

COTTON GINS TRANSFORM
THE LANDSCAPE

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COLORADO PRIDE

CHET BRAVES
THE GHOST ROAD

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

JULY 2022

Texas' Best Bird

Kreuz Market
serves up superb
barbecued chicken

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18

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July 2022



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Prized Fibers

Cotton gins still turn sweat and tears into a treasured commodity.

Story and photos by Julia Robinson

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Because Kreuz Market has perfected the once-scorned barbecued bird.

*By Joe Nick Patoski
Photos by Wyatt McSpadden*

ON THE COVER

Chicken that pitmaster Roy Perez describes this way: "Simple. With love."

Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

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Jerry Harris inspects raw cotton at King Mesa Gin.

Photo by Julia Robinson

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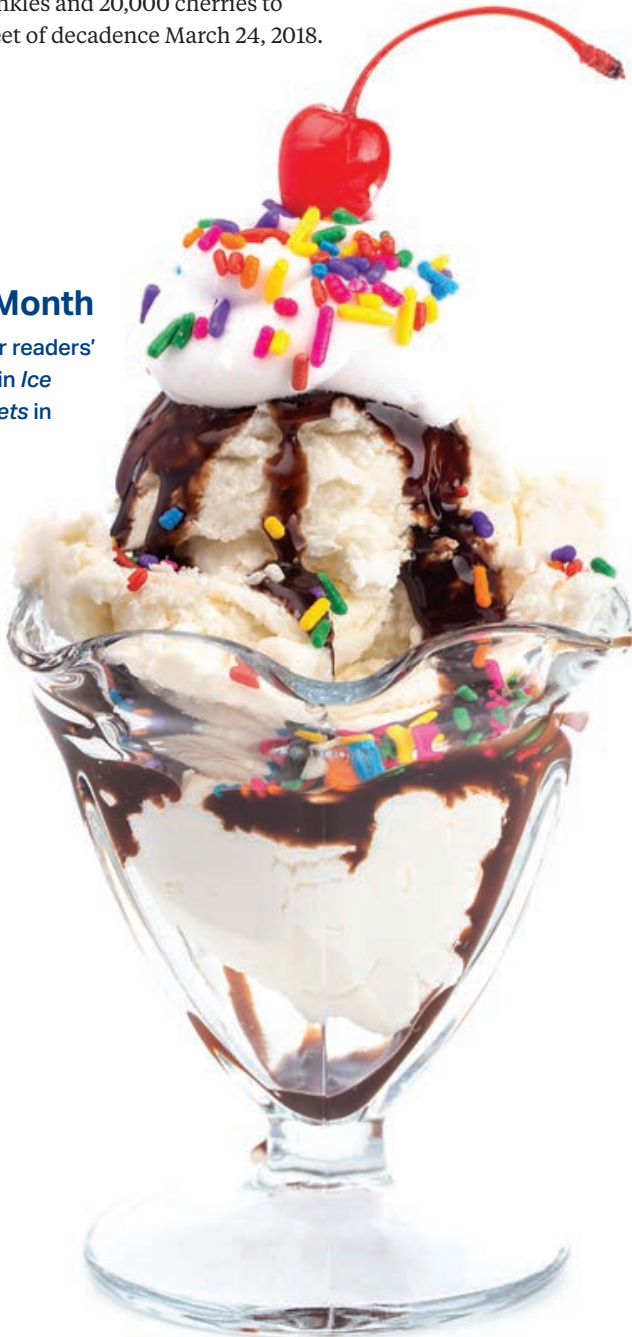
Sundae Best

THE WORLD'S LONGEST ice cream sundae—more than 15 football fields long—was concocted four years ago in College Station.

The creators at the Spirit of Texas Festival used 500 gallons of H-E-B Texans Tackle Crackle ice cream, 2,000 cans of whipped cream, 300 gallons of chocolate and strawberry syrup, 25 pounds of sprinkles and 20,000 cherries to assemble 4,549 feet of decadence March 24, 2018.

July National Ice Cream Month

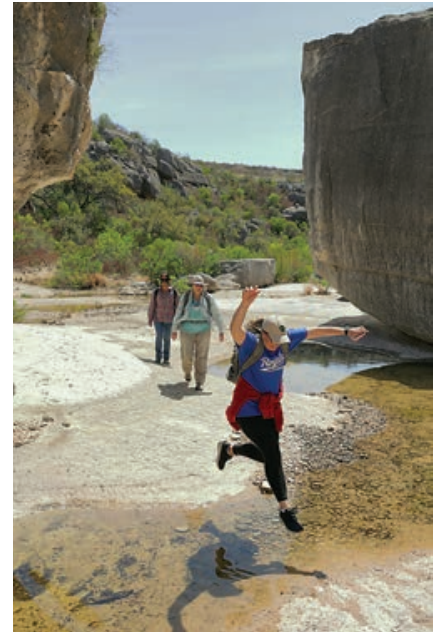
Celebrate with our readers' recipes, featured in *Ice Creams and Sorbets* in July 2021.



WORKING FROM HOME?

Save electricity by unplugging your least-used devices—printers and scanners—when you don't need them.

Your electric cooperative is in the people business; it just happens to sell power. The less you use, the more you'll save.



Dig This

Texas Co-op Power readers ... well, they rock.

One reader, inspired by an October 2021 story, donated \$20,000 to a research program in South Texas.

Learning Rocks featured a Shumla Archaeological Research and Education Center program, above, involving high school students in Comstock. The donation will help Shumla purchase a camera with accessories, scaffolding to help students photograph rock art and tablets for data entry.



HQ TX

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News Flash

LIGHTNING OVER TEXAS reached a long way, though not to the ground.

A storm April 29, 2020, produced a bolt that stretched a record 477 miles, from Southeast Texas to Mississippi. Scientists used satellite technology to confirm the record in February.

Also this year, Flatonia, a small town about halfway between Houston and San Antonio, was announced as the lightning capital of the U.S. Vaisala, a weather measurement and analysis company, determined that Flatonia received 1,043 lightning events per square mile in 2021—more than any other city in the country.



FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I FEEL
PATRIOTIC
WHEN ...

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 May prompt: **Three words that brighten my day are ...**

I love you.

SANDRA BOWEN
BIG COUNTRY EC
HAWLEY

Ice cold beer.

STEPHEN SEWELL
PEDERNALES EC
KEMPNER

I've got this. (A nice young man ahead of me in line at 7-Eleven this morning decided to pay for my juice and coffee.)

LINDA RIDEOUT
VIA FACEBOOK

To see more responses, read Currents online.



BRAVE UNION

A Deep Dive

“What a fascinating story about a fascinating aspect of our state. I was amazed to learn such a unique place exists in the Lone Star State.”

DONALD HAHN
HAMILTON COUNTY EC
HICO

Hope Lives On

To find that the photo of the Wantland family was taken inside what was the old Hope Lutheran Church of Buckholts really took my breath away [*'A Little Source of Joy,'* May 2022].

Our family were members of Hope Lutheran, and our daughter's wedding was the last one before the old church was hauled off to the pasture of the man who purchased it to use as a barn. The building was later cut into several pieces and moved to Round Top to be restored and used as a children's library.

Lamerle Zajicek
Lucas



ERICH SCHLEGEL

I love Ms. Dolly, not only for her music [*'A Little Source of Joy,'* May 2022]. She has done so much for the community she grew up in.

SHERRI CONSTABLE
VIA FACEBOOK

It Takes the Cake

The Texas Praline Sheet Cake featured in March was one of the most amazing cakes I've ever made. It was a big hit on our Easter table.

I've made several of the recipes featured in the magazine over the years and really liked them all, but this cake takes the cake.

Cindi Boyd
Medina EC
Freer

A Great Mix

I love your magazine. I am always surprised at how much you get into so few pages. And it's a great mix of heartfelt stories, usable information, wonderful recipes and beautiful pictures. You represent our state well.

Anita Askew
Pedernales EC
Wimberley

Along Those Lines

As a child in the 1940s and '50s, we would travel between Vernon and Amarillo. There were always hundreds of scissor-tailed flycatchers on the electric lines [*Scissortail Signals,* April 2022]. My favorite bird. I love them.

Penny Haulman
Via Facebook

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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Texas' cotton gins have turned more sweat and tears into lint than

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

At times the fabric of Texas' economy has been 100% cotton. The availability of cotton products, though, belies a complicated transformation.

"Blood, sweat and tears," says Kirk Tidwell, a cotton farmer in Lamesa, about halfway between Lubbock and Midland. "There's a lot of tears sometimes."

"There's just so much risk; we don't know from the day we plant it if it's ever going to make it to harvest or not," says Tidwell, who also serves on the board of directors at Lyntegar Electric Cooperative. "We may lose it to a hailstorm or a sandstorm or an early freeze. We're always just hopeful."

That cotton-hope blend—formed by a lot of hard work and a little luck—has not frayed much over two centuries. Times are still tough for cotton farmers, but cotton gins are still going. Texas had 4,300 gins in 1900; 185 operate today,

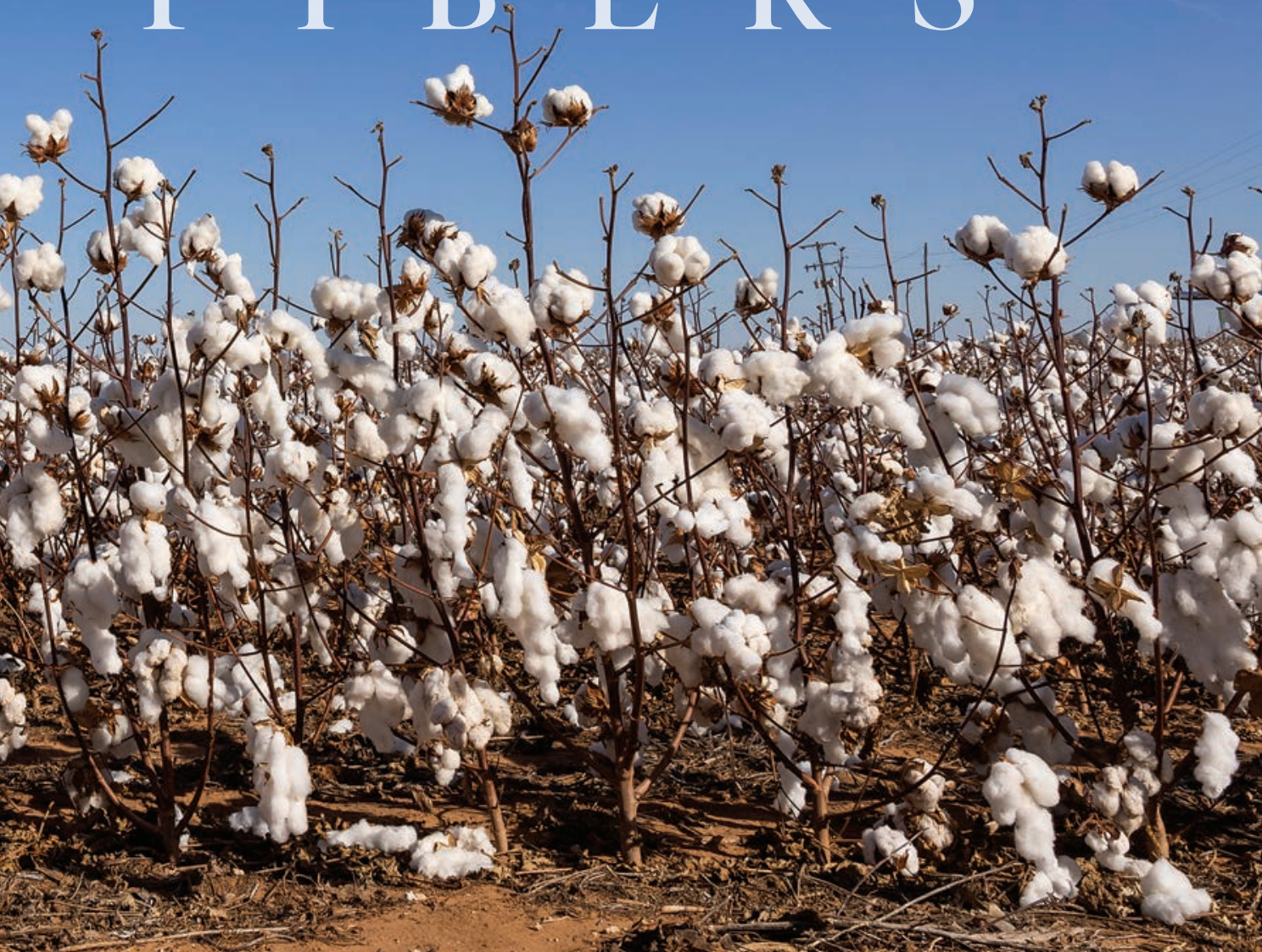
according to the Texas Cotton Ginners' Association.

"I would guess half of those are on the way out," says Jerry Harris, general manager of King Mesa Gin in Lamesa.

"As the number of gins go down, the number of bales ginned stays the same or goes up," Harris says as 18-wheelers pull onto scales with round bales bound in colorful plastic. "There used to be a gin every 6 miles because that's as far as people wanted to carry their crop, but now people will come hundreds of miles with a crop."

Spanish missionaries were the first to raise cotton in Texas. By 1821, Anglo colonists turned to the crop in earnest, reaping profits and building an industry by relying on the labor of enslaved people. Cotton drove the state's economy until the 20th century. Today it thrives in several areas of the state, and the South Plains region around Lubbock, where Tidwell farms, devotes more land to growing cotton than any other part of the world—as much as 3 million acres some years. Irrigation and easy weed control make

F I B E R S =



any other state for 150 years—and they're still innovating

growing cotton there more productive than in other parts of the state.

Starting at Odessa and going north up the Panhandle, the soil turns reddish brown as fields of cotton spread beneath the pump jacks and wind turbines that dominate the horizon. It's a geography of vast spaces—"so flat that your dog can run away, and you'll still see him a week later," a Texas congressman once said—and the white bolls in tidy rows are set off dramatically against unblemished blue skies.

Since 1850, Texas has led the nation in cotton production, tallying 8 million bales in 2021, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Every one of those bales is processed at a cotton gin, where bolls move through machines that separate the embedded seeds, which are about the size of a grain of rice, from the prized fiber, which is called lint. Cotton production at this scale is possible only because of the gins that dot the state.



TOP The South Plains region around Lubbock devotes more land to growing cotton than any other part of the world. ABOVE A handful of cotton seed left over after the ginning process.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Kirk Tidwell raises cotton on 6,500 acres in Lamesa. An 1833 hand-operated cotton gin. Jerry Harris runs King Mesa Gin in Lamesa. Curtis Stewart, manager at Spade Co-op Gin northwest of Lubbock, catches cotton seeds as they fall through a gin's spinning blades.

The largest gin in the world, Adobe Walls Gin in Spearman, about 35 miles from the Oklahoma border, produces 300,000 bales per year. Operations were much smaller during fall and winter harvests generations ago, when cotton gins became gathering places where farmers socialized and shared news while waiting their turn to have their crops baled. Those days could be stressful.

“There was a lot riding on the processing and selling of your cotton,” says Andrew Torget, a University of North Texas professor and author of *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850*. “This is an industry where you basically have one payday. The emotional tenor of that was tremendous. How much profit you had, what you could buy your kids or couldn’t for the coming year—all these things got concentrated in this one location and this one experience for farmers.

“Today we like to look back with a sort of bucolic romanticism about things that are unfamiliar to us, but I think we forget the terrors and the fears and the helplessness that sometimes accompany those experiences.”

Still, gins greatly eased much of the anxiety of cotton farming, which in the early days of our state was only possible because of labor by enslaved people. It takes 10 hours for one person to remove enough seeds by hand to get 1 pound of lint. “Cotton has this problem that the seeds are stuck inside this prison of fibers,” Torget says. “How you get those out is a real bottleneck because doing it by hand means you can’t do it at scale.”

Early gins used hand-cranked stone or iron rollers to separate the seeds from the fiber and could process 5 pounds of lint per day. In 1794, Eli Whitney designed a machine, a cylinder with spikes that pulled lint clean from the seed as it was cranked, that increased production to 50 pounds per day.

Two years later, Henry Ogden Holmes patented a design that increased the output to thousands of pounds per day with a set of spinning saw teeth on a circular steel blade that pulled lint from seeds in a continuous motion. This design



Since 1850, Texas has led the nation in cotton production, tallying 8 million bales in 2021.

year. In 1915 it pressed nearly 1,000 bales.

“We would have been serving 60 farmers in a really good day,” says Tynan Shadle, the museum’s programs coordinator and a member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. Teams and wagons full of cotton would wait their turn—first come, first served—in the yard. Some farmers camped out the night before; some would unload in the morning and return in the afternoon with another load.

The gin featured pneumatic tubes that inhaled the raw cotton and blew it through the entire ginning process, an innovation that came from Robert Munger of nearby Ruttersville. The system is still used today in gins around the world.

Nothing from cotton was wasted in those days. Seed was separated from the lint and delivered back into the farmer’s wagon to plant for the next year. Sometimes the gin bought it to use as livestock feed or to press into oil.

The Burton gin continued operations until 1974, when it closed its doors after producing only seven bales that year. Lint cleaning, feed milling and other services had kept the facility going longer than most, but its time had come.

“We’ve seen boll weevil infestations lead to crop failures, two world wars taking men off the farms, and then the GI Bill, which gave those returning men better opportunities,” Shadle says. “We saw a mass exodus from farms.

“Cotton was just not able to make enough money, and so it was more profitable to switch back to cattle. Not too long after that, they began finding natural gas in the area, too.”

A community group formed a nonprofit and began restoring the Burton Farmers Gin in 1990. It’s the oldest operating cotton gin in the U.S. and is a Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Out in Lamesa, King Mesa Gin, which operates around the clock at times to keep up with the 7 tons of raw cotton delivered several times a day by truck, is the only gin in the U.S. to offer DNA tracing to its producers, ensuring the same cotton that’s sent overseas for manufacturing is the same cotton in the finished product on store shelves.

In 2019, Texas growers were responsible for three-quarters of all American organic cotton, which is grown using more sustainable practices. “Where you’re sitting right now is in a hundred-mile circle of the most organic cotton grown in the U.S.,” says Harris, a member of Lyntegar EC.

For Tidwell, becoming part owner of King Mesa just made sense for ensuring his livelihood.

“We went in together as a community to keep the gin in the community, under our control and to do it the way we’ve always done it,” he explains from his knee-high cotton field. “I only get paid once a year, and this is my payday right here.” ■

is still used in modern cotton ginning. Gin designs and innovations proliferated across the South, and daisy chains of gins began to be operated by animal and water power.

Visitors to the Texas Cotton Gin Museum in Burton, halfway between Austin and Houston, can see some of this history up close, including an open stand that reveals 80 saw blades that spin vertically through metal ribs. A group of local German farmers sold \$50 shares, raising \$10,000 to build the Burton Farmers Gin in 1913. The gin fired up for the first time August 3, 1914, and produced 82 bales that



Roy Perez, general manager and head pitmaster at Kreuz Market in Lockhart.

WHY'D THE CHICKEN CROSS THE PIT?

Because Kreuz Market has perfected the once-scorned barbecued bird

THE **poor barbecued chicken.**

The holy trinity of Texas barbecue consists of beef brisket, pork ribs and sausage. Other meats pulled from pits around these parts include prime rib, pork chops and giant beef.

Barbecued yardbird? Not so much. Even the generic turkey breast gets more 'cue love.

Traditionally, slow-smoked chicken has been regarded as too tricky to cook consistently, the end product either undercooked with too much red visible or overcooked to a dryness rivaling jerky.

Chicken, it would seem, is meant to be fried, roasted on a rotisserie or grilled in the Mexican style of the El Pollo Loco and Pollo Regio franchises.

For the past 10 years, however, the best barbecued chicken in Texas has been turned out quietly, as something of an afterthought—an almost under-the-counter thing—in one of the most obvious places on Earth: Kreuz Market in Lockhart, one of the temples of Texas barbecue.

Moist and tender, every morsel packs savory-sweet smoked flavor, enveloped by deep-bronzed skin that's crispy, not greasy.

Full disclosure: "Best barbecue" is a loaded phrase, I know. But that's how my friend Wyatt McSpadden described the whole chicken wrapped in butcher paper he brought me when I was bedridden following a hospital stay last year. I didn't open the sack until about three hours after he left. When I did, bells rang and the lights started flashing.

Chicken!

I was part of the original *Texas Monthly* barbecue team for the magazine's top-50 barbecue joints ranking in 1997 and 2003. Barbecued chicken was never part of the discussion on either top-50 quest.

McSpadden photographed some of the top-50 locations, and today he's known as one of the foremost photographers

of Texas barbecue, capturing pitmasters including Austin's Aaron Franklin and Lexington's Tootsie Tomanetz and sampling their esteemed meats.

I met him at Kreuz Market to gauge his assessment, and now I'm willing to stick my neck out and declare it's the best.

Roy Perez chuckles when he hears that.

He says he started tinkering with yardbirds 10 years ago, after noting a number of customers—typically first-timers—asking about chicken. "It wasn't on the menu for years," he says. "We got tired of people asking, 'You got chicken?' and 'You ain't got chicken?' In my head, I went, 'You want chicken? We got Golden Chick, Chicken Express, all these chicken places.'"

But those are fried, not slow-smoked.

"There's something about barbecued chicken that's different," he says. "It just came to me: 'Can I do chicken?' I thought: Let's throw it on there and mess with it, see how it turns out."

As general manager and head pitmaster at Kreuz and with 35 years' experience, the mutton-chopped Perez is renowned for turning out top-shelf brisket as well as exceptional pork ribs, dino beef ribs and sausage.

But a hands-on approach to minding the pit and trial and error led him to consistently turn out slow-smoked birds that are moist and flavorful throughout. His favorite part? "I've always liked the thigh," he says. "We're old-school. As you can see, I'm sitting here keeping my eyes on this fire instead of sitting in an office somewhere."

Perez says he learned the pitmaster trade from Rick Schmidt, one of the owners at Kreuz Market when he started, back in 1987. Chicken takes as much skill as any of the cuts that Kreuz is known for.

"You've got to stay on it, take care of it," Perez says. "Keep an eye on it, twist on the leg to see if it's still tender and still needs more cooking. It's all visual. We don't use thermometers."

Still, most barbecue pit bosses don't share his respect for the craft.

"These guys laugh when we're cooking the chicken," Perez



CHOICE CHICKEN

We asked electric cooperative employees where they get their barbecued bird. Here are a few of their favorite spots.

Mimsy's Craft Barbecue, Crockett
Lockhart Smokehouse, Dallas
Iceman's BBQ, Edgewood
Stiky Ribz, Forney
Bar-B-Que To-Go, Ganado
Heavy's Bar-B-Que, Hondo
Back Porch BBQ & Grill, La Grange
Cooper's Old Time Pit Bar-B-Que, Llano
The Smoking Oak, Mercedes
Mack's Split Rail BBQ, Mineola
Judge Hunt's BBQ, Quitman
Hickory Roots BBQ, Terrell

Slow-smoked chicken at Kreuz Market.

Roy Perez's method emphasizes simplicity: about two hours of cooking time at about 300 degrees.

says. "I'll say, 'Those are ready.' 'No, they're not!' I'll say 'OK, get a thermometer so we can check the internal temperature.' Sure enough, they'll poke it and say, 'How did you do that?'"

"With my years of experience, I don't need nothing to tell me this is done or this is not done. You got to make sure how it all comes out because people travel from all over. Even the locals—you don't want to let them down."

His method emphasizes simplicity: about two hours of cooking time at about 300 degrees.

"Put it in the back, let it cook slowly. When you know it's ready, take it off, put it in a container with the lid to keep the moisture in," Perez says. "It's such a little piece of meat; you have to keep an eye on it. You can't walk away like you can with a brisket."

The wood that provides the heat in Perez's pit is post oak. The seasoning, he says, "is no secret: just salt and pepper, a little cayenne, chili powder—same way we do our brisket." But timing is everything. "You can't sell it too early. If it's got blood in there, people might get sick. You can't sell it too late."

Kreuz was famous for not providing barbecue sauce as a condiment; the establishment has never used sauce in the cooking process, no matter the meat.

"It's cheating," Perez says. "It's a quick way out. Here we've

always been, 'Don't put nothing on it. Eat it, try it before you start covering it up with sauce.' Simple. With love. Everything else will take care of itself."

This is barbecue I can eat almost every day.

Hipster barbecue fetishists in search of the exotic tend to bypass the bird. Perez says it's because most young folks don't have the time or patience to slow-smoke chicken.

"They don't want to cook something that you have to babysit," he says. "They want to throw on a big brisket, a big clod, big rack of ribs, ring of sausage, pork chops. Then you get a little chicken—'Man, I don't want to sit here all day—it's hot!'"

Only one of Kreuz Market's eight pits accommodates chicken. The other pits, where briskets are cooking at 700 degrees, are too hot. Chicken sales have steadily increased, Perez says, despite a determined lack of emphasis on the product.

"We don't cook much of it," he says. "We're not known for chicken. The old people who have been coming for years don't order chicken. They don't want something new or different. They're set in their ways."

For the rest of us though, there's a whole other reason for making a barbecue pilgrimage to Lockhart: Roy Perez's barbecued chicken. ■

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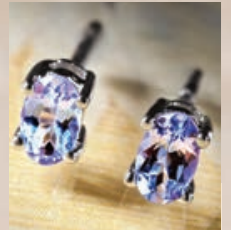
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"This ring is incredibly beautiful — the pictures do not do it justice! ...well worth the price."
— K. M., Palm Coast, FL

African Gem Cutter Makes \$2,689,000 Mistake... Will You?

This story breaks my heart every time. Allegedly, just two years after the discovery of tanzanite in 1967, a Maasai tribesman knocked on the door of a gem cutter's office in Nairobi. The Maasai had brought along an enormous chunk of tanzanite and he was looking to sell. His asking price? Fifty dollars. But the gem cutter was suspicious and assumed that a stone so large could only be glass. The cutter told the tribesman, no thanks, and sent him on his way. Huge mistake. It turns out that the gem was genuine and would have easily dwarfed the world's largest cut tanzanite at the time. Based on common pricing, that "chunk" could have been worth close to \$3,000,000! The tanzanite gem cutter missed his chance to hit the jeweler's jackpot ... and make history. Would you have made the same mistake then? Will you make it today?

In the decades since its discovery, tanzanite has become one of the world's most coveted gemstones. Found in only one remote place on Earth (in Tanzania's Merelani Hills, in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro), the precious purple stone is 1,000 times rarer than diamonds. Luxury retailers have been quick to sound the alarm, warning that supplies of tanzanite will not last forever. And in this case, they're right. Once the last purple gem is pulled from the Earth, that's it. No more tanzanite. Most believe that we only have a twenty year supply left, which is why it's so amazing for us to offer this incredible price break. Some retailers along Fifth Avenue are more than happy to charge you outrageous prices for this rarity.

Not Stauer. Staying true to our contrarian nature, we've decided to lower the price of one of the world's rarest and most popular gemstones.

This stunning two-total carat Sunburst Tanzanite Ring features marquise-cut gems set dramatically in gorgeous sterling silver. Each facet sparkles with the distinct violet-blue hue of the precious stones. But we don't stop there. While supplies last, we'll include these tanzanite studs **FREE** with your purchase of the ring — a \$99 value!

Limited Availability. We only have ~~1200~~, 954 left for this ad only. Of course, your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. If you are not completely aglow with the Sunburst Tanzanite Ring, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price. But, please don't wait, our supply is dropping rapidly.

Jewelry Specifications:

- 2 ctw genuine tanzanite set in .925 sterling silver setting; whole sizes 5–10

Sunburst Tanzanite Ring (2 ctw) ~~\$349~~ \$79* + S&P **Save \$270**
Plus FREE Tanzanite Studs (½ ctw) with your purchase of the Sunburst Tanzanite Ring — a \$99 value!

*Special price only for customers using the offer code.

1-800-333-2045

Your Offer Code: TZR664-12

Stauer, 14101 Southcross Drive W., Ste 155, Dept. TZR664-12, Burnsville, MN 55337 www.stauer.com

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The Invention of the Year

The world's lightest and most portable mobility device

Once in a lifetime, a product comes along that truly moves people. Introducing the future of battery-powered personal transportation . . . **The Zinger.**

Throughout the ages, there have been many important advances in mobility. Canes, walkers, rollators, and scooters were created to help people with mobility issues get around and retain their independence. Lately, however, there haven't been any new improvements to these existing products or developments in this field. Until now. Recently, an innovative design engineer who's developed one of the world's most popular products created a completely new breakthrough . . . a personal electric vehicle. It's called the **Zinger**, and there is nothing out there quite like it.

"What my wife especially loves is it gives her back feelings of safety and independence which has given a real boost to her confidence and happiness! Thank You!"

—Kent C., California

The first thing you'll notice about the **Zinger** is its unique look. It doesn't look like a scooter. Its sleek, lightweight yet durable frame is made with aircraft grade aluminum so it weighs only 47.2 lbs. It features one-touch folding and unfolding - when folded it can be wheeled around like a suitcase and fits easily into a backseat or trunk. Then, there are the steering levers. They enable the **Zinger** to move



Available in Green, Black and Blue (shown)

forward, backward, turn on a dime and even pull right up to



The Zinger folds to a mere 10 inches.

a table or desk. With its compact yet powerful motor it can go up to 6 miles an hour and its rechargeable battery can go up to 8 miles on a single charge. With its low center of gravity and inflatable tires it can handle rugged terrain and is virtually tip-proof. Think about it, you can take your **Zinger** almost anywhere, so you don't have to let mobility issues rule your life.

Now available in a Joystick model
(Zoomer Chair)

Joystick can be mounted on the right or left side for rider's comfort

Why take our word for it? Call now, and find out how you can get a **Zinger** of your very own.

journey
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Call now and receive a utility basket absolutely FREE with your order.

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HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

The Zinger and Zoomer Chairs are personal electric vehicles and are not medical devices nor wheelchairs. They are not intended for medical purposes to provide mobility to persons restricted to a sitting position. They are not covered by Medicare nor Medicaid. © 2022 Journey Health and Lifestyle



CHECK IT OUT!

We've created a whole new look for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's website!

the new bluebonnet.coop

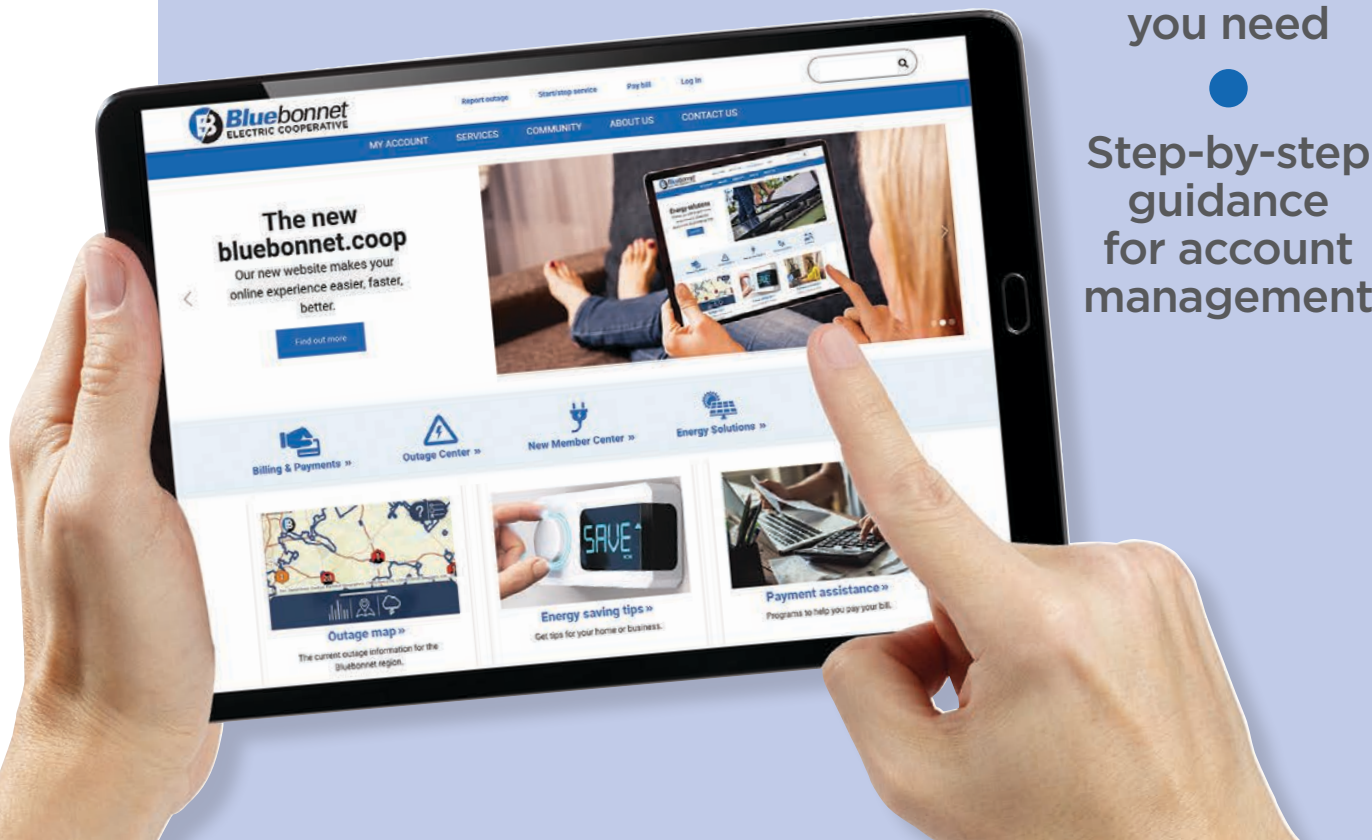
You'll find fast, mobile-friendly ways to:

- Report and track outages
- Start, stop or transfer service
- Learn about solar and renewable energy options
- Get the latest co-op news and information
- Explore career options at Bluebonnet

Clear, easy to use and navigate

● Quickly find the resources and information you need

● Step-by-step guidance for account management



FEATURES INCLUDE:



Billing & payments

Pay your bill with ease. Create an online account and use its many tools, take care of business on our mobile app, enroll in Auto Pay or pay using our automated phone system.



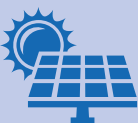
Outage center

Everything you need to know about ways to report an outage, use our outage map, get outage text alerts, find storm and outage resources, and see updates on our Twitter feed.



New member center

Welcome to the neighborhood! Whether you're moving into a new house or apartment, or starting a business of any size, we've got online tools for you. Connect service online, create an account online or on our mobile app, understand your bill and learn the ways to contact us.



Energy solutions

Find our Solar 101 guide and the steps to streamline the process of connecting solar panel arrays; get energy-saving tips to help you save money; and see updates on new ways to generate, store and use electricity.



Careers

Most Bluebonnet employees live in our service area and are passionate to provide the best service to our members and neighbors. Explore a variety of career options and sign up for job alerts.



Caring for your community

Learn all the ways we are connected to the communities we serve, from providing grants and sponsorships to scholarships for graduating seniors. Meet your dedicated community representatives who connect Bluebonnet to the areas we serve.



News & information

Read the latest news from Bluebonnet, including our pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine, community news, press releases, and our Twitter feed.

ALSO ON THE SITE

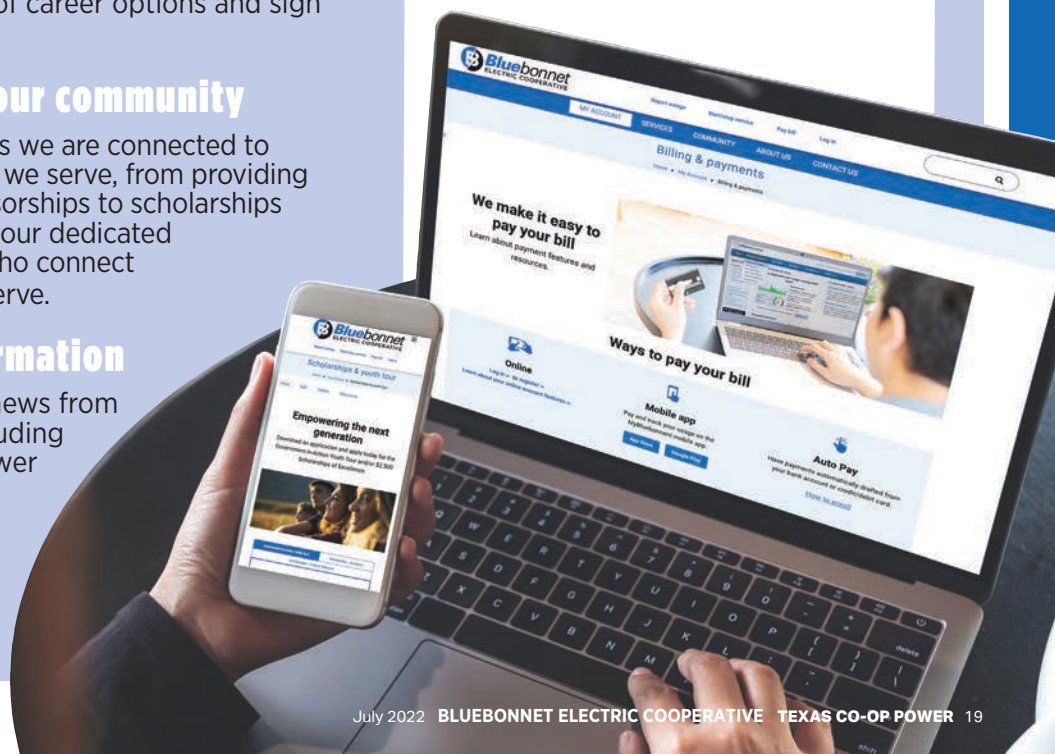
- A detailed service area map
- Easy to find energy-saving tips, sorted by categories
- A guide to all the advantages of being a co-op member
 - The document center, a handy resource if you are seeking reports, forms and business documents
- Enhanced information on the many ways to contact us
 - Smarter, improved site search functionality

Don't worry!

The way you pay your bill or access account information hasn't changed.

Questions?

**Call member services at
800-842-7708 from 8 a.m.
to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday,
or email [memberservices@
bluebonnet.coop](mailto:memberservices@bluebonnet.coop).**



One in a series of stories on fitness, recreation and outdoor adventure in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region.

Get Going WITH Pam LeBlanc

Making fire without tools, storing water in a vine and snacking on wood sorrel are among the life-in-the-wild lessons at wilderness school.



I WILL SU

Story by Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Laura Skelding

I'M SAWING AWAY like a lumberjack with a handmade bow, its cord wrapped around a wooden spindle. My arms pump furiously as I try to coax an ember from a piece of wood.

Making fire using nothing but a few sticks and a cord isn't easy. I could walk to a convenience store and buy a lighter by the time a single sunflower seed-sized ember drops from my "fireboard" onto a waiting piece of bark.

The convenience store route would defeat the purpose of the day, anyway.

I transfer the glowing bead into a thumb-sized indentation in a bundle of fluffed-up cedar bark and blow gently. It bursts into a tiny tongue of flame. I puff a little more, and it gets bigger. And as it grows, a bolt of confidence sizzles through my soul.

"I do think one of the coolest things you can learn to do in life is go out into the woods without a tool in your hand and make fire," says Dave Scott, founder of Earth Native Wilderness School in Cedar Creek, west of Bastrop, where I've come for half a day to learn what it takes to survive in the wild without the trappings of modern-day life.

I have to agree with him.

But there's more to surviving in the wilderness than making fire. By the time I leave this afternoon, I'll know not only how to make fire, but also how

I do think one of the coolest things you can learn to do in life is go out into the woods without a tool in your hand and make fire.

— DAVE SCOTT,

Founder of Earth Native Wilderness School

to stay warm, hydrated and fed if I'm ever away from the comforts of home with nothing but my instincts, a couple of tools and these lessons.

Meet the expert

Scott, 41, opened Earth Native Wilderness School in 2011. It occupies 58 acres of wooded land west of Bastrop. The school offers programs for children and adults who want to learn how to live off the land or special skills. About 3,000 people — young and old — sign up for instruction or go to camps every year. The majority of the action is at the Earth Native campus, but there are some activities at Garey Park in Georgetown and McKinney Falls State Park in southeast Austin.

"It's just people who like being outdoors and want to increase their skills or learn more about what it takes to take care of themselves in the wilderness," Scott says. "We don't get a lot of paranoid people, but with COVID and (2021's statewide) winter storm, we are hearing from people who feel more vulnerable."

The school's style of wilderness training is more



Continued on page 20B



RVIVE!

Dave Scott shows writer Pam LeBlanc how to make fire in the wilderness. After gathering the items to make a 'bow drill' and spark a small ember, Pam transfers the ember to a bundle of tinder. She cradles it in her hands and gently blows on the flame to help it grow. Then she celebrates her mastery of the elements.





Dave Scott shows Pam a few basic survival skills, including foraging for and identifying edible plants, such as this wild onion.

Continued from page 20

about learning confidence and enjoying time in the outdoors than about preparing for an apocalypse. Survival, Scott says, requires a steady disposition, some basic skills and an adjustment to an individual's comfort level.

Scott grew up exploring Williamson Creek in South Austin. After his father bought land in Colorado, Scott spent summers there, rambling around in the forest. After his father joined a search and rescue team, Scott listened to emergencies unfold over the sheriff's radio. When he was old enough, he trained for search and rescue work himself. After five years as a U.S. Army police officer, he spent three years training in wilderness survival, then became a survival skills instructor and eventually opened his school.

"I think the combination of my love of nature and wanting to be self-reliant made me to want to learn more about what it takes to take care of myself in the wilderness," he said.

Lesson 1: Be prepared

The key to wilderness survival, Scott says, is planning ahead so you don't find yourself in an emergency empty-handed. That's why he carries a few basic items in his vehicle (see his list, Page 20C) to carry when he ventures into the wild: a small knife, something to start a fire and a water filter.

Still, emergencies happen. When they do, it's important to stay calm. Take some deep breaths and quiet your mind.

There are three basic needs you must attend to: body temperature, food and water — or what Scott calls the survival triangle.

He makes it sound simple: "To me, the whole act of survival is problem-solving."

Lesson 2: Not too hot, not too cold

Are you cool enough? Or warm enough? Can you maintain a comfortable body temperature with the clothing and shelter you have? If not, you should address this first.



A ferro rod or fire starter, such as the one above by Texas Bushcraft, creates 5,000-degree sparks — hot enough to ignite a variety of tinder to then burn kindling. This model includes a paracord lanyard, a whistle and a bottle opener. It costs about \$16.

If it's hot, stay out of direct sunlight. Seek shade. Even better? Dip yourself in a creek if there's one nearby.

If you're cold, look at the materials around you. Try stuffing dry leaves inside your shirt to create a layer of insulation.

If you need to sleep, don't lie directly on the ground. Lay down a bed of boughs first. You can also build a rudimentary shelter using branches and leaves, but that may not be necessary. Even finding a wind break or making one out of dirt or rocks can help.

"People think of shelter as a grand thing with a roof and fire, but that's so much work," Scott says. "More practically, prepare ahead of time. Carry lightweight things like a sheet of plastic to use as a wind block. And remember that movement and exercise help keep you warm."

If you need fire to stay toasty — or to cook food or boil water — use what you have available to light it. Maybe you packed matches or a ferro rod, which is a small metal rod that sheds sparks when scraped with a knife (a good item to carry when backpacking). First, set dry, small twigs on fire, then work your way up to larger materials. Flat sticks burn better than round ones, and tree sap makes a good accelerant. Remember that flames burn upward, so start the fire from the bottom.

Creating a fire with the bow drill method I used takes practice, but it's not impossible. From start to finish, it took me about an hour. Start by preparing a tennis ball-sized

Continued on page 20D

VEHICLE ESSENTIALS: PLAN AHEAD TO SURVIVE IN THE WILD

If you are stranded — temporarily, hopefully — in a remote wilderness location, the best strategy is to have planned in advance for the unexpected. Dave Scott, the founder of Earth Native Wilderness School west of Bastrop, recommends stocking your vehicle with these supplies in case you ever find yourself in such a predicament.

Vehicle gear

- Two flashlights
- Multi-purpose tool (Leatherman or something similar)
- Non-folding knife (Morakniv makes good quality inexpensive knives.)
- Extra weather-appropriate clothing: long-sleeved sun shirt, hat in heat; insulated jacket, knit cap, gloves in cold.
- Emergency water — 2 gallons
- Battery jumper pack: Scott prefers these to jumper cables because you aren't reliant on another vehicle. Make sure to get one large enough to jump your battery. If you have a truck or large SUV you need a more powerful one than if you have a sedan.
- Small pack to carry if you need to leave your vehicle (see list below)
- Good first aid kit (such as Adventure Medical Kits' backcountry version)
- Sleeping bag or wool blankets in cold weather
- Lightweight water filter (such as Sawyer mini system)
- Paper road maps or map book (Gazetteer) of your state, nearby cities
- Emergency road flares

In addition to the gear in your vehicle, keep a small, dedicated emergency pack, like a fanny pack with a shoulder strap, as an emergency tote. Stock it with these items:

Tools

- Quality non-folding knife
- Compass
- Multi-purpose tool
- LED flashlight with an on/off switch (one that will burn for many hours even if that means lower lumen power); two sets of extra batteries for light
- Folding saw, like a Silky Pocketboy



A multi-purpose tool like the Leatherman, above, is an indispensable survival device that can cost from \$30 to more than \$100. For your vehicle, Scott recommends a battery jumper pack like the DeWALT 1400, left, which sells for about \$160.



A lightweight water filter like the Sawyer system, right, makes relatively quick work of making water drinkable. It retails for about \$40. Another recommended survival tool is a non-folding knife like the Morakniv, below, which sells for about \$50 with pictured sheath.



Other recommended items for your survival kit are a folding saw like the Silky Pocketboy, above, which sells for about \$40, and a package of fatwood, a natural, waterproof firestarter made from the resin found in the stumps of pine trees.

Fire

- Two to four fire-starting options (hurricane matches, lighters)
- Fire starters, like fatwood

Shelter

- Emergency ponchos
- Three thick, extra-large trash bags for use as a wind break or to pull over your body
- Lightweight small tarp (Scott recommends lightweight tent floor with webbing attachment at corners, or painter's plastic if you can tie a sheet bend knot)

Water

- Iodine or similar water purification tablets
- Two clear, 2-liter water-carrying bags
- Stainless steel water bottle

Food

- Small amount of high-calorie food (Scott recommends 500-1,000 calories a day)
- Sugar and salt packets
- Emergen-C or other electrolyte replacement

Additional items

- Mini first aid kit
- Extra pair of prescription glasses
- Small amount of prescription medication if critical
- 30 feet of paracord rope
- Several gallon-size Ziploc bags to keep items clean, dry
- Whistle
- Signal mirror
- Small fishing kit (think small pill-bottle sized with hooks, line, weights and maybe a synthetic worm or small lure)
- Pencil notepad (Write in the Rain makes a waterproof pad)
- Some flagging tape to mark route on trees, branches if you leave vehicle



Dave Scott, above, finds some 'cleavers,' a common Central Texas plant, which can be cooked down like spinach. His love for nature and the outdoors began when he was a child. He has shared his knowledge of wilderness survival, bushcraft skills and wildlife tracking with thousands of adults and children at his wilderness school west of Bastrop.

Continued from page 20B

nest of shredded dry bark (I used juniper). Then you'll make a fireboard by cutting chocolate chip-sized divots into a length of wood (we used a thick piece of trumpet vine). Next, carve notches leading from the divots to the edge of the fireboard.

After that, sharpen one end of a stick that is about an inch thick and a foot long to make a spindle. Then fasten a cord (use a natural fiber or vine if you don't have a cord) to both ends of a curved branch (I used a juniper bough) to serve as a bow. Last, find a block of wood about the size of a deck of cards to use as a "handhold."

You'll twist the spindle into the cord on the bow, place the tip of the spindle onto the fireboard and brace your arm against your body. Clamp down with the handhold, then start to move the bow back and forth.

It's wobbly at first, but after a few minutes you'll find a rhythm. If you're doing it right, in a few minutes a fine dust will fill in the notch in the fireboard. If all goes well, the heat created by friction will carbonize that dust and create an ember.

Tap that ember onto a leaf or bit of bark below your fireboard, then carefully plant it inside the wad of fluffed-up bark and blow gently.

Voilà, fire.

Lesson 3: Food for energy

Once you've taken care of your body temperature, you need to think about replacing



Edible wood sorrel, left, which is also sometimes called sourgrass, looks similar to clover and can go well in a wild salad.

calories lost through activity.

Here in Texas, we've got lots of options. I followed Scott as he foraged around his property, choosing bits of plants like he was moving through a salad bar.

First, he plucked a ruffled green leaf from a dock plant and offered me a nibble. It tasted slightly tart and lemony. Then he pulled up a few wild onions. Cleavers, those sticky, low-growing weeds that feel like a cat's tongue (I call it Velcro plant), can be cooked down like spinach. He calls wood sorrel the "Skittles of the woods" for its tangy zing. Dewberries, mesquite beans, wild blackberries and pecans are all tasty options, too.

Other plants can be used for medicinal purposes. He points out a toothache tree. Chew its leaves or twigs to numb your tongue. Crush the leaves of a small plantain (different from the bananas that go by the same name), and use it to treat insect bites or inflammation.

We also brewed tea, toasting up a pan of yaupon leaves for 30 seconds, then pour-

ing hot water over them. It's an acquired taste — nutty and earthy — but loaded with caffeine.

Of course, exercise caution to make sure you know what you are eating. Learn more about foraging for food in Texas with the books "Wild Edible Plants of Texas" by Charles Kane, "Foraging Texas" by Falcon Guides and "Common Edible and Medicinal Plants of Texas" by Wesley Adams.

For something heartier, look no farther than the nearest creek or lake. A plastic water bottle can be converted into a minnow trap. Just cut the top off and invert it, so minnows get washed in but can't back out. You can eat them raw if need be, or cook them up over a fire. "The skin crisps up and the tail is good," Scott chuckles.

Lesson 4: Don't dehydrate

You need water to stay alive. If you didn't bring a water bottle or filter with you into

EARTH NATIVE WILDERNESS SCHOOL

137 Woodview Lane
Bastrop, Texas, 78602
earthnativeschool.com 512-299-8870
info@earthnativeschool.com

COURSES INCLUDE:

- Two-day Wilderness Survival 101 for adults includes strategies for surviving emergencies, fire lighting using friction; basic shelter building, finding edible/medicinal/useful plants; water collection and purification, food/foraging techniques, knife/tool use and more; \$245
- Individual day or weekend adult skill courses include land navigation, wildlife tracking, basket making, edible/medicinal plants and more; from \$45 to \$245
- Ongoing adult intensive courses include wilderness survival, wildlife tracking; one weekend a month for 8 months; October-May; \$2,495 to \$2,995 (payable in installments)
- Youth classes, ages 5 to 16, include Wild Outside weekly class throughout school year; \$1,995 (payable in installments); and individual one- and two-day weekend classes; about \$55 a day
- Preschool classes, ages 3½ to 5, one- or two-day a week programs at Wild Life Forest Preschool; monthly and one-day weekend classes during the school year; prices vary
- Summer camps include five-day sessions at three locations: Earth Native's campus in Bastrop, McKinney Falls State Park in southeast Austin or Garey Park in Georgetown, \$375; five-day overnight camps at Earth Native campus in Bastrop. \$695; camps are full this summer



Indigenous people brewed tea like this, above, from the leaves of yaupon, an evergreen holly. It is the only plant native to North America that contains caffeine and is related to South America's yerba maté.

the outdoors, you've still got options, although there are fewer if you're in a desert environment.

Use a rock or a hole lined with leaves to catch rainwater. If you have a container, boil the liquid over a fire to purify it. If you don't, squeeze it through a T-shirt, then let it settle in the sun for at least six hours (longer if the sky is cloudy).

My favorite solution? Wild grapevine. It grows all over Central Texas and can be as thick as an adult's arm. Cut through a section of thick vine, then put a container (or a

rock with a hole in it) at each end. You can drain up to a liter (four cups) of water from a healthy plant.

Lesson 5: Keep calm and carry on

In the end, a level head will go a long way toward staying safe.

Stay calm and remember priorities. Don't rehash whatever mistakes you've made to find yourself in a bad situation. You can analyze that later.

And don't feel sorry for yourself. "In an emergency or real crisis, you can't afford to do that. It's not useful," Scott says.

Instead, take a deep breath and keep it all in perspective. "Humor and the ability to not take yourself too seriously are the best survival skills of all," Scott adds.

A little dollop of humor helped me make that fire and propelled me through the rest of my wilderness survival training. They are skills I hope I never have to use, but if I do, I'll know it's possible to survive out there — even without a lighter. ■

TEXAS LINEMAN'S RODEO



Bluebonnet journeyman line workers Chris Rivera, above left, and Jeffrey Bolding team up to work on a pole crossarm on the unelectrified lines set up for the Lineman's Rodeo competition in 2019.

Competition returns after hiatus

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative will send two journeyman line worker teams, seven apprentice line workers and six competition judges, as well as a barbecue team and additional volunteers, to the Texas Lineman's Rodeo at Nolte Island Park near Seguin on July 16.

After the event was canceled for two years, everyone from participants to volunteers are ready to return to the competition fields.

The event gives line workers a chance to compete against peers from across Texas, and to demonstrate the skills they use in their jobs.

Come cheer on Bluebonnet's competitors in person or track their progress on our social media pages that day. Learn more about the event at tla.org.

Coach says:

Are you in it to win it? Then try and take a little heat.

Bump up your thermostat by one degree every couple of days until you get to 78°, especially during peak heat hours.

You can do it!

WIN ONE

5 TIPS TO RACK UP POINTS AND SAVINGS

1. SEAL IT UP

Hot air can sneak in around windows, doors and electrical outlets. Weatherstripping, insulation and insulated curtains can help keep the cool air in and the hot air out.

2. TURN 'EM OFF

Lights can eat up a chunk of your electric bill. If you are leaving the room, turn them off and close those curtains, too.

3. GET SMART

Upgrade to a programmable or smart thermostat to better control your temperature settings. A smart thermostat lets you adjust the temperature with your smartphone and some thermostats can even learn and adapt to your habits.

4. KILL THE VAMPIRES

Computers, small appliances and electronic devices can silently eat electricity, even when they are in standby mode. Plug them into an advanced power strip and turn that off when the devices aren't in use.

5. TOSS THE GARAGE FRIDGE

That extra refrigerator that holds cold drinks or other items is probably 1) old, 2) hot and 3) an energy guzzler. If you can't live without it, it will impact your bill.



IS JULY'S HEAT melting your game plan to reduce your electricity use? Did your gritty resolve to turn up the thermostat wilt with triple-digit temperatures?

Help is here! Energy Coach Alyssa and her four-legged cheerleader, Millie, have a game plan that will help you cut your electric bill and conserve energy.

Let's not mince words. The most effective way to cut your electric bill is to turn up the thermostat. Every degree you bump up the temperature could cut 2% or more off your electric use. That's most important from 3 to 8 p.m., the hottest part of the day and the time most everyone in Texas is running their AC.

Keep an eye on our social media for video tips and giveaways all summer long. Plus, find more tips and resources to help you save money and electricity at bluebonnet.coop/saving-money.

Bluebonnet's Energy Coach

is ready to get you in peak
energy-saving shape this summer

for the

WALLET!

We've got plenty of ways to save energy around your house and put money back in your pocket. Start with quick, simple changes, and work your way up to the larger investments that can make a significant difference in your power use in the long term.

FREE WAYS TO SAVE

- Set your water heater temperature no higher than 120°F, or 115°F if there are only one or two people in the household.
- Save on the suds. Wash clothes in cold water and try to do only full laundry loads. If you must do smaller loads, adjust the water level to match the load size.
- Get comfortable using fans, which can make you feel up to 6 degrees cooler. And don't forget to turn the fans off in rooms you're not using.

INEXPENSIVE WAYS TO SAVE

- Replace your HVAC filters monthly. Dirty filters, coils and fans reduce airflow through HVAC systems. Reduced airflow decreases system performance, causing the HVAC system to run more frequently.
- Add insulation around electric wall plugs and wall switches with foam pads. If you have an attic, make sure your attic door is insulated. While you're up there, consider beefing up or replacing old attic insulation and you could save up to 15% on your electric bill.

PRICIER UPGRADES FOR BIG SAVINGS

- If you're replacing old or damaged appliances, do your research and buy Energy Star-approved appliances. Look for the blue Energy Star label and review annual cost impacts to your electric bill.
- Time to replace your HVAC? According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the most efficient air conditioners use 30% to 50% less energy to produce the same amount of cooling as air conditioners made decades ago. Even if your air conditioner is only 10 years old, you may save 20% to 40% of your cooling energy costs by replacing it with a newer, more efficient model. When buying an air conditioner, do your research and look for a high-efficiency model with an Energy Star or EnergyGuide label.

Millie says:

I can handle up to 80° in the house, but I can chill better with a cooling mat or pad, an elevated bed or a cooling vest.



Sarah Beal photos

MILLIE'S PAWSITIVELY AWESOME PLAYS TO KEEP YOUR PET COOL

- On very hot days, limit exercise to early morning or evening hours.
- Any time your pet is outside, make sure they have protection from heat and sun, as well as plenty of fresh, cold water.
- Keep your pet from overheating indoors or out with a cooling body wrap, vest, mat or raised bed.
- Plan outdoor summer activities with your pooch that involve some water play — sprinklers, pools or lakes can all be fun and cooling.
- Never leave anyone, including your pet, in a parked car in the summer, even if the windows are cracked! Even on milder days, temperatures inside vehicles can quickly rise to dangerous, life-threatening levels. ■

Tradition drives Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting

FOR DECADES, on the second Tuesday of every May, hundreds of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members have gathered to attend the co-op's Annual Meeting.

"I moved here [to Bluebonnet's service area] in 2002," said Debra Irvin, a Bluebonnet member in Lee County. "I still enjoy coming to the Annual Meeting. It's fun."

The 2022 Annual Meeting, on Tuesday, May 10, in Giddings, was another opportunity for members to register, chat with employees and cooperative leaders, get a bag full of useful information, ask questions and be entered to win door prizes. In the parking lot of The Silos on 77 event facility, nearly 200 members were guided through two white tents, each wide enough for several lanes of vehicles. Attendees even received ready-to-go snack bags stuffed with kolaches.

"I love how connected to the community Bluebonnet is and the effort to keep everyone safe," said Kathy Ray Mack, a Bluebonnet member in Caldwell County.

During the Annual Meeting, three incumbent members of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors were re-elected: Milton Shaw, District 1, Caldwell, Hays, Guadalupe, Gonzales counties; Debbi Goertz, District 3, Bastrop County; and Ben Flecher, District 5, Burleson County.

Flecher has been chairman of the Board since 2014 and a Board member since 1987. "Congratulations to Directors Milton Shaw and Debbi Goertz, who, with me, were re-elected to the Board," he said.

Milton Shaw has been on the Bluebonnet Board since 2010. "It is a great honor to serve as your Director and represent your interests," he said.

Debbi Goertz joined the co-op's Board in 2017. "I am honored to be re-elected to serve as one of your Directors from Bastrop County, and greatly appreciate the confidence you have in me and my fellow Directors," she said.

Before the event, more than 6,100 Bluebonnet members participated in the Annual Meeting by submitting proxy voting forms. Those, along with members who registered at the event, constituted a quorum of member representation for the meeting.



Sarah Beal photos

At top, members drive through a large tent to talk to employees. They got information, answers to questions and a snack. Above, Bluebonnet employee Rebecca Brotherton helps register Cynthia Gonzalez-Montoya of Dale.



Milton Shaw



Debbi Goertz



Ben Flecher

Members who submitted proxy voting forms or registered at the drive-through were also entered to win door prizes. Those prize drawings took place the next day, May 11. Three members — Corrine Randall of Dale in Caldwell County, Earl Hodges of Cedar Creek in Bastrop County and Herbert Beerwinkel of Chappell Hill in Washington County — won the grand prizes, Cub Cadet riding lawnmowers.

Greeting members at the Annual Meeting is always a highlight for Bluebonnet employees and Directors. "We had an opportunity to meet a lot of our

members, share thoughts with them and answer their questions," Flecher said. "We hope you'll join us for our next Annual Meeting in 2023."

Get a video peek of the Annual Meeting at bit.ly/3MPreWo and find the information given to members at the event at bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting.

"Any chance that we have to match our employees up with our wonderful members is a great day," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager. "Annual Meeting is that one day we cherish, and is an incredibly special day for Bluebonnet."

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First responders receive grants for lifesaving equipment

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently awarded first responders in Bastrop County with grants to purchase lifesaving equipment. The grants are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program to assist communities it serves. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and is proud to partner with LCRA to support its members and communities. Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted through July 31, 2022. More information about this program and the application can be found at lcra.org/cdpp.



A \$15,900 grant will help Bastrop County First Responders buy two cardiac monitors to help aid in calls for people having cardiac emergencies. The grant, along with \$4,000 in matching funds, will allow the first responders to replace monitors that were recently de-certified for use under new federal guidelines. Pictured, from left, are Josh Coy, Bluebonnet Bastrop-area community and development representative; Johnny Sanders, Bluebonnet's former manager of community and development services; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative; Deborah Rogers, former Bluebonnet Bastrop-area community and development representative; James Green, Bastrop County First Responders president; Debbi Goertz, Bluebonnet Board member; Roderick Emanuel, Bluebonnet Board vice president/vice-chairman; and Wesley Brinkmeyer, Bluebonnet's manager of community and development services. *Sarah Beal photo*



A \$19,429 grant will help the Heart of the Pines Volunteer Fire Department improve its response time and rescue operations. The department is using gear near its expiration date that no longer fits volunteers. The grant, along with \$4,734 in matching funds, will pay for 12 new sets of personal protective equipment and a fire rescue saw. Pictured, from left, are front row, Andrew Baker, Heart of the Pines VFD firefighter and Aimee Lewey, Heart of the Pines VFD junior firefighter. On the back row, from left, are Niki Lucas, Heart of the Pines VFD vice president and support services; John Gomez, Heart of the Pines VFD lieutenant; Rick Arnic, LCRA regional affairs representative; James Lewey, Heart of the Pines VFD firefighter and treasurer; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Josh Lucas, Heart of the Pines VFD assistant chief and public relations chair; Cody Kelly, Heart of the Pines VFD fire chief; Roderick Emanuel, Bluebonnet Board vice president/vice-chairman; Debbi Goertz, Bluebonnet Board member; Johnny Sanders, Bluebonnet's former manager of community and development services; John Ertz, Heart of the Pines VFD firefighter; Deborah Rogers, Bluebonnet's former Bastrop-area community and development representative; Josh Coy, Bluebonnet's Bastrop-area community and development representative; Melissa Baker, Heart of the Pines VFD support services; and Elizabeth Lewey, Heart of the Pines VFD firefighter. *Sarah Beal photo*

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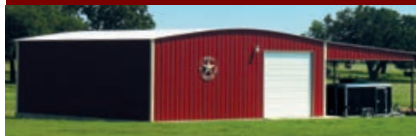
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It was a perfect late autumn day in the northern Rockies. Not a cloud in the sky, and just enough cool in the air to stir up nostalgic memories of my trip into the backwoods. This year, though, was different. I was going it solo. My two buddies, pleading work responsibilities, backed out at the last minute. So, armed with my trusty knife, I set out for adventure.

Well, what I found was a whole lot of trouble. As in 8 feet and 800-pounds of trouble in the form of a grizzly bear. Seems this grumpy fella was out looking for some adventure too. Mr. Grizzly saw me, stood up to his entire 8 feet of ferocity and let out a roar that made my blood turn to ice and my hair stand up. Unsnapping my leather sheath, I felt for my hefty, trusty knife and felt emboldened. I then showed the massive grizzly over 6 inches of 420 surgical grade stainless steel, raised my hands and yelled, "Whoa bear! Whoa bear!" I must have made my point, as he gave me an almost admiring grunt before turning tail and heading back into the woods.

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I was pretty shaken, but otherwise fine. Once the adrenaline high subsided, I decided I had some work to do back home too. That was more than enough adventure for one day.

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getting stuck with a high price.

But we don't stop there. While supplies last, we'll include a pair of \$99 8x21 power compact binoculars **FREE** when you purchase the Grizzly Hunting Knife.

Make sure to act quickly. The Grizzly Hunting Knife has been such a hit that we're having trouble keeping it in stock. Our first release of more than 1,200 SOLD OUT in TWO DAYS! After months of waiting on our artisans, we've finally gotten some knives back in stock. Only 1,337 are available at this price, and half of them have already sold!

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Colorado's Texas Bridge

The Royal Gorge Bridge, highest in America, was built and owned by Texans

BY W.F. STRONG

BRIDGES ARE MEASURED in three ways: longest, tallest and highest. In Texas, the Fred Hartman Bridge across the Houston Ship Channel boasts the longest span at 1,250 feet and is the tallest at 440 feet. But it's not the highest. That honor goes to the aptly named Pecos High Bridge, where the deck is an astounding 273 feet above the Pecos River—nearly a football field straight up.

The highest bridge in America is the Royal Gorge Bridge—just shy of 1,000 feet high. It's in Colorado. But without Texas, it might not exist at all.

The Royal Gorge Bridge was the dream of Lon P. Piper of San Antonio. They say he stood on the edge of the gorge in 1928

and imagined laying a bridge across it. He had already built a bridge across the Rio Grande into Mexico.

The Royal Gorge would be different though. It would be a bridge to nowhere, one that would exist purely to give tourists heart-stopping views they couldn't get anywhere else in the world.

Within two years it was done—at a cost of \$350,000, or more than \$6.2 million today. When it was finished, Piper owned the highest bridge in the world, and it would remain so for 72 years.

Piper hired bridge engineer George Cole of Houston to design the Royal Gorge Bridge and to serve as the general contractor. With 80 workers, they com-

TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



pleted the project in seven months without a fatality or any serious injuries.

As I learned about the bridge's history, I couldn't help but notice its national character. It was a bridge built by Texans in Colorado spanning the Arkansas River with Oregon timber for the deck. Cole went on to design and build a railroad that would take brave riders to the bottom of the gorge at a 45-degree angle. Now there are gondolas far above the gorge for those who want to go higher still and zip lines for those who can't get enough tachycardia in their lives.

In 1947, Piper sold the bridge to another Texan, Clint Murchison Sr., who bought it sight unseen as an investment and strangely never traveled there to walk across his magnificent possession. Instead, Murchison set up the Royal Gorge Bridge Co. and managed the Colorado property from Dallas. When he died, the bridge was passed on to his sons, Clint Murchison Jr. (you remember him—he founded and owned the Dallas Cowboys for 25 years) and John Murchison. When John died, his wife, Lucille, inherited the bridge, and they say she just loved it, traveling often to see it.

For the past 21 years, Texan Mike Bandera has served as the Royal Gorge Bridge's general manager of operations. But today, the bridge—after nearly 100 years—has Colorado ownership. After Lucille Murchison passed it on to her grandchildren, they sold it a few years ago to nearby Cañon City.

So I'd like to say this to Colorado, about the world-class bridge we envisioned, financed, built and managed for you all those years: You're welcome. ■

Stone Fruits

This season of abundance offers a variety of delectable options

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

When summer hits, I know I'm not the only one looking forward to that first bite of a juicy peach. My family loads up on stone fruits, making sure to have enough to cover our snack cravings and to enjoy in sweet and savory recipes. In this curry, fresh nectarines take the place of the dried fruits more commonly used. You can peel the nectarines if you like; I keep the skins intact to let them bubble away into the sauce.



Chicken Nectarine Curry

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
2 teaspoons salt, divided use
½ teaspoon pepper, divided use
1 onion, halved and thinly sliced
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
2 teaspoons cumin
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
⅛ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
1 cup chicken broth
4 nectarines, pitted and sliced
½ cup chopped fresh parsley, divided use
2 cups cooked couscous
¼ cup roughly chopped pistachios (optional)

- 1.** In a large straight-sided skillet with a lid, add oil and heat over medium-high. Season the chicken on both sides with half of the salt and pepper, then add to the hot skillet. Cook until browned on both sides, about 12 minutes total. Remove from pan and set aside on a plate.
- 2.** Reduce heat to medium and add onion. Sauté until slightly softened, about 3 minutes. Add garlic and ginger and cook another 30 seconds. Stir in remaining salt, pepper and spices, and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.
- 3.** Add a small amount of chicken broth to deglaze the pan, scraping the bottom, then pour in remaining broth. Return chicken to the pan with any accumulated juices. Scatter nectarine slices over the top.
- 4.** Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for about 25 minutes. Remove lid and stir occasionally. Once chicken is tender, simmer uncovered for 5 minutes to thicken sauce. Stir in half the parsley and serve over couscous, with remaining parsley and pistachios for garnish.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Peach Barbecue Sauce.



Apricot Scones

JANET EAKINS
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

These tender scones, a perfect way to feature dried apricots, are wonderful straight out of the oven but also keep well, so you can enjoy them multiple days in a row.

- 2½ cups flour**
- ½ cup plus 2 teaspoons sugar, divided use**
- 2 teaspoons baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cold and cut into pieces**
- 1 cup finely chopped dried apricots**
- 1 cup plus 1½ tablespoons heavy cream, divided use, plus more as needed**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment.
2. In a large bowl, combine flour, ½ cup sugar, baking powder and salt. Using a pastry blender or two knives, cut butter into flour mixture until crumbly and butter is evenly blended. Add apricots, stirring to mix well. Add 1 cup cream, stirring just until dry ingredients are moistened. If mixture looks too dry, stir in more cream, 1 tablespoon at a time, until dough is equally moistened and coming together.
3. On a lightly floured surface, scoop out dough and knead gently just to bring it together. Pat dough into an 8- to 9-inch circle and cut into 8 equal wedges. Place on baking sheet slightly separated, brush with remaining 1½ tablespoons cream and sprinkle with remaining sugar. Bake 20 minutes or until browned.

SERVES 8

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

Peach Cream Cheese Danish

MARY MITCHELL
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC



Easy to make and bursting with peaches, this braided danish makes for an elegant presentation on the brunch or dessert table. Swap in your favorite fresh or canned fruits and serve as is or with ice cream on the side.

SERVES 6



FILLING

- 6 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- 1 egg yolk, at room temperature**
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice**
- Pinch of salt**

PASTRY

- Flour, for dusting**
- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed**
- 1 can (15 ounces) sliced peaches, drained and sliced into bite-size pieces**
- 1 egg**
- 1 tablespoon water**
- 1–2 tablespoons coarse sugar**

GLAZE

- ½ cup powdered sugar**
- 1½ teaspoons milk**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. **FILLING** In a bowl, beat together cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Add egg yolk, vanilla, lemon juice and salt and beat together until well blended.
3. **PASTRY** Lightly dust a sheet of parchment with flour and roll out puff pastry, flattening creases if needed. Set onto a rimmed baking sheet. Spread cream cheese mixture down the middle of the pastry lengthwise, leaving a 1-inch border at the top and bottom. Spoon diced peaches onto the cream cheese mixture.
4. Use kitchen shears or a paring knife to cut an equal number of 1-inch strips diagonally down both sides of the pastry, leaving ½ inch between the filling and the start of each cut. Braid the pastry strips by folding them into the middle, alternating from side to side.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together egg and water and brush over pastry. Sprinkle with coarse sugar. Bake 25–30 minutes or until pastry is golden brown. Let cool to room temperature.
6. **GLAZE** In a small bowl, whisk together powdered sugar and milk until smooth, then drizzle glaze over the pastry and let set or serve immediately.

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Easy Cherry Pie

POLLY BELT
COSERV

Instead of a bottom crust, this pie features a buttery crumble topping that bakes into the filling. Make sure to keep the syrup separate from the pie until ready to serve so the topping stays delightfully crisp.

- 1 can (14.5 ounces) sour or tart pitted cherries**
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon flour, divided**

- use**
- 1½ cups sugar, divided use**
 - ½ cup chopped pecans**
 - 1 teaspoon baking powder**
 - ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
 - ¼ teaspoon salt**
 - 1 egg**
 - ¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, melted**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and set a rimmed baking sheet on the lower rack to catch any spilled juices.
2. Drain the juice from the cherries into a small saucepan and reserve. Pour the cherries into the bottom of an ungreased 9-inch pie dish.
3. In a medium bowl, combine 1 cup flour, 1 cup sugar, pecans, baking powder, cinnamon and salt. Using a fork, mix in egg until mixture is evenly moist and crumbly. Spread evenly over the cherries. Pour the melted butter over the crumble topping, coating it completely.
4. Bake 40 minutes, until browned. Let pie cool while you make the sauce.
5. To make the sauce, whisk together

remaining flour and sugar. Place reserved saucepan of juice over medium heat, whisking in sugar mixture. Cook until slightly thickened, then remove from heat (sauce will thicken more as it cools).

6. Serve slices of pie with spoonfuls of warm sauce over the top.

SERVES 6-8

TCP You'll find hundreds more recipes featuring these and other stone fruits on our website. Most of them are from the kitchens of *Texas Co-op Power* readers just like you.



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Creeping Along

I was brave enough to visit the eerie Ghost Road. How about you?

BY CHET GARNER

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER the first time I set out to see the Saratoga lights. My mom loaded up the family van with as many people as it could carry so we could experience a bona fide unsolved mystery.

Generations of locals say the lights are a periodic presence of unexplainable orbs and lights dancing up and down an old Big Thicket dirt road under a dark canopy of piney woods. My mom killed the headlights, and we crept along, holding our breath. My only comfort was that I was inside a locked car.

Bragg Road (aka Ghost Road) is a rite of passage in East Texas, between Beaumont and Livingston. It's only about 8 miles long, originally a railroad spur used during the East Texas oil boom. Legend holds this run through swampy land was full of danger, and crews suffered numerous casualties from accidents, malaria and other perils. Some say those killed never left the work site.

The tracks and ties were removed in the 1930s, leaving a very straight road that anyone with a healthy dose of Lone Star courage can drive to see if the ghostly orbs appear. Some say they change colors. Others say they dart back and forth, even coming toward vehicles at light speed.

Naysayers believe they're simply distant headlights, and scientists explain them as swamp gas. But nobody can explain everything that happens out there in the dark.

It took Mom over an hour to drive the entire length of Bragg Road. Every couple minutes she would yell, "Did you see that?" or "Whoa, that was beautiful." As soon as I looked, the light (or whatever it was) would be gone.

By the end, I didn't see a thing. But I did settle the fact that I was brave enough to travel the infamous Ghost Road. ■

ABOVE Chet discovers that what you don't see can be as frightening as what you do see on the Ghost Road.

TCP A dark lane with a chance of ghosts. What could go wrong? See Chet's video on our website to find out. Watch all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



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San Angelo [14–Sept. 11] Banjara Textiles From a Private Collection, (325) 653-3333, samfa.org

15

Ennis [15–16] Creative Quilters Guild of Ellis County Quilt Show, (972) 878-4748, elliscountyquilters.com

Bastrop [15–17] Corvette Invasion, (512) 303-0558, corvetteinvasion.com

Laredo [15–17] International Sister Cities Festival, (956) 795-2200, visitlaredo.com

16

Paris Tour de Paris, (903) 784-2501, tourdeparis.org

Round Rock Colombian Fest ATX, (512) 903-8929, colombianfestatx.com

Fredericksburg [16–17] Night in Old Fredericksburg, (830) 997-2359, gillespiefair.com

Waco [16–17] Duel on the Brazos, (830) 385-3106, sdbaracing.com/schedule

19

Lubbock [19–23, 25–30] **Hamilton**, (806) 792-8339, visitlubbock.org

21

Waco [21–24] Deep in the Heart Film Festival, deepintheheartff.com

MORE EVENTS >

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

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SERHIY SHULYEV | DREAMSTIME.COM

Pick of the Month

Salt Lime & a Good Time

Comanche, July 23
 (325) 356-3233
comanchechamber.org

Celebrate National Tequila Day at the courthouse square with the spirited beverage and other treats.

JULY EVENTS CONTINUED

22

Kyle Dive-in Movie: Lilo & Stitch, (512) 262-3939,
cityofkyle.com

Lubbock Dwight Yoakam, (806) 792-8339,
visitlubbock.org

Waxahachie [22-23] Metroplex Archaeological Society Indian Artifact Show, (469) 309-4040,
waxahachie.com

Palestine [22-24, 29-31] The Little Mermaid, (903) 724-4385,
visitpalestine.com

Victoria [22-24, 28-31] The Wizard of Oz, (361) 570-8587,
theatrevictoria.org

Lockhart [22-24, 29-31, Aug. 5-6] Annie Get Your Gun, (512) 376-5653,
mygbt.org

23

Bandera National Day of the American Cowboy, (830) 796-3045,
banderacowboycapital.com

San Angelo National Cowboy Day, (325) 657-4444,
fortconcho.com

28

Buffalo Gap [23-24] Tour de Gap, (325) 829-0617,
tourdegap.com

Gonzales [23-24] Float Fest, floatfest.net

Salado [23, 30, Aug. 6], Salado Legends, (254) 308-2200,
tablerock.org

Clute [28-30] Great Texas Mosquito Festival, (979) 265-8392,
mosquitofestival.com

29

Fredericksburg [29-31] Hill Country Auto Swap Meet, (254) 751-7958,
visitfredericksburgtx.com

Junction [29-31] Sizzler Disc Golf Tournament, (361) 549-5507,
junctiontexas.com/disc-golf

San Angelo [29-Aug. 5] Wild West Fest, facebook.com/wildwestfestsanangelo

Stafford [29-31, Aug. 5-7, 12-14] The SpongeBob Musical, (713) 302-5329,
inspirationstage.com

30

Bowie July Jam, (940) 872-6246,
cityofbowietx.com

Lubbock An Evening With Journey, (806) 742-7362,
visitlubbock.org

AUGUST

02

Bandera Cowboy Capital Opry, (830) 796-4969,
banderatex.com

06

Camp Wood Nueces Canyon Old Settlers Reunion, (830) 597-6241,
nuecescanyonchamber.org

Frankston Neches River Wilderness Race, (903) 245-9490,
necheswildernessrace.com

Morning Glory

A new day is dawning in Co-op Country, and members have captured the magnificence, from dewy haze to warm sunshine. So fetch yourself a cup of coffee, and let's greet the sunup.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 DANNY VIVIAN
NUECES EC
"The sun rises over the breakers near Port Aransas."

2 BRIAN FOX
PEDERNALES EC
Sunrise over Caprock Canyons State Park.

3 CASSIE DE LEON
TRI-COUNTY EC
"Breakfast. Need I say more?"

4 MICHAEL HRISCHUK
TRINITY VALLEY EC
"Our backyard on a cool fall morning."



Upcoming Contests

- DUE JUL 10 **Aerials**
- DUE AUG 10 **Winter Wildlife**
- DUE SEP 10 **Nature's Colors**



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Morning Glory photos from readers.





Can't Top This

Finding more than just a sense of accomplishment on Guadalupe Peak

BY ANDY RHODES
PHOTO BY E. DAN KLEPPER

“HOW FAR AWAY is the peak?”

“Once you get to the really hard part, you're nearly there.”

“Wait ... *this* isn't the really hard part?”

I was approaching the summit of Guadalupe Peak—or at least I thought I was—and glad to catch my breath while giving my rubbery legs a break. After encountering the descending hiker, I was momentarily discouraged but not daunted. My three-hour trek in far West Texas had so far been challenging but not overwhelming, and I wanted to carry my momentum all 8,751 feet up to the tallest natural point in the state.

The last eighth of a mile was indeed tricky—a couple sheer rock faces (I didn't look down) and large boulders to ascend—but it never felt dangerous. Finally, I took one giant step and came face to face

with a metal pyramid atop the peak.

But I also encountered something I hadn't expected: Surrounding the sculpture was a spontaneous community. About a dozen of us smiling hikers shared the rewarding accomplishment of having just summited Guadalupe Peak. Cheers of “You did it!” and “Welcome to the top of Texas!” erupted. We beamed with adrenaline and pride, knowing how much planning, commitment, resolve and stamina it took to conquer such a formidable foe.

I was also rewarded by the most spectacular 360-degree views I've ever seen in Texas. It was a perfect fall day—65 and sunny—so visibility was pristine. The sky was pure blue, a cheerful overstretched canvas. I took in multicolored ridges of mountains stretching for miles and miles beyond Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

I had started the day with a hearty breakfast and hit the trail in the cool shade. The first hour was tough, with tight switchbacks and steep ascents. I reminded myself I wasn't in a race and listened to my body's cues; when I felt weary, I'd stop for water or take a few bites of a protein bar. My trusty trekking poles helped me navigate the rocky trail and pivot up tough spots.

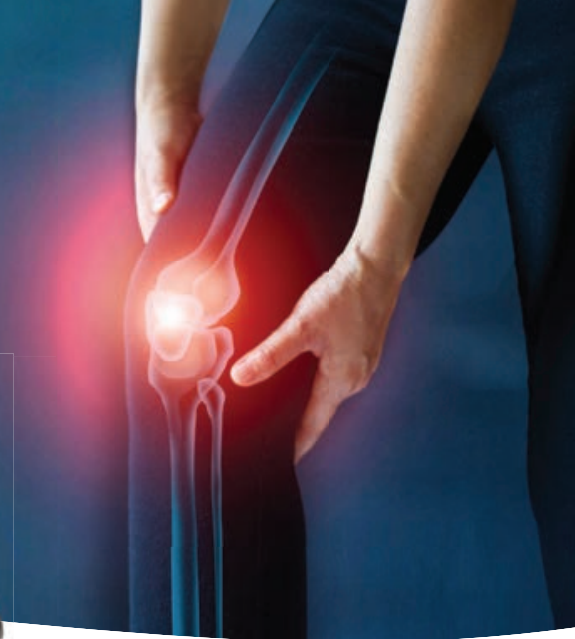
The second hour was easier—a large section of trees provided welcome shade, and I noticed more flora, including jade-colored desert scrub and small waxy succulents. The trail was well maintained and easy to navigate, which helped guide me through the final stretch.

By the end, my legs were fatigued, but that seemed a small price. I was excited about completing the quest. When the shiny obelisk entered my view, the smile on my face reflected the joy I felt in joining my new community.

At that moment, it felt like the top of the world. It just so happened that it actually was. ■



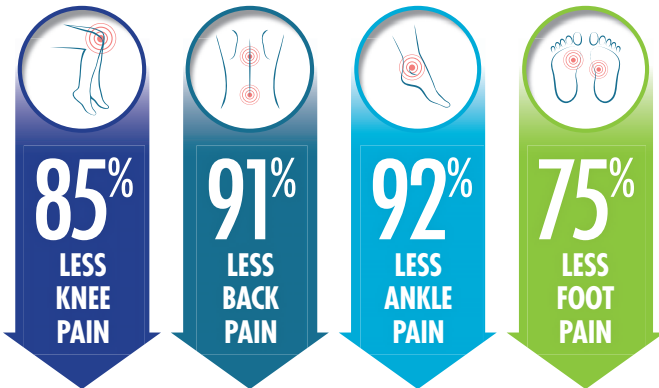
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