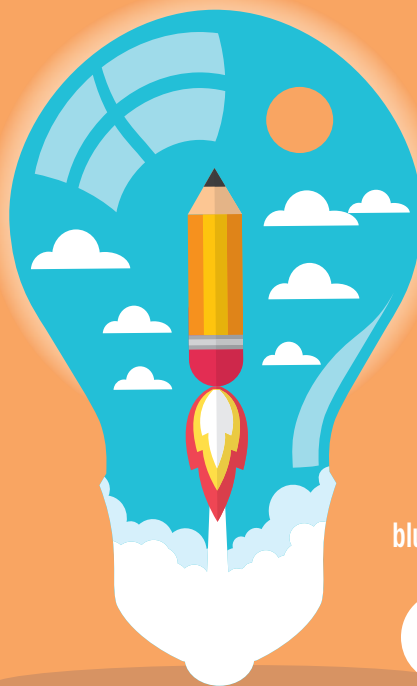
MAGAZINE QUESTIONS?

For inquiries about Bluebonnet's pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine, contact Lisa Ogle at **512-332-7968** or lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.

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83983

Meat and Greet

Two of Texas' legendary pitmasters meet for the first time

STORY AND PHOTO BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

ON AN OVERHEATED SATURDAY IN EARLY October, I drove Roy Perez, the venerable pitmaster at Kreuz Market in Lockhart, and Kreuz Market owner Keith Schmidt to Snow's BBQ in Lexington. Snow's, a tiny barbecue joint in a tiny town, is often mentioned as one of the best barbecue destinations in the state. Of course, Kreuz Market vies for the same title and has been a legendary barbecue purveyor for more than a century.

Roy is the first pitmaster I photographed nearly 25 years ago. Since then, as I created images for two photography books on Texas barbecue, I've had the honor to make more pictures of Roy along with photographs of dozens more folks who do the hot, hard work of making Texas barbecue the best in the world.

Even though Roy remains one of my favorite subjects, I will admit that in the past six years, a rival for my lens's attention has charmed me through several sessions. She is a grand woman named

Tootsie Tomanetz, who handles much of the cooking in the early hours of every Saturday in Lexington. Now in her 80s, Tootsie's fame rivals that of Roy. But

WEB EXTRAS

► Win a copy of Wyatt McSpadden's photography book *Texas BBQ*. Go to TexasCoopPower.com/contests.



neither one lets the acclaim go to their head.

Tootsie arrives at Snow's well before sunup each Saturday and works through lunchtime, exhibiting her natural work ethic as well as a genuine love of people and the pit skills she has honed over decades.

I had set the goal to deliver Roy to Snow's for lunch, so he could meet his fellow barbecue icon, Miss Tootsie. Roy is not widely traveled but agreed to go along.

Once Roy, Keith and I arrived in Lexington, we were greeted by Snow's owner, Kerry Bexley. We enjoyed a brilliant sampling of Snow's smoked goodies.

After lunch, we took a few minutes to capture this image of two barbecue legends who will live forever in the barbecue museum that exists only in my mind.

Wyatt McSpadden's two photography books on Texas barbecue are *Texas BBQ* and *Texas BBQ: Small Town to Downtown*.

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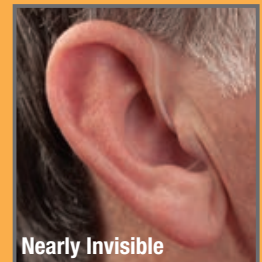
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Forget Chocolate, My Sweetie Likes...



I MOVED TO TEXAS 14 YEARS AGO AND was surprised at first by the amount of fresh, local produce available. Eager to expand my cooking horizons, I embraced all of it in my cooking. On my recipe blog, Stetted, I look to everything that Texas has to offer each season, from summer peaches to winter citrus.

When it comes to desserts, my family gravitates toward anything with fruit—my kids are especially fond of strawberry shortcake any time of year. But when strawberries aren't in season, I look to other ingredients.

Meyer lemons are perfect for celebratory desserts because they are sweeter and less acidic than standard lemons. This Meyer Lemon Meringue Pie is suitable for all tastes, including the littlest valentines in your house. Gingersnaps are used in the crust for a contrasting kick, but you can swap in graham crackers.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Meyer Lemon Meringue Pie

- 1¾ cups crushed gingersnap cookies
- ¼ cup (½ stick) melted butter
- 1⅓ cups plus ¼ cup sugar, divided use
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup Meyer lemon juice
- 4 eggs, separated

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Mix together gingersnaps, melted butter and ¼ cup sugar until well combined. Press mixture into a 9-inch pie dish, using the bottom of a measuring cup or glass to press down, making sure to keep the crust even. Bake crust 10 minutes, then set aside.
3. In a small saucepan over medium

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Forget Chocolate, My Sweetie Likes...



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

LAMONT PETERSEN | NAVARRO COUNTY EC

Our testers enjoyed the winning pie so much that one said it was her new favorite dessert (and she loves chocolate!). It's got everything you want in a coconut pie: rich filling with plenty of coconut flavor, a lightly sweet whipped cream topping and the added kick of freshly toasted coconut on top. Petersen makes it for the senior citizen residents at Brookdale Corsicana. "They rave about this pie," Petersen says, "and the facility administrator thinks it is over the moon!"

Oma's Dreamy Coconut Pie

- 1 9-inch pie crust, premade or homemade
 - 2 cups sweetened coconut flakes, divided use
 - 1½ cups coconut milk (not low-fat)
 - 1½ cups half-and-half
 - 5 egg yolks
 - ¾ cup sugar
 - 4 tablespoons cornstarch
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - ⅛ cup (¼ stick) butter
 - 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
 - 2 teaspoons coconut extract, divided use
 - 2 cups heavy whipping cream
 - ⅛ cup powdered sugar
1. Prebake pie crust and set aside. Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.
 2. Spread ½ cup coconut flakes evenly on a baking sheet. Place sheet in oven 8–10 minutes or until coconut begins to toast. Remove from oven to cool and set aside.

3. Pour coconut milk and half-and-half into a medium-size bowl. Add egg yolks and whisk together. Set aside.
 4. Combine sugar, cornstarch and salt in a medium-size saucepan. Whisk egg mixture into pan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the custard thickens and boils, about 15 minutes. Boil 1 minute. Remove from heat and stir in remaining untoasted coconut flakes, butter, vanilla and 1 teaspoon coconut extract.
 5. Pour filling into pie crust and refrigerate until cool.
 6. Whip cream in a stand mixer on high speed. Once it begins to thicken, add powdered sugar and remaining coconut extract. Mound whipped cream on top of cooled pie. Sprinkle with reserved toasted coconut. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
- Serves 8.

COOK'S TIP A graham cracker pie crust works well, too.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

- heat, whisk together 1 cup sugar, flour, cornstarch, salt, water and lemon juice, and cook until dissolved.
4. Beat egg yolks in a small bowl, then slowly whisk in ¼ cup of the warm sugar mixture. Once combined, slowly whisk egg mixture into the saucepan.
 5. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook about 5 minutes, whisking constantly, until mixture is thick and coats the back of a spoon. Pour filling into prepared crust.
 6. In the bowl of a stand mixer, beat egg whites until frothy. Turn mixer to high and pour in remaining ⅓ cup of sugar. Beat until stiff peaks form.
 7. Spoon meringue onto pie filling, spreading to the edges of the crust to prevent shrinkage. Return the pie to the oven and bake 10–15 minutes, until meringue is lightly browned. Let cool completely before serving. ► Serves 8.

COOK'S TIP Meringue pie is best served as soon as it has cooled but can be stored in the refrigerator. Meringue may release moisture (weep) after being exposed to humidity.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com.

Pecan Pie Muffins

SHARI MCWILLIAMS | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium-size bowl, stir together pecans, brown sugar, flour, baking powder and salt.
2. Add melted butter, eggs and vanilla to bowl and stir to mix well.
3. Spoon batter into a foil-lined muffin pan. (Batter will stick to regular paper muffin cups.) Fill each cup about ¾ full. Bake 20–25 minutes. ► Makes 12 muffins.

COOK'S TIP These will not rise much and the finished product will be flat on top.

\$100 Recipe Contest

July's recipe contest topic is **Hot Off the Grill**. Tell us your favorite way to fire up a dinner of shrimp, steak, ribs, chicken thighs or fish. The deadline is **February 10**. Readers whose recipes are featured will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.



Valentine Stack

MARION EVONIUK | PEDERNALES EC

FILLING

- 8 ounces mascarpone cheese, softened
- 4 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy whipping cream, divided use
- 2 ounces white chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- ½ cups raspberries, plus 5 for garnish

PANCAKES

- 2 cups flour
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1½ cups milk
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, divided use
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

1. FILLING: Add the mascarpone, cream cheese and vanilla into a medium-size glass mixing bowl. Beat with a hand mixer on medium speed until soft and creamy, about 1–2 minutes.

2. Into a small, microwave-safe bowl, add the 2 tablespoons whipping cream and microwave on high 25 seconds. Add the white chocolate and stir until creamy. If necessary, microwave an additional 15–20 seconds to melt chocolate. Immediately add to the cream cheese mixture and beat on medium speed until incorporated, 15–20 seconds.

3. Add the powdered sugar and remaining cup of whipping cream and continue beating an additional 1–2 minutes until mixture is thick and creamy. Do not beat on high or overmix—the mascarpone can separate. Gently fold in 1½ cups raspberries and set aside.

4. PANCAKES: In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Set aside.

5. In a medium-size glass mixing bowl, whisk the eggs slightly, then add the

milk, ¼ cup vegetable oil and vanilla, and whisk to combine. Pour over dry ingredients and, using a large spoon, stir briefly to just incorporate. There will be lumps of dry ingredients. Set aside 10 minutes.

6. If using a griddle to prepare pancakes, preheat it to 350 degrees. Gently stir pancake batter just until combined. Pour 1 tablespoon oil onto griddle or into nonstick pan over medium-high heat and spread it evenly, then pour ½-cup portions of the batter onto the griddle or pan and cook until golden brown, about 2 minutes on each side. Remove pancakes onto a large platter and cover with foil to keep warm.

7. To serve, place one pancake onto a serving platter and spread it with ⅓–½ cup of the filling. Place another pancake on top and continue layering the filling and pancakes until you've used up the pancakes. Top with remaining filling and garnish with remaining raspberries. Serve immediately. ▶ Serves 4–6.

TEXAS COOP POWER

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SHARPENING MY HISTORY

Chet Garner pokes around the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.

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WE KNOW THE POWER of a good country song, and rocker Huey Lewis knows the power of love—but we wondered how power moves Texans. Here are some of the ways. **GRACE FULTZ**

WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.

◀ **DANNY PICKENS**, Cherokee County EC: “A Ferris wheel at the East Texas Fair is powered up for fun.”

▼ **LAUREN MCCLAIN**, PenTex Energy: “Abigail McClain, 6, shows Mom how a pushup is done.”



▼ **JIM BROWDER**, HILCO EC: “A woodpecker inspects a HILCO power line.”



◀ **JACQUELINE ACUFF**, Nueces EC: “Lightning shows the power of nature right in my backyard.”

▼ **MARK HUSFELD**, Navasota Valley EC: Near a substation in Navasota after a thunderstorm.



UPCOMING CONTESTS

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JULY EXPLORATION	DUE MARCH 10
AUGUST ON THE WATER	DUE APRIL 10

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.

Pick of the Month Michael Carbonaro Magic Show

Victoria February 15
(361) 788-9271, visdfoundation.org

Michael Carbonaro is known for his hidden-camera magic. His illusions, along with his absurd, matter-of-fact explanations, leave audiences bewildered. Proceeds from this show support the Victoria Independent School District.



February

7

Alpine [7-9, 14-16] Nat Turner in Jerusalem, (432) 837-8218, sulross.edu/theatre

Fredericksburg [7-23] Wine Lovers Celebration, (872) 216-9463, texaswinetrail.com

8

Avoca Swedish Smorgasbord, (325) 668-2796

Lufkin The Choir of Man, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

9

Bandera St. Stanislaus Church Faith Heritage Dinner, (830) 460-4712, ststanislausbandera.com

14

Luckenbach [14-15] Hug-In and Valentine Ball, (830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

Port Lavaca [14-15] South Texas Square & Round Dance Association February Frenzy, (361) 575-2665, stsrda.org

February 21-23
New Braunfels
Troutfest Texas



15

Fredericksburg Cave Creek School Open House, (830) 990-1017, historicsschools.org

Richardson Mu Delta Alpha Changemaker Award Dinner, (469) 712-7716, mudeltaalpha.org/events

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16

Harlingen Ms. South Texas Senior America Pageant, (956) 357-1636

20

Edinburg [20-23] Fiesta Edinburg, (956) 383-4974, edinburg.com/events

Nocona [20-23] Mardi Gras Nocona Style, (940) 825-3526, nocona.org

21

Alpine [21-22] Lone Star Cowboy Poetry Gathering, (432) 216-2167, lonestarcowboypoetry.com

Brenham [21-22] Nature's Blessings Quilt Show, (979) 525-1128, friendshipquiltguild.weebly.com

New Braunfels [21-23] Troutfest Texas 2020, (830) 964-3455, grtu.org/troutfest

22

Crockett *One Night in Memphis*, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

Boerne [22-23] Spring Antiques Show, (830) 329-2870, visitboerne.org

27

Boerne [27-29] Just Between Friends Sale,

(830) 282-6133, nwsanantonio.jbfsale.com

Brownsville [27-29] Sombrero Festival, (956) 550-9682, sombrerofestival.com

28

Luckenbach Barbara Leatherwood Fight for the Cure Concert for Ovarian Cancer, (254) 833-2444, luckenbachtexas.com



February 27-29
Brownsville
Sombrero Festival

New Braunfels Lone Bellow: Half Moon Light Tour, (830) 606-1281, gruenehall.com

29

Streetman Southern Oaks VFD Chili Supper/Cake Auction, (903) 599-6022

Wichita Falls Red River Valley Square & Round Dance Association Teen Scholarship Dance, (940) 733-2782, rrvsda.org

March

6

Marble Falls [6-7] Austin Square and Round Dance Association Square Thru the Wildflowers, (830) 613-9054, asrda.org

7

Crockett Jeanne Robertson, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

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The Height of Deceit

Oil boom scam created world's littlest skyscraper in Wichita Falls

WHETHER IT'S HATS, TRUCKS OR HAIR, WE Texans expect things to be big. So when I saw a building in Wichita Falls advertised as the world's littlest skyscraper, it piqued my interest in a Texas-sized way.

I was amazed at the revitalization in downtown Wichita Falls, which includes a craft brewery, a farmers market and a fancy chocolatier. At the northern edge of downtown, I found my destination: the Newby-McMahon Building.

From the street, the building looked like a well-kept, historic single-story structure. A glance down the alley identified the addition of a thin, four-story tower—like an elevator shaft built for floors never completed. The tower looks strange, but the story of its origin is even stranger.

To unravel the mystery, I walked into the building that now houses Hello Again, a consignment shop whose owner encourages visitors to climb the world's littlest skyscraper. I found the thin staircase with a sign directing me upward. Even though I felt like I had stepped into a large closet, I was actually inside the skyscraper. It measures only 9 feet by 12 feet. I climbed three flights of stairs and arrived at the top floor museum that recounts an epic tale of swindling, greed and manipulation.

The story began in 1918, when the oil boom hit nearby Burkburnett. The town was rocked by overnight success, but most of the deals took shape in Wichita Falls, which was desperate for office space. J.D. McMahon proposed a solution that included what he described as the business



Chet makes sure you can't miss the world's littlest skyscraper.

opportunity of a lifetime. McMahon pitched the city's residents on a skyscraper that would be 480 feet high—the tallest in Texas and rivaling the tallest in the world. Investors were eager, and McMahon raised \$200,000 (well over \$3 million in today's money).

Construction started and questions soon followed. The building was not as "Texas-sized" as promised. Instead of the monumental structure the investors expected, they received a skinny tower with no elevator or stairs. The investors were enraged and sued McMahon for fraud.

When the judge reviewed the approved blueprints, he found that everything was in order and that the building was being built exactly according to plan. The final plan was laid out and approved—in inches instead of feet. So, instead of getting the 480-foot skyscraper investors had dreamed of, builders erected a 480-inch embarrassment. McMahon had executed the con of the century by simply adding an apostrophe. Turns out that when people see dollar

signs, they tend to overlook punctuation.

The angry investors wanted to tear the building down immediately, but before the demolition took place, a nationally syndicated newspaper column called Ripley's Believe It or Not dubbed the ill-conceived project the world's littlest skyscraper. That publicity quickly transformed the eyesore into an international tourist attraction.

I stood at the top of the diminutive structure that now sits in the shadow of taller buildings and wondered how this skyscraper, if it had been built to expectations, might have changed the trajectory of Wichita Falls. Would it now sit abandoned? Or would Wichita Falls have become a city more like Dallas?

The world will never know. But what is certain is how much fun it is to climb the world's littlest skyscraper and take in one of the littlest views in Texas.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

WEB EXTRAS ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video of his visit to the world's littlest skyscraper.

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2000	MAX. STARTING WATTS	2000	
1600	RUNNING WATTS	1600	
61 dB	NOISE LEVEL	59 dB	
48 LBS.	WEIGHT	45.6 LBS.	
1.2 GAL.	TANK SIZE	.95 GAL.	
3	OUTLETS	3	
YES	OVERLOAD PROTECTION	YES	
79.7 cc	ENGINE SIZE	90.5 cc	
YES	LOW OIL ALERT	YES	
YES	PARALLEL CAPABLE	YES	
YES	POWER SAVER	YES	



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30", 4 DRAWER TECH CARTS

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FLUX 125 WELDER

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BADLAND SUPER COUPON

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

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- 11-1/8" L x 4-1/2" H

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MODEL: 1125220

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

COMPARE TO HONDA \$329.99
MODEL: 6X200UT20X2

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

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HaulMaster SUPER COUPON

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

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