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OCTOBER 2023

## Still Grabbing Glory

Senior rodeo competitors' pride  
'just won't let them be old yet'

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16



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# October 2023



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## It's Rocket Science (And so Much More)

High school students learn to problem-solve by building giant, powerful rockets.

*Story by Mark Wangrin  
Photos by Scott Van Osdol*

ON THE COVER  
The 88-year-old hands of Jimmy Tobolka await their next chance to rope a calf.  
*Photo by Julia Robinson*

ABOVE  
Time for McGregor's rocket class to learn whether all its hard work will fly.  
*Photo by Scott Van Osdol*

## 10 Still in the Saddle Again

Calf roping at 80? Competition—and camaraderie—have no upper limits in the senior rodeo circuit.

*Story and photos by Julia Robinson*

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# ‘The Right Thing To Do’

**SHORTLY AFTER** Mark and Cheryl Brown bought 200 acres near Ammannsville, halfway between Houston and San Antonio, they turned to conservation.

They gave their land a break from grazing, worked on grassland restoration and began networking with fellow landowners on the benefits of habitat management.

“Changing that mindset where people want to be a part of the land rather than dominate the land—it just seems like the right thing to do,” says Mark, a member of Fayette Electric Cooperative.

It’s been rewarding—for Mother Nature and the Browns.

More than 250 species of native plants thrive on their land, as do bird species with dwindling populations. And in May, the Browns received the Leopold Conservation Award—the state’s highest honor for private land conservation—for their prairieland restoration and community outreach.



## Concern for Community

Texas electric cooperatives donated nearly \$750,000 to at least 360 volunteer fire departments across the state in 2022. We celebrate that community involvement during October, which is National Co-op Month.

## TCP Contests and More

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## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I collect ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our August prompt: **Back to school means ...**

Making new memories with my best friends, getting to meet new people, learning and experiencing new things.

ELVIRA PULIDO  
MAGIC VALLEY EC  
MISSION

An uninterrupted second cup of coffee.

PHYLLIS SUTTLE  
MIDSOUTH EC  
IOLA

New shoes, cooler weather and FOOTBALL!

MIKE WEBER  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES  
GRANBURY

Mother buying each of us boys two pair of Levi’s blue jeans for the new school year. (We used them as work jeans at the farm the following summer.)

MANUEL G. TREVIÑO  
MEDINA EC  
PEARSALL

Visit our website to see more responses.

AUGUST 2023 Charming the Alamo

“There’s a new Alamo cat? Ruby is my favorite part of Alamo history, so good to see they’re continuing the tradition.”

CINDER SCOTT  
VIA FACEBOOK



STEPHANIE DALTON COWAN

### Good To Hear

Thank you for the audio about Larry McMurtry in *A Page of the Past* [August 2023]. It was much easier and enjoyable to listen to the story than to try to read the small print with my old eyes of 75 years.

Becky Parks  
Bluebonnet EC  
Maxwell

### A Long and Winding Labyrinth

About 20 years ago, my husband built a labyrinth on top of a hill on our 17-acre hobby farm west of Trent [*Circles of Life*, August 2023]. He integrated it into the natural landscape of the hill, resulting in a multilevel path.

The entire labyrinth is approximately a mile walk. At the time it was built, we were told it was the largest one in North America. Visitors can reach us at [dancingwithherbs@gmail.com](mailto:dancingwithherbs@gmail.com).

Cyndi Hughs  
Taylor EC  
Trent



LAURA JENKINS

### In Defense of Mockingbirds

The mockingbird was chosen by the Legislature to be the state bird of Texas in 1927—chosen because of its courage to protect its home and family even in the face of death [TCP Talk, August 2023]. It stands tall without fear to protect its brood, much like those who fought for Texas independence. That’s why it was chosen.

We have witnessed the mockingbird attacking snakes and hawks. It would serve us all well to take note of the parenting skills, courage and intelligence of these awesome birds.

Tim and Tammy Layman  
Coleman County EC  
Ballinger

Legislators in 1927 described the mockingbird as “a fighter for the protection of his home, falling if need be, in its defense, like any true Texan.” Need any more be said?

David Snipes  
HILCO EC  
Aquilla

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
[letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com)

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

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

 Texas Co-op Power

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**TEXAS CO-OP POWER** Volume 80, Number 4 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). Call (512) 454-0311 or email [editor@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:editor@TexasCoopPower.com).

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** Subscription price is \$4.44 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

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# IT'S ROCKET SCIENCE

(AND SO MUCH MORE)



## High school students learn to problem-solve by building giant, powerful rockets

In the predawn hours one Friday in May, a yellow school bus hurtles down U.S. Highway 281 with 19 students, one teacher and a lot of uncertainty.

A few things are known. The juniors and seniors from McGregor High School are heading to the town of Stonewall in the Hill Country. They will launch three rockets they have designed and built based on their own research and calculations—part of a curriculum called SystemsGo, developed by a local STEM teacher in 1996.

And that’s where the uncertainty begins.

The science, technology, engineering and math students have never done this before. The year before, a funding mishap robbed them of the chance. This school year, they’ve done and redone the math, studied and applied the physics, checked the aerodynamics, and then built the rockets based on what they’ve taught themselves, measuring 100 times if they measured once. Because of the nature of rockets, they haven’t been tested outside of computer simulations.

If that isn’t enough, weather forecasts call for afternoon thunderstorms in Stonewall, which means their launch window could be compressed.

And it doesn’t help that most haven’t slept much. Some worked through the night. Others were bothered by an overnight storm; others consumed by what-ifs.

And there are a lot of what-ifs.

Moments after stepping down the bus steps at the Stonewall Chamber of Commerce, where five other classes from five other schools are already gathered, teacher Johnathan Whatley is approached by one of his students. Mario Suarez is wearing a T-shirt with “Never Waste Talent” on the back and a sheepish grin.

“We have a predicament,” he says. Of course they do.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A.J. Jimenez carries a McGregor High School rocket off the bus on launch day. Aaron Olivera checks parachute lines. McGregor rocket club students huddle during the competition. A rocket launches during a SystemsGo event in Stonewall. RIGHT The thrill of a successful launch for members of the McGregor class.

### STAGE 1 | Getting Off the Ground

Dozens of high schools participate in the SystemsGo rocketry curriculum, which culminates in competitive launches at the end of the school year. Teachers leave the rocket building and problem-solving up to the students.

Whatley’s go-to response is, “That’s interesting. What do you think?” The idea is for the students to figure things out on their own, which is how SystemsGo got started.

Brett Williams was a marine fisheries expert at Texas A&M University at Galveston. When he retired in 1996, he became a science teacher at Fredericksburg High School.

“I didn’t have lab equipment,” Williams says. “I didn’t really have anything. I didn’t have a curriculum. I was making it all up as I went.”

Today—27 years later—65 schools across Texas and New Mexico launch more than 150 rockets each spring at test sites in Texas and New Mexico as part of SystemsGo, Williams’ brainchild.

These aren’t toy rockets. These are full-fledged 7-foot-long projectiles, some carefully configured to carry a 1-pound payload as close to a mile high as possible or break the sound barrier. The most advanced few among them carry a payload of university research to an altitude of 50,000 feet.

### STAGE 2 | Preparing the Mission

A few miles down the road from McGregor is Crawford, home of SpaceX’s rocket testing facility. Occasionally, Whatley’s class hears the loud roar of ignition.

Last year’s class even got to visit. They saw the facilities



McGregor's Kirsten Galle, left, and Isaiah Thomas prepare a rocket. Teacher Johnathan Whatley calls Galle "a mathematical whiz."



and were allowed off the bus just once—to see close-up the first rocket the company landed safely.

"That was the 100th rocket they'd launched," Whatley says. "That's not a cautionary tale, it's a tale of hope. Here are professionals who have it blow up on them. And then they succeed."

After graduating from Baylor University in 2014, Whatley applied for a coaching job at McGregor, also agreeing to teach the rockets class after he was hired.

"It made me really excited for just the possibilities of different types of education," he says. Some students—even the brightest ones—don't learn to think for themselves, and some need to be challenged, he says. So that's what he does.

The fall semester focuses on the basics of flight. During the first weeks of class, Whatley dumps an assortment of rocket parts on a large table and asks the students to build a small rocket that's fitted with a beginner's rocket engine and launched.

"They make some pretty terrible stuff," Whatley says. "They think the more fins the better. They get creative. Like why not? But that's them failing—but then learning from their mistakes."

Their second goal, Whatley says, "is to build a stable rocket." That's the one they'll try to fly in Stonewall.

### STAGE 3 | The Race to Launch

It turns out the predicament Suarez mentions is minor. They forgot a section of plastic tubing vital to fueling. "It's a chance to work on your social skills," Whatley says to Suarez. The implication is clear: Ask around.

The group is an amalgam: football players, makers, math nerds and more. But all plan to attend college, many in technical fields.

"This class definitely reshaped the way I went about doing school," says Suarez, who wants to be a hair stylist. "Before, I would slack in classes. But whenever I got to rockets, I understood that you can't do that. There are deadlines that need to be met."

For Williams, there's more than just hard work, or even serendipity, at play with SystemsGo. He recalls cold calling a rocket parts company only to unexpectedly catch the CEO at lunch, reading an article about the program as he ate. He was a yes.

And there was a real long shot—dialing the Pentagon from the middle of nowhere, hoping to find someone to ask about borrowing some launch technology. He reached a general's adjutant, who was in Fredericksburg the week before for a presentation. Impressed, he connected Williams to the general, who said, "I know I'm supposed to say no, but this guy tells me I have to say yes." And he did.

### STAGE 4 | Launch, Recovery, Retrospection

The storms do not materialize in Stonewall. After much back and forth with officials examining the rockets, a few close calls, and frantic recalculations, all three McGregor rockets pass muster: They launch and fly straight and high.

None earns an award, though one just misses reaching the 1-mile threshold. The students don't know that as they bus back to McGregor, stopping at the Chick-fil-A in Marble Falls for a celebratory feast.

Once back, the teams do their post-launch analyses, looking at what they did right and what they didn't. Uncertainty will be met with experience next year, when the nucleus of 11th graders returns for a chance to improve.

Schematics will be honed. Math will be tightened. Construction will be polished.

Next May, the sky's the limit (weather permitting). ■





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***Still in  
the Saddle  
Again***



## **CALF ROPING AT 80? COMPETITION—AND CAMARADERIE— HAVE NO UPPER LIMITS IN THE SENIOR RODEO CIRCUIT**

**C**ompetitors pace their horses before a barrel racing event on a warm October day at Circle T Arena. It's the statewide finals, and competitors are wearing their finest—spotless boots, hats and tack. Their high-strung mounts trot back and forth at the dusty arena in Hamilton, about 70 miles west of Waco, awaiting their call times.

When the clock starts, horse and rider burst from the gate in a blaze of energy and graying hair. Precision turns, pivots and raw speed streak through the arena. Cheers of support rise from the grandstands: "You got this, Grandma!" and "Let's go, Gram!"

It's all over in a few blinks.

Billie Bright, 63, takes the win with a time of 15.8—only 2.5 seconds slower than the current national champion, who is about 35 years younger. Not bad for an oldster. Four-time National Finals Rodeo world champion Hailey Kinsel, 29, holds the fastest barrel time—13.34 seconds.

Today's statewide finals are one of the 23 events the Texas Senior Pro Rodeo Association, celebrating 45 years in 2023, hosts for competitors 40 and older. Rex Sandifer's father, Morris, was one of the founding members of the organization in Waco in 1978.

"There were lots of amateur rodeos at the time, but it's just difficult as a 40-year-old to compete against 20-year-olds," Sandifer says. So Morris and a few other aging cowboys organized calf roping events for the older crowd. That grew into steer dogging, bareback and bull riding. "And all of them said, well, why don't we just go in and make a rodeo association out of it?"

The TSPRA put on full rodeos, including bull and bronc riding, in the 1980s. "There were probably two or three of those guys that were pretty good bull riders, and then the rest of the guys were people who wished that they were bull riders earlier in their lives," Sandifer says with a laugh.

The decision was made to drop the more dangerous events from the schedule but not because they didn't have competitors. "It was hard to get producers to haul animals for eight or 10 people," says Sandifer, a member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

Today, many of TSPRA's 300-plus members are former pro rodeo riders, ropers and barrel racers from Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Ages range from the association minimum into the 80s, and competitors are grouped by age. But some old-timers can still beat the young whippersnappers, and many older members choose to compete in multiple younger divisions.

"Some people join and think it's going to be easy because it's all old-timers, but we have cowboys and cowgirls that are still going to circuit finals and winning open rodeos," says Beverly Shoaf, secretary of the TSPRA board of directors.

Bright, a member of Taylor Electric Cooperative from Baird, has been competing in rodeos for 50 years and is one of the top barrel racers in the 60-plus division. She has had to refine her approach.

"For me, at my age, I've learned that I can't ride just every horse that comes around," she says. "I have to look for a



OPPOSITE J.J. Jolley of Stephenville whips around a barrel during the Texas Senior Pro Rodeo Association finals last October in Hamilton. ABOVE Karen Little of San Saba gets a hug from her grandson Asher.



*“It’s real important to have these rodeos because if you ever quit, you’re done.” —REX SANDIFER*

horse that moves a little smoother and doesn’t throw a whole lot of torque.”

Earlier in her career, Bright could spend hours training on horseback, but these days, she rides for half an hour before giving her knees a break. “We have to have a lot of core strength to do what we do at our age,” she says. “Your hand-eye coordination needs to be real sharp. And if you don’t compete fairly often, like every two weeks or so, you get slower and slower.”

But Bright says other skills have only improved. Her ability to read animals gives her a competitive advantage that came with age. “You can anticipate nearly what a horse is fixing to do from each step that they take,” she says. “Each stride that they take, they’re telling you something if you’re really listening.”

Tomm Owens, vice president of the TSPRA board and a member of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, didn’t join the association until he was 50.

Rex Sandifer of Elgin prepares his lasso. His father, Morris, was one of the founders of the senior circuit in 1978.

“I was competing in [pro] events when I was 35, 40, 45. I was one of them that held out,” says Owens, who’s trying to convince his friends to join. “Their pride just won’t let them be old yet.”

For Owens, aging into a new bracket is part of the fun. “You kind of get excited again,” he says, “because you’re going to be the youngest in the group, and you’re hoping you’re one of the best.”

Like Bright, he says his experience gives him a competitive advantage—but for a different reason. “Mentally it’s easier as I get older. I don’t get as frustrated when things don’t go right,” Owens says. “You learn not to let the little things bother you.”

But he admits that the physical aspect only gets tougher. “Once you get out of shape, it’s really hard at 55–60 to get back into shape,” he says. “I do 20–30 minutes of stretching every morning and then some situps and pushups.”

Jimmy Tobolka is living proof that bodies in motion tend to stay in motion. At 88, he’s TSPRA’s oldest member and still competes in the 80-plus breakaway, where a mounted rider ropes a running calf.



ABOVE Pat and Jimmy Tobolka of Caldwell are regular TSPRA competitors. Jimmy, at 88, is the circuit's oldest member. LEFT Doug Richards of Bedias closes in on a calf.



“Once you start doing it, it’s hard to get quit doing it, you know?” he says. “It’s helped keep me going all these years.”

One of the youngest members of the association is Seth Smithson, the president of the board, who turns 40 in December. “I think it’s a breath of fresh air from the hustle and bustle,” he says. The 2023 TSPRA statewide finals are October 19–21 at Circle T Arena in Hamilton. “You come hang out with the older crowd and watch these guys compete and see how great they are with their horses, and you can definitely learn a thing or two.”

**T**he TSPRA’s prizes aren’t much—trophy saddles and buckles—but that’s not the main reason any of these competitors are here.

“Nobody’s going to get rich at our rodeos,” Owens says. “So much of it is just being able to see all the guys you used to rodeo with, cook steaks out back at the trailers and eat a meal Saturday night with maybe 10 or 15 people at every other trailer. That’s a big, big part of it.”

But no one can question the enthusiasm and the dedication these athletes have for their sport—for continuing to hone their craft, even as their bodies falter.

“We’re all just very grateful to still be able to throw a leg over a horse,” Bright says. “And when you have that gratitude of still being able to do it, nobody’s moaning and groaning about winning.” ■



# 1920s Style for a 1920s Price

It was a warm summer afternoon and my wife and I were mingling with the best of them. The occasion was a 1920s-themed party, and everyone was dressed to the nines. Parked on the manse's circular driveway was a beautiful classic convertible. It was here that I got the idea for our new 1920s Retrograde Watch.

Never ones to miss an opportunity, we carefully steadied our glasses of bubbly and climbed into the car's long front seat. Among the many opulent features on display was a series of dashboard dials that accentuated the car's lavish aura. One of those dials inspired our 1920s Retrograde Watch, a genuinely unique timepiece that marries timeless style with modern technology.

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# BATTLE *of the* BACKYARD

Test your knowledge of friends and foes in Central Texas landscapes.

By ADDIE BROYLES

**T**HEY SEEMED LIKE GOOD ideas at the time.

Remember the Chinaberry tree in your parents' backyard? Who didn't have a thick privet hedge for privacy? And what's so bad about a backyard full of Bermuda grass?

The bark scale and lone star tick are high on the bad-bug list in Central Texas. Do you know what they look like?

Our quizzes test your knowledge of undesirable plants and insects in our landscapes. Most are classified as invasive species, which are nonnative species that are bad for the environment, economy or your health. Others may not make the invasives list, but can still present problems in area lawns and fields.

It can take time to fully understand problems with a species, said Mike Arnold, director of The Gardens at Texas A&M University and a professor in the university's Department of Horticultural Sciences.

We're talking about "aggressive or adaptive plants," he said. Invasives can outcompete native species and cause a devastating ripple effect in the ecosystem and the industries that rely on it. They cost the United States \$137 billion annually, according to the Texas Invasive Species Institute in Huntsville.

Some of the most economically harmful invasive species of plants and creatures are in Texas lakes. Plants such as giant salvinia, water hyacinth and zebra mussels hurt the local ecosystem, cause millions of dollars in damage to water treatment plants, and cause lost boating and tourism revenue on heavily affected lakes.

When a region loses its natural diversity, it is more susceptible to diseases and harmful pests, too.

"As we experience global climate change, invasives are going to put increased physiological effects on these ecosystems," Arnold said. "When an extreme cold snap kills a certain plant, it creates opportunities for plants that weren't previously invasive to become a problem."

Test your knowledge of the plants and bugs (and one worm) that make the nice and naughty lists in area gardens and fields with our quizzes. Plus, learn what native plants can best replace less-desirable ones in your landscape.



The nonnative brown recluse spider's bite can be dangerous.



At top of page: The crepe myrtle, the 'official state shrub,' is beloved in Central Texas for its colorful blooms. Do you know what invasive insect can cause it harm? See Question 4, Page 20.



# The Great Central Texas Plants Quiz

Is it good for your garden, or will it sow destruction?

It's time to test your knowledge of what's growing in your landscape or pasture, and learn a little more about plants in our region: Are they dependable natives or destructive interlopers?



CHINESE TALLOW TREE

**1** \_\_\_\_\_, an invasive tree that originated in China, grows in the Bluebonnet region. Long used as a landscaping tree, it became widespread in the 1950s. It crowds out native plants with its deep taproot and tolerance for drought.

- A. Chinaberry tree
- B. Heavenly bamboo
- C. Chinese privet
- D. Chinese tallow tree

**Answer: D**

The Chinese tallow trees in our area were introduced by the U.S. government as a source of seed oil for soap. Also known as "popcorn trees," their waxy seeds look like a favorite movie snack. But don't eat them. They're poisonous!



CHINABERRY TREE

**2** Which two of the following are true about the chinaberry tree, a member of the mahogany family, native to China, Indonesia and Australia?



LADYBUG

## Good bug or bad bug?

Learn more about the insects (and one worm) that help or harm our landscapes and fields. [Take our second quiz, Page 20.](#)

- A. It was brought to the United States in the late 1700s by a French botanist.
- B. It's not bad for planting because it provides shade.
- C. Seeds can be poisonous to people and pets, and birds can get intoxicated by eating rotting seeds.
- D. It is found in all 50 states.

**Answers: A and C**

Even though these fast-growing trees are shade kings, chinaberries are invasives that sprout so many trees under their canopy they can become a landscaping mess. They are sold in many nurseries in the South, because they can't withstand cold climates. Chinaberry has yellow seeds and violet flowers. It is similar to the Western soapberry, which is native to Central Texas.



YAUPON HOLLY

**3** Privets — also known as Ligustrums — are still popular hedge plants in many Bluebonnet-area yards. There are many varieties, but the Chinese privet can quickly take over a Central Texas ecosystem. Which of these is a better shrub alternative that also happens to be the only native-grown source of caffeine in North America?

- A. Yaupon holly
- B. Cenizo
- C. Texas mallow
- D. Flame acanthus

**Answer: A**

The yaupon holly is a better choice. The woody evergreen shrub or small tree can grow up to 25 feet, and female plants are known for their bright red berries. They are native to the eastern, southern and southwestern states. Yaupon holly's leaves and twigs can make a caffeinated tea you may find or sale at local farmers markets. The other plants on the list are also native and make excellent substitutes for the pestilent privet.

**Turn the page for more quiz questions! ▶**

**4** Bermuda grass is still popular as a turfgrass, but it is also considered a weed. It is one of the most common aggressive grasses in Texas, likely arriving from Africa. It can handle Central Texas heat and droughts, creeps into crops, covers the soil and is hard to remove. Consider planting this native turfgrass instead:

- A. Zoysia
- B. King Ranch bluestem
- C. St. Augustine
- D. Buffalo grass

**Answer: D**

The only native turfgrass on the above list is buffalo grass, which once fed millions of grazing bison from Mexico to Montana. It doesn't require a lot of water. Zoysia and St. Augustine grasses are popular but aggressive and can spread rapidly. King Ranch bluestem, also aggressive, came from Europe and Asia in the 1920s and was planted on the famous King Ranch in South Texas in the 1930s.

**5** True or false: Juniper trees are among the state's worst invasive tree species.

**Answer: False**

Junipers, as well as cedar trees, are responsible for many Central Texans' allergies from December through February, but both are native to Texas. In fact, junipers have been growing here for centuries. Many people mistake junipers for cedars. The two types of trees have a similar smell, but junipers belong to the cypress family and cedars to the pine family. Ashe junipers, though widespread, provide food for birds and butterflies, and orange for mammals. One common juniper, however, is named "native redcedar," which may contribute to the confusion.



**JUNIPER**

**6** Native plants in many rivers, lakes and creeks of Central Texas have been getting pushed out by invasives in the last 20 years. Conversely, which two of these water plants should you be happy to see in your water garden?

- A. Cow lily
- B. Alligator weed
- C. Hydrilla
- D. Humped bladderwort

**Answers: A and D**

Cow lily and humped bladderwort are good choices if you have a lake or pond. The bladderwort is attractive, plus it can capture and consume insects. Avoid alligator weed and hydrilla at all costs. Hydrilla is right up there with water hyacinth and giant salvinia as one of the most damaging invasive water plants in the Bluebonnet region, including in Lake Somerville and the Fayette County Reservoir. Hydrilla can suffocate other plants, fish and some animals

**7** This aggressive invasive, native to East Asia, can tower more than 20 feet tall in watery areas throughout the Bluebonnet region, including in ditches alongside roads. It grows thick roots and absorbs water that could benefit native plants.

- A. Giant reed
- B. Heavenly bamboo
- C. Giant hogweed
- D. Salt cedar

**Answer: A**

Although all of the above are invasive plants, the giant reed is perhaps the biggest threat. It can burn quickly and spread via pernicious, hard-to-kill rhizomes. The clumps of reeds are hard to dig out of the ground. Many folks resort to a glyphosate herbicide.



**GIANT REED**

## Natives worth planting

Consider filling our landscape with some of these native, noninvasive trees, plants and grasses. They are good for your yard and the Central Texas ecosystem.



**Shrubs**

- ▲ Flame acanthus
- Texas mallow
- Mountain laurel
- Agarita
- American beautyberry



**Grasses**

- ▲ Mexican feather grass
- Little bluestem
- Indian grass
- Prairie dropseed
- Inland sea oats



**Vines**

- ▲ Coral honeysuckle
- Coral berry
- Mustang grape
- Crossvine
- Yellow jessamine



**Trees**

- ▲ Mountain laurel
- Mexican plum
- Bald cypress
- Lacey oak
- Desert willow

# Plant this, not that!

You can buy all of these trees, vines, bushes, landscape and water plants from Texas nurseries, but that doesn't mean they're ideal for a Central Texas landscape. Native plants work within the area's ecosystem and generally require less water in our drought-prone part of the country. Some of the don't-plant items on this list are considered invasive species, which are defined as nonnatives that can cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health, according to the Texas Invasive Species Institute. However, any of the plants on our don't-plant list can slowly take over your landscape — and not in a good way.



## PLANT THIS!

- Chinkapin oak, Texas red oak
- ◀ **Texas redbud**, red oak, bigtooth maple
- Crinum lily, tuckahoe, arrowhead
- Mexican buckeye, buttonbush
- Evergreen sumac, yaupon
- Cherry laurel, possumhaw
- Maypop (purple) passionflower
- Texas sage

## NOT THAT!

- Paper mulberry
- Silk tree, aka mimosa** ▶
- Elephant ear
- Lilac chaste tree
- Scarlet firethorn
- Sweet autumn clematis
- English ivy
- Sacred bamboo, aka nandina



**8** What flowering tree that your parents might have planted turned out to be a bad idea (and not just because it stinks in spring)?

- A. Magnolia
- B. Bradford pear
- C. Crepe myrtle
- D. Oleander

### Answer: B

It can look nice, but it's the weedy Bradford pear that was introduced from China in the early 1900s. Some folks still plant it, even though it smells terrible when it flowers. Its branches break easily in storms. The other three flowering trees on the list — magnolia, crepe myrtle and oleander — look nice and are popular, but they can outcompete native trees for growing room. Lady Bird Johnson would have preferred you plant a Texas redbud.



**BRADFORD PEAR**

**9** Don't let their cute little yellow flowers fool you. This plant is choking out Texas' beloved wildflowers.

- A. Rue
- B. Horsetail
- C. Beggar's lice
- D. Bastard cabbage

### Answer: D

Noxious, weedy bastard cabbage from southern Europe and northern Africa, also known as turnip weed or wild rape, smothers native plants and can quickly cover a field. Native rue and horsetail are fine plants to grow in your yard. Beggar's lice is native, but it can fill your yard with burrs in summer.



**BASTARD CABBAGE**

**10** These two invasive species go together like grackles and parking lots.

- A. King Ranch bluestem and red-streaked leafhopper
- B. Hackberry trees and cankerworm caterpillars, also known as inchworms
- C. Agarita bushes and carpenter bees
- D. Greenbrier vine and possums



**RED-STREAKED LEAFHOPPER**

### Answer: A

Bluestem and the leafhopper, which may resemble a grasshopper, are both invasive. The insect feeds on native and nonnative grasses, and sugarcane crops. Hackberry trees and agarita bushes are weedy, but they're native to Texas and are food sources for wildlife, including cankerworm caterpillars and carpenter bees. The nativized greenbrier vine — originally from the eastern United States, just like the possums that feed on it — isn't as much of a pest as the poison ivy that usually grows near it.

By the way, grackles are native, too. Parking lots, not so much.



# Good bug or bad bug? Take the quiz.

Stop before you squish! That insect could be good for your landscape.

Most bugs are good — about 97% of them, according to some experts. But there are some insects that cause more harm than help to people, animals or the environment. Beneficial bugs help pollinate plants and crops, aerate soil, balance the ecosystem, recycle organic matter and even eat bad bugs. Test your knowledge of native, nonnative and invasive bugs, and one worm (it's so bad, we couldn't leave it out).

**1** Formosan subterranean termites have been eating lumber in Texas homes since at least the 1950s. Why are they worse than regular termites?

- A. They build huge aerial nests.
- B. They reproduce faster than other species.
- C. They secrete a foul odor.
- D. They resist all forms of treatment.

**Answers: A and B**

Formosan termites are the most destructive kind, causing more than \$1 billion in damage to U.S. homes annually. There are many ways to keep termites at bay: Get information from Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension website: Go to [citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/](http://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/) and search for "termites." If you've already got termites, Formosan or not, call in professionals to use termiticide, fumigation and/or continual baiting until the colony is eliminated.



**FORMOSAN TERMITES**

**2** Which three of these ants should you leave alone in your yard?

- A. Tawny crazy ants
- B. Red fire ants
- C. Pyramid ants
- D. Leafcutter ants
- E. Harvester ants

**Answers: C, D & E**

Pyramid, leafcutter and harvester ants are all native. They might carve a path in your grass or make a bald spot near their nest, but they are important to our ecosystem. Invasive tawny crazy ants and red fire ants are decimating our native ant populations. Texas A&M's fire-ant research and management project recommends using pesticide baits from late August through October.

**3** True or false: Honeybees are a native species that thrives on Texas wildflowers.

**Answer: False**

There are more than 1,000 species of native bees in Texas, but honeybees are not one of them. Honeybees are native to Europe, Africa and the Middle East, although they've been in North America since the 1600s. "Hardcore naturalists aren't fans of honeybees, but they don't disrupt native bees, to our knowledge,"

said Molly Keck, an integrated pest-management program specialist with Texas A&M University who hosts two podcasts on Texas pests. Bees native to Texas include bumblebees, carpenter bees and sweat bees.



**CARPENTER BEE**

**4** Love your crepe myrtles? Watch out for this tiny insect causing big problems in Brazos, Williamson and Travis counties.

- A. Bark scale
- B. Varied carpet beetle
- C. Confused flour beetle
- D. Cochineal scale

**Answer: A**

Some scales, like cochineal, which lives on prickly pear cactus, are native, but the bark scale is not. After emerging from clusters of felt-like egg sacs, these tiny, oval-shaped insects with shell-like coverings can quickly give rise to a dark, sooty fungus that blackens crepe myrtle bark, making the tree susceptible to disease. Flour and carpet beetles are troublesome for homeowners, but they aren't a problem for trees.



**BARK SCALE**



## Did you know?

The Texas horned lizard, often called a "horny toad" or "horned frog," is now considered a threatened species in Texas due to habitat loss and the decline of native ants, in particular the harvester ant. Fun fact: In 1928, a horned lizard that was said to have been sealed in a time capsule for more than 30 years was found alive after all that time. The lizard, named Ol' Rip, went on tour, including a stop at the White House to meet President Calvin Coolidge, and inspired a rush on horned lizard sales.

**5** Hammerhead flatworms, recently spotted in Houston, are among the fastest-spreading, most troubling invasive species in Texas because:

- A. They travel easily and quickly via wet ground, including sidewalks, roads and waterways.
- B. They can irritate your skin and can make pets sick if ingested.
- C. They can regenerate parts of their body, so stepping on one could just create two worms.
- D. They eat other species of worms.



**HAMMERHEAD FLATWORM**

**Answer: All of the above**

Earlier this year, the state's Invasive Species Institute made a special appeal to folks in Central Texas to be on alert for this flatworm with a hammer-shaped head that came to America 100 years ago from Southeast Asia. It reproduces and travels quickly, and harms humans and animals, so take a photo of it before you kill it by putting salt and/or vinegar or citrus oil on it. Email your photo to [invasives@shsu.edu](mailto:invasives@shsu.edu). Be sure to tell them where you found it.

**6** Which is the native: a ladybug or a ladybird beetle?

**Answer: Ladybug** (photo on **Page 17**)

Although the two look similar, ladybird beetles, native to Asia, were introduced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1960s to control agricultural pests. They aren't invasive, though, and even though they can swarm inside your home when it gets cold, or bite to protect themselves, they are good for your garden. The beetles eat aphids and mites, just like ladybugs.



**LADYBIRD BEETLE**

**7** This insect's bite can cause humans to have a sudden onset of an allergy to red meat.

- A. Asian tiger mosquito
- B. Damsel fly
- C. Lone star tick
- D. Common bed bug

**Answer: C**

The lone star tick — named not for Texas, but for the white star on its back — can cause alpha-gal syndrome, which can create a lifelong allergic reaction to red meat (think hives, itching, swelling and shortness of breath). These ticks, more common in the northeast United States, are starting to show up more in Texas, including in Fayette, Bureson and Austin counties.



**LONE STAR TICK**

**8** Spiders might scare you, but you shouldn't kill most of them: They are good for the environment. Which two of these should you leave alone (or carefully move outside if one is in the house)?

- A. Wolf spider
- B. Brown recluse spider
- C. Orb spider
- D. Brown widow spider

**Answer: A and C**

Wolf and orb spiders are two native species that do a lot of good in an ecosystem: They eat smaller insects and they're eaten themselves by birds. The brown widow is nonnative and, though less dangerous than its native cousin, the black widow, it still packs a venomous bite. The brown recluse's bite can cause all kinds of problems, including fever, nausea and even necrosis.

**9** There are more than 150 species of assassin bugs in the United States, but this is the only one to worry about because it can carry a parasite that causes Chagas disease, which can be life-threatening.

- A. Ambush bug
- B. Milkweed assassin bug
- C. Giant wheel bug
- D. Kissing bug

**Answer: D**

Also known as the cone-nosed bug, kissing bugs can bite humans (and dogs) and transmit a parasite that causes the potentially fatal Chagas disease that can lead to flu-like symptoms, diarrhea, vomiting and a rash. Cases have been reported in Fayette, Lee and Travis counties. The other three assassin bugs are fine: they eat soft-bodied insects that might chew up your crops.



**KISSING BUG**

**Sources:** Texas Invasive Species Institute, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Texas A&M Forest Service (*Invasive Plants in Central Texas*), U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension; Photos courtesy Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Texas Invasive Species Institute; iStock photos

# SPEND A DAY IN Smithville

By Laura Castro

**RESIDENTS HERE** have a standard warning for visitors: You're going to fall in love with Smithville.

The picturesque community of more than 4,000 along the Colorado River in Bastrop County, off State Highway 71 about 40 miles southeast of Austin, abounds with small-town charm, historic buildings, museums, antique railcars, and oak tree-lined streets and parks. There are popular restaurants, eclectic shops and stylish art galleries scattered along or near historic downtown Main Street.

Hollywood chose the town as the backdrop for the hit movie "Hope Floats" with Sandra Bullock and Harry Connick Jr., which was released 25 years ago. That paved the way for Smithville to appear in at least 100 other movies, TV shows, commercials and music videos.

Independence Park commemorates the town's first house and store built in 1827 along the river by settler Dr. Thomas J. Gazley. Decades later, 17 families moved from the riverside to be near the tracks of the Bastrop and Taylor Railway, which started service there in 1887. The train line was extended to Houston and then merged with the Missouri, Kansas & Texas (MK&T or "Katy") railroad in 1891. That spurred employment and growth that made Smithville Bastrop County's largest city for over 50 years. A legendary coin toss between two prominent businessmen — Murray Bureson and William Smith — determined the town's name.

## WHAT TO DO

Self-guided tours of the city's historic commercial and residential districts start at **James H. Long Railroad Park and Museum**, the 100 block of First Street. Pick up self-guided tour brochures at the Chamber of Commerce and visitor center (in the same building) on weekdays, or grab them from any of three informational kiosks on Main Street. One brochure features a walking guide to 26 historical buildings downtown and, on the flipside, a driving guide to 32 historic homes and churches. Another is a tour map of movie sites around town. You can also find a guide to the historic downtown at [explorebastropcounty.com](http://explorebastropcounty.com) (search for Smithville Historical Downtown Walking Tour) and the movie tour map at [smithvilletx.org/tours](http://smithvilletx.org/tours).

Learn more of the city's history at **Smithville Heritage House & Museum**, 602 Main St., open 10 a.m.-noon Tuesday; call 512-629-2197 to schedule a tour.

Smithville is a state-designated cultural district with a vibrant arts scene. Outdoor murals, mosaics and sculptures are all around, many reflecting the city's railroad history. A swallowtail sculpture near **Railroad Park's Gazebo** is dedicated to workers killed in a



Smithville's Main Street is full of shops, galleries, dining spots and historic buildings. Look for information about the city and self-guided tour brochures in kiosks on the street. *Sarah Beal photo*



Courtney Dyer — a local beekeeper who sells her own honey — is the founder and manager of the farmers market, open 10 a.m.-1 p.m. every Sunday, near the downtown gazebo in Railroad Park. Vendors must produce the products they sell. *Laura Castro photo*



Fred and Laurie Beck represent local, regional and national artists — such as Austin artist Felice House, whose work is at left — at their 1,500-square-foot Main Gallery Smithville, which opened in 2022. *Melissa Segrest photo*



New owners have brought a few changes and a new name to the Smithville Coffee House & General Store, 108 NE Second St., including more seating space and locally produced fresh food. *Melissa Segrest photo*

### Continued from previous page

1911 locomotive explosion; a bust of town founder Gazley sits in **Independence Park**, 506 NW Loop 230; and Smitty, a 20-foot-tall replica of the former world's largest gingerbread man (baked here in 2006) stands next to the chamber.

Several art galleries feature paintings, sculptures, pottery, handmade furniture, mosaics and collages by local and regional artists. Community theater and live music also thrive.

Annual festivals include the **Airing of the Quilts & Tour of Homes** the second Saturday in November, the **Festival of Lights & Lighted Parade** the first Saturday in December, and the **Smithville Jamboree** in April.

Eleven area public parks include **Buescher State Park**, just north of town, with six miles of hiking/biking trails, a 30-acre lake and campsites; **Vernon Richards Riverbend Park** on the Colorado River, with camping, fishing, disc golf and more; and **Railroad Park**, where the **Smithville Farmers Market** happens every Sunday near the gazebo. Other parks include **Veterans Memorial Park-Splash Pad**, 311 NW Second St.; **MLK Park**, 208 Miller St.; and **Power Plaza Skate Park**, 350 NW First St.

## GRAB A BITE

**Your Mom's**, 109 NW Second St. Cajun and comfort food, plus a popular chicken-fried steak. 6-9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, noon-3 p.m. Sunday. Just a few steps away is **Hope Floats Ice Cream & Bakery**. Noon-9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, noon-3 p.m. Sunday.

Other dining options ranked high on **Tripadvisor.com** include:

**Comfort Cafe**, 111 NW First St. Popular for weekend brunch, cash only (pay what you can), the restaurant supports SerenityStar recovery program. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Friday-Sunday.

**Honey's**, 109 NE Second St. Wood-fired pizza, craft beers. 5-9 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday and Sunday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

**The Front Room Wine Bar**, 116 Main St. Drinks and dining in a quiet, cozy pub. 5-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 4-10 p.m. Friday, noon-10 p.m. Saturday.

**Olde World Bakery & Cafe**, 112 Main St. Breakfast and lunch. 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday.

**Fat Cat Lounge and Cafe**, 301 Main St. 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday.

## STOP TO SHOP

Tour galleries and shop for local artists' paintings, pottery, furniture and more: **Mosaic Art & Home**, 218 Main St.; **Lost Pines Artisans Alliance Gallery on Main**, 206 Main St.; **Main Gallery Smithville**, 200 Main St.; and **Lumberyard Studio**, 223 NE First St.

Popular boutiques, gift shops and antique stores include:

**Consuela**, 110 NW Second St. Popular, one-of-a-kind handbags and totes. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday.

**Texas Trails Antiques and Marketplace**, 213 Main St. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday-Saturday. **Bella's Cottage Antiques**, 119 Main St. same hours as Texas Trails, except closed Tuesday.

Sources: *City of Smithville* ([ci.smithville.tx.us/for-visitors](http://ci.smithville.tx.us/for-visitors)), *Smithville Cultural District* ([smithvilleculturaldistrict.com](http://smithvilleculturaldistrict.com)), *Explore Bastrop County*, ([explorebastropcounty.com](http://explorebastropcounty.com)), *Smithville Area Chamber of Commerce* ([smithvilletx.org](http://smithvilletx.org)), *Visit Smithville* ([visitsmithville.org](http://visitsmithville.org)), *Buescher State Park* ([tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/buescher](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/buescher))

*This is part of a series featuring towns in the Bluebonnet region.*



Logan Lancaster, a Bluebonnet crew supervisor from Giddings, left, installs a meter loop on a new pole while wearing a pink hardhat in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. All October, in addition to the pink hardhats and pink ribbon decals on trucks, Bluebonnet's member service centers will be lit pink to raise awareness for the cause. *Sarah Beal photos*



# Bluebonnet is going pink for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

**BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC** Cooperative's five member service centers will once again glow pink at night throughout October in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Since 2012, the cooperative has supported efforts to inform its members about this type of cancer. More than 297,000 women and almost 3,000 men in the United States are expected to be diagnosed with it in 2023, according to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

In addition to pink lighting at the member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor, Bluebonnet field crews will wear pink hard hats, and service trucks will display pink ribbon decals.

Members can visit a member service center this month to receive a pink ribbon pin, flower-seed bookmark or rubber bracelet to show their support, as well as a breast self-examination reminder and instruction card. On select days, member service representatives will wear pink shirts.

Events are planned across Bluebonnet's service area to help raise awareness and money for breast cancer education and research. Watch the cooperative's social media for information about those activities throughout October.

## HOW TO REPORT AN OUTAGE

If you have a power outage, report it by texting OUT to 85700 (to register, text BBOUTAGE to that number), visiting [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop), using the MyBluebonnet mobile app or calling 800-949-4414.

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# It Still Reigns

At 50, Elmer Kelton's 'The Time It Never Rained' remains 'a book of the heart'

BY W.F. STRONG

**WE SHOULD ALL BE** grateful that Elmer Kelton was a poor cowboy. When he was a young man, the now-famous writer said his inability to rope and ride well pushed him toward reading and then writing. Had he been a better cowboy, he told a reporter in 1984, "I'd still be working out on some ranch on the Pecos River."

It's been 50 years since *The Time It Never Rained*, Kelton's classic novel, was published. Many Texas literary critics consider it one of the best novels written by a Texan about Texas. It was also Kelton's favorite book and what he called his signature work—of the nearly 50 novels he wrote before he died in 2009.

The novel received the Spur Award

and the Western Heritage Award.

The book is not your run-of-the-mill Western. There are no shootouts. No one dies. Wallace Kaufman, who taught at Duke University, wrote that the novel should rank "with Faulkner's work as the local made universal."

Author Shelley Armitage grew up in the 1950s in the Texas Panhandle, when and where the novel takes place.

"To see oneself and one's landscape so accurately and aesthetically rendered was life-changing—as it remains today: a book of the heart," Armitage says.

Mike Cox, author of 14 books on Texas and the West, notes that Kelton covered the terrible 1950s drought for the *San Angelo Standard-Times* and began

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



writing fiction on the side.

"He used what he knew about the dry spell for *The Time It Never Rained*, a novel I don't believe he ever expected to become a classic," Cox says. "I predict that as the West continues to get drier and drier due to global warming, his book will become even more important."

For prolific author Wyman Meinzer, Texas' official state photographer who once shared a book signing with Kelton, his "words conjured memories of blinding dust storms, dry stock tanks and a land void of palatable grass."

Jac Darsnek, the man behind the much-loved *Traces of Texas* accounts on social media and a ubiquitous traveler and photographer of Texas, was 17 when he discovered the novel. He still draws inspiration from Charlie Flagg, the novel's admirable protagonist, whom Kelton created from his own cowboy father.

"Elmer Kelton's tale of hardship and endurance and main character Charlie Flagg's astonishing self-reliance resonated within me in a place I never knew I had, and his descriptions of ranch life spoke to my inner Texan," Darsnek said. "Decades later, when confronted with some obstacle or tough choice, I'll ask myself, 'What would Charlie Flagg do?'"

Steve Davis, curator of the Southwestern writers collection at the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University, says *The Time It Never Rained* is one of the most important Texas novels and a masterful example of eyewitness literature.

"Kelton was on the front lines when the great drought devastated the land and people he knew intimately," Davis says. "His resulting novel, richly observed and deeply empathetic, stands as the truest, most profound portrait of that era." ■

# Beans

Versatility turns this kitchen staple into a star

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

A quick and easy mixture of green, black and red beans tossed in a delicious, tangy dressing, this three-bean salad is great the day you make it, but it's even better to enjoy the next day for lunch.



## Three-Bean Salad

4 teaspoons salt, divided use  
 12 ounces fresh green beans,  
 rinsed and cut into 1-inch pieces  
 6 tablespoons olive oil  
 6 tablespoons lemon juice  
 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard  
 1 teaspoon ground cumin  
 1 teaspoon ground black pepper  
 1 can black beans (15 ounces),  
 drained and rinsed  
 1 can red beans (15 ounces),  
 drained and rinsed  
 ¼ cup finely diced red onion  
 1 cucumber, diced  
 1 cup finely diced carrot  
 ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley  
 4 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

1. Fill a pot halfway with water, add 2 teaspoons salt and bring to a boil.
2. Add green beans and cook for 3 minutes. Drain and pat dry.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, cumin, pepper and remaining 2 teaspoons salt.
4. Add green beans, black beans and red beans to bowl. Stir to combine, then stir in red onion, cucumber and carrot.
5. Cover and chill until ready to serve. Before serving, stir in parsley and dill.

SERVES 6

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at [sweetliffbake.com](http://sweetliffbake.com), where she features a recipe for Roasted Tomatillo Garbanzo Salad.



## Little Pots of Red Beans With Sour Cream

ALEXANDRA DIBRELL  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Sometimes cooking for two can be tricky. Don't worry—Dibrell has hungry twosomes covered with a simple one-pot dinner idea. Bacon, beans and a little jalapeño kick, served warm and topped with sour cream, are pure comfort.

- 2 strips bacon, diced**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- ½ small red onion, finely diced**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely diced**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¾ cup chicken broth or stock**
- 1 can kidney beans (15.5 ounces), drained**
- 4 tablespoons sour cream**
- Fresh cilantro sprigs, for garnish**

1. In a skillet, cook bacon until crisp. Remove from pan and drain.
2. Add olive oil, onion, jalapeño and salt. Sauté until soft and translucent.
3. Pour in chicken broth or stock and return bacon to skillet, bringing to a simmer.
4. Stir in beans and simmer until warmed through.
5. Ladle the beans into two bowls and top each with sour cream and cilantro.

**SERVES 2**

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



**\$500 WINNER**

## Hurry Up Stew

EDITH FORSHAGE  
GVEC



A filling, hearty meal that's easy to prepare at the end of a busy day, Forshage's Hurry Up Stew is pantry-friendly and can be whipped up in under 30 minutes.

**SERVES 6**

- 1 pound ground beef**
- 2 tablespoons dried beef bouillon**
- 1 can diced tomatoes with green chilis (15 ounces)**
- 1 carton chicken, beef or vegetable broth (32 ounces)**
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can garbanzo beans (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can hominy (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can potatoes (15 ounces), drained**
- 1 can diced carrots (15 ounces), drained**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper**

1. In a nonstick pot, brown ground beef and drain.
2. Stir in bouillon, diced tomatoes and broth.
3. Add pinto beans, garbanzo beans, hominy, potatoes and carrots.
4. Add salt and pepper.
5. Simmer for 20 minutes to thoroughly heat ingredients.

## **TCP** \$500 Recipe Contest

**BEST BRUNCH** DUE OCTOBER 10

Brunch is at your place this time. What will you serve? We're looking for the best recipes in Texas. Submit your favorite online by October 10 for a chance to win \$500.





## Homemade Bean Dip

KAREN YEOMAN  
SAN PATRICIO EC

Yeoman has been cooking up this family-favorite dip for 40 years for family gatherings, church functions and parties. It's easy and delicious, and we're excited to share it with you.

**2 cups fully cooked pinto beans**  
**2 tablespoons picante sauce**  
**½ teaspoon garlic powder**

**¼ pound processed cheese product**  
**2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter**  
**Tortilla or corn chips, for serving**

1. Place beans, picante sauce and garlic powder into a blender. Blend until smooth.
2. In a glass bowl, melt cheese and butter in microwave, stirring at 30-second to 1-minute intervals until smooth.
3. Stir bean mixture into the cheese mixture until smooth. Microwave dip for 30-second to 1-minute intervals until thoroughly heated.
4. Serve warm dip with chips.

**SERVES 10**

**TCP** Among the more than 1,000 recipes in our online archive are dozens that include beans—even some for chili. You can find them all on our website.

## Fabulous and Versatile Beans

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Canned beans, a pantry staple, are not only delicious, they also are extremely versatile and budget-friendly, can shine as a main dish or side, and even work in desserts.

Try these ideas to get more from your pantry beans:

**Blend them into a creamy dip.**

**Stir some into your favorite stew.**  
(And they really are even OK in chili.)

**Use beans as a satisfying filling for your next taco night.**

**Consider them as a meatless option for making burgers.**

**Mix into cold salads for potlucks.**

**Bake puréed beans into brownies for added protein.**



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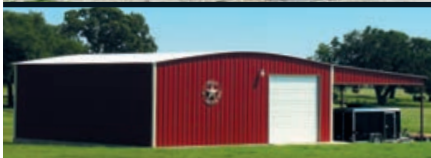
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## Puffy Taco Trailblazer

Legendary Ray's Drive Inn was the first and remains the best

BY CHET GARNER

**WHEN I HEAR** the term “drive-in,” I immediately envision greasy cheese-burgers, thick milkshakes and smiling carhops. But Ray's Drive Inn on the west side of San Antonio isn't that kind of joint. Sure, it's full of nostalgia, an old jukebox and belly-pleasing food. But Ray's has a magical, signature dish that separates it from all others—puffy tacos. After hearing the legend, I took a day trip to the Alamo City to try them for myself.

Ray's opened in 1956 as the entrepreneurial dream of Raymond Lopez. Legend holds that one day, Ray's grandmother was frying corn masa for tostadas. She stepped away from the fryer and a wooden stick (no doubt guided by the hand of God) fell from a shelf and folded the masa into a tacolike form. The family started selling these crispy yet fluffy shells full of meat, cheese, lettuce and tomatoes. In no time, a legend was born.

After almost 70 years, the restaurant is still family owned and operated by the children of Arturo Lopez, Ray's younger brother.

I found the restaurant far from the beaten path and could smell the deep-fried tortillas as soon as I stepped out of my truck. Inside, the walls were a menagerie of family photos, taxidermy and even a neon altar to the Virgin Mary. I ordered up a platter of three puffy tacos (beef, chicken, and bean and avocado) and found a table tucked below a painting of Ray, Arturo and their three other brothers.

One bite let me know that this was unlike any taco I had ever eaten. It was crunchy but soft and perfectly greasy. I had no choice but to order a few more with different fillings. You know, for research. ■

ABOVE Chet shows a close-up of a puffy taco before making it disappear.

**TCP** Follow along as Chet enjoys puffy perfection. See the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



### Know Before You Go

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

## OCTOBER 07

**Boerne Book Festival,**  
(830) 249-3053,  
boernebookfest.com

**Grapevine Celebra**  
**Grapevine,** (813) 807-3382,  
latinosingrapevine.org

**Huntington Catfish**  
**Festival,** (936) 635-3306,  
shophuntingtontx.com

**San Marcos [7-8] Sacred**  
**Springs Powwow,**  
(512) 393-5930,  
sspowwow.com

**Weatherford [7-Dec. 2]**  
**Spirit of the West,**  
(817) 599-6168,  
weatherfordart.com

## 12

**Corsicana 175th Anniver-**  
**sary Time Capsule**  
**Ceremony,** (903) 654-4850,  
corsicana175years.com

## 13

**Albany [13-14] Living His-**  
**tory Days,** (512) 463-6100,  
thc.texas.gov

**Ingram [13, 15, 20-22,**  
**26-29] Frankenstein,**  
(830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

## 14

**Fredericksburg Monarch**  
**Celebration,** (830) 990-1393,  
wildseedfarms.com

## 19

**Tyler [19-22] Texas Rose**  
**Festival,** (903) 531-1212,  
texasrosefestival.com

## 20

**Brenham Brass Transit,**  
(979) 337-7240,  
thebarnhillcenter.com

## 21

**Cisco TX Pie Fest,**  
(254) 334-9621,  
ciscotxpiefest.com

**San Marcos Eddie Durham Jazz Fest**, (512) 217-0600, facebook.com/calaboosemuseum

**Waco Oakwood Cemetery's Walking Tales**, (254) 717-1763, facebook.com/heartoftexasstorytellingguild

27

**Galveston [27-28] Oktoberfest**, (409) 762-8477, galvestonoktoberfest.com

28

**Cibolo Cibolofest**, (210) 619-3104, cibolotx.gov

**Point Venture Holiday Bazaar**, (781) 363-7161, facebook.com/pvholidaybazaar

**Sanger Sellabration**, (940) 458-7702, sangertexas.com

**Waxahachie Texas Country Reporter Festival**, (469) 309-4045, waxahachiecvb.com

31

**Johnson City Trunk-or-Treat at the Square**, (830) 868-7111, johnsoncitytx.org

## NOVEMBER

03

**Oakville Dobie Dichos**, (361) 319-3067, dobedichos.com

04

**Cottonwood Shores Legends of the Falls Festival**, (225) 747-0730, cottonwoodshores.org

### TCP *Submit Your Event*

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

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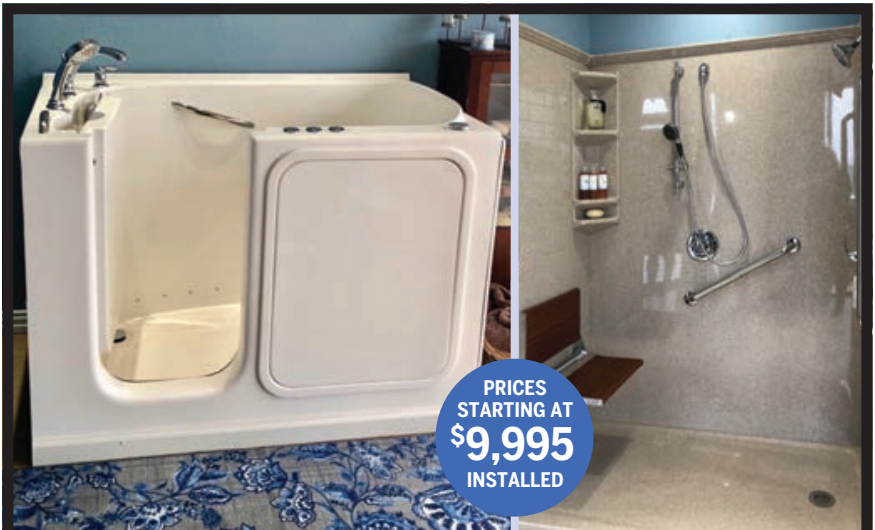


Welcome Home Fest  
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www.kerrvillefolkfestival.org



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# Helping Out

From food donations to fundraising, Texans love to answer the call and lend a helping hand. Here's to all those who look out for others and embrace a challenge, rolling up their sleeves and pitching in for those in need.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



**1 HANNAH WESTERVELT**  
SAN PATRICIO EC

"My son and husband working on his truck."

**2 KERI NAKAMURA**  
TRI-COUNTY EC

"A son takes his 93-year-old mother on an evening walk."

**3 BRANDON EMBRY**  
DEAF SMITH EC

"I always liked this photo of my grandpa with my son trailing him around. We were getting ready to harvest wheat, and my kids always liked hanging out with Pop."

**4 LINDSAY HUMPHREYS**  
SOUTH PLAINS EC

"The beauty of raising kids in West Texas is they get to experience traditional branding and working cattle."



## Upcoming Contests

- DUE OCT 10** Vibrant Color
  - DUE NOV 10** Architecture
  - DUE DEC 10** Pollinators
- 

Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for more Helping Out photos from readers.



## Noteworthy Grace

When the pandemic paused events, a tiny chapel celebrated kindness

BY SPIKE GILLESPIE  
PHOTO BY WYATT MCSPADEN

**SEVERAL YEARS AGO** I bought an abandoned ranch just east of Austin. I dreamed of one day converting it to a meditation center, providing space for people of all walks to gather and sit in peace.

Running a ranch, even a small one, is pricey though. So I put my dream on hold and instead created a small wedding venue, a more lucrative way to support the place.

The crown jewel was a tiny chapel I had moved here from Luling. Couples loved the rustic feel and unique beauty of the building, fashioned from reclaimed wood and antique stained glass.

During the pandemic, business fell off and grumpiness befell some of the couples who proceeded with their plans. Frustrated with how the pandemic forced unwanted change—some had to reschedule, others watched guest lists

dwindle—they sometimes took out their aggravation on me. Overwhelmed by this negativity, sometimes I snapped back.

For a spell, after a particularly enraged bride eviscerated me because of the weather, I shut down altogether. Dismayed at how joyful celebrations had become overshadowed, I knew I needed to make a change.

A flash of an idea struck me. I recalled a Vermont chapel where people make pilgrimages to honor their dogs who have passed. I remembered a little chapel in Mexico where visitors leave notes of gratitude and *milagros* (prayer offerings) for St. Francis. I dubbed my itty-bitty church the Tiny Chapel of Kindness and invited people to send stories of kindness to adorn the walls.

And they did.

Their notes run the gamut from heartwarming to heartbreaking to flat-out hilarious. One describes being saved from a car wreck by strangers. Another hails an internet stranger who sent free motorcycle parts to a fellow tinkerer. One details the discovery, late in life, of a long-lost half-brother who embraced his “new” sister wholeheartedly (the siblings had been kept secret from each other because of the sins of their father).

I had many stories of my own to share, finally settling on one. Last fall, one of my longhorns went into labor. It was a bad journey. Unable to assist her alone, I called a neighbor for help. We cried as we worked together to deliver the stillborn calf. Then he administered penicillin so the mom would survive.

Grateful visitors come to read the stories and leave notes of their own. This is not the meditation center I’d envisioned when I first laid eyes on an old run-down property, but in our own fashion, we each meditate on the power of kindness. Powerful indeed.

As I had hoped, my attitude has shifted back to positive and, inspired by others, my anger has been replaced by joy and gratitude. ■

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**2023 Canada Maple Leaf:** A highly sought-after bullion coin since 1988, this 2023 issue includes the FIRST and likely only use of a transitional portrait, of the late Queen Elizabeth II. These are also expected to be the LAST Maple Leafs to bear Her Majesty's effigy. Struck in high-purity 99.99% fine silver at the Royal Canadian Mint.

**2023 South African Krugerrand:** The Krugerrand continues to be the best-known, most respected numismatic coin brand in the world. 2023 is the Silver Krugerrand's 6th year of issue. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the South African Mint.

**2023 China Silver Panda:** 2023 is the 40th anniversary of the first silver Panda coin, issued in 1983. China Pandas are noted for their heart-warming one-year-only designs. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the China Mint.

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**2023 British Silver Britannia:** One of the Royal Mint's flagship coins, this 2023 issue is the FIRST in the Silver Britannia series to carry the portrait of King Charles III, following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. Struck in 99.9% fine silver.

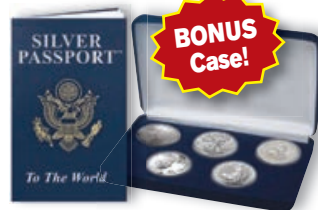


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