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IN BANDERA

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THE AMERICAN FLAG

A NEIGHBORHOOD'S
SEED SAVER

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRINITY VALLEY EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2024

Vanishing Act

Conservationists
work to save
native plants in decline

TRINITY
VALLEY EC
NEWS

SEE PAGE 16

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April 2024



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Thorny Task 12 Holding Promise

Scientists, landowners and plant lovers work to preserve hundreds of threatened Texas natives.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Bandera's Helping Hand puts relief within reach for neighbors in need.

Story and photos by Laura Jenkins

ON THE COVER

The flower of the rare night-blooming cereus can be seen just one night a year.

Photo by Dave Shafer

ABOVE

The Hinckley oak is an evergreen shrub in the Chihuahuan Desert.

Photo by Keeper Trout | Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

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FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Wow! The eclipse was ...

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 February prompt: **Campfires remind me of ...**

Telling scary stories as kids.

CATHY ONDREJ
HILCO EC
AQUILLA

Me and my dad camping. We would stare at the fire for hours and say, "This is much better than watching TV."

MIKE EARLY
VIA FACEBOOK

The time I set our tent on fire!

HOOMALIMALI PAULO
VIA FACEBOOK

The possibility of a nostalgic gathering and the surety of an asthma attack.

SHELLY REID
SOUTH PLAINS EC
BECTON

Fresh air, boiled cowboy coffee, staring at the embers.

DURENA KRILEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

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Textures

RECOMMENDED READING
Ten years ago we looked at the problems caused by the growing population of feral hogs in Texas. See *Here a Pig, There a Pig* from April 2014 on our website.

Wiring the American Dream

ON LINEWORKER Appreciation Day, April 8, we celebrate the 20 Texas electric cooperative lineworkers who brought electricity to Matasanos, a rural village in Guatemala. They spent two weeks there in November as part of NRECA International, a program that for more than 60 years has delivered electricity to remote places that had none—exactly what co-ops did in rural Texas 85 years ago.

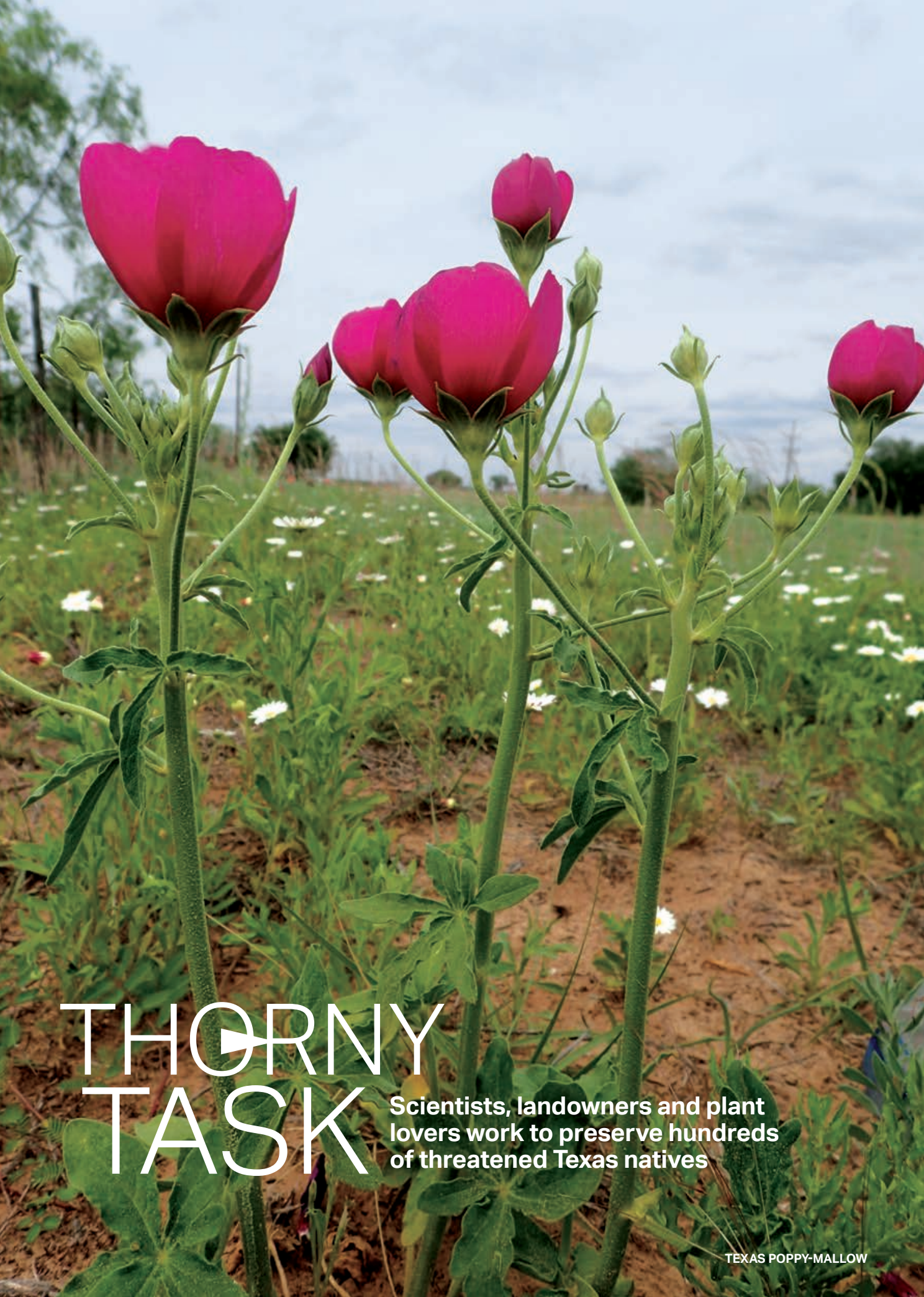
Ten South Texas co-ops sent two crew members each, plus support staff. When they finished, 60 homes had each been wired with four lights, two switches and two outlets. Villagers helped the lineworkers move equipment up the mountain.

"I believe we take the American dream on the road and transplant it to other countries," says Jim Coleman, general manager at Jackson Electric Cooperative in Edna, who has participated in several international projects. He was joined in Guatemala by GMs from four other Texas co-ops.



No Fooling

Some historians say April Fools' Day customs have been around since the 16th century, when France's King Charles IX decreed the new year would begin January 1—not on Easter. Those who clung to the old ways were called April fools.



THORNY TASK

Scientists, landowners and plant lovers work to preserve hundreds of threatened Texas natives

TEXAS POPPY-MALLOW

Randy Deming often walks his 10 acres of rural land in Callahan County, near Abilene, always on the lookout for a flower, insect or bird he hasn't spotted before.

Using an app called iNaturalist, he documents the native grasses, yuccas, Ashe junipers, live oaks and other plants that grow there. Thanks to the app, Deming learned in 2021 that one of his flowering species could be one of only a few remaining populations in Texas.

"I took pictures of a pretty flower and forgot about it," recalls Deming, a member of the Texas Master Naturalist Program and Taylor Electric Cooperative. "A few months later, I was skeptical when someone contacted me through iNaturalist and asked to see my large-flower beardtongues.

"When they told me how rare they are, I was excited," Deming says. "I could have mowed them down! Now I'm watching over them."

In the future, large-flower beardtongues—a tall, erect perennial with tubular purple blooms—could be legally protected if researchers collect enough ecological data to substantiate the designation. In the meantime, 437 other Texas plants have already been designated by the state as "species of greatest conservation need," meaning they're in decline and need attention. Some of those species require even more urgent measures. These are further labeled as threatened or endangered.

The two legal terms stem from the Endangered Species Act, a federal law enacted in 1973 to protect and help recover the nation's imperiled plant and animal species and their habitats. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service oversees the federal list and partners with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which manages the Texas list. A species can be federally and state protected, such as shrubby Texas snowbells in the Hill Country, or just one or the other.

However, the process for federally listing a species can stretch out for years. Consider the bracted twistflower, a tall annual with lavender flowers that has been increasingly lost to urban sprawl and hungry herbivores. Found only within the Edwards Plateau, the wildflower has been marked as imperiled since 1975 and was petitioned for



TURNER'S CLIFF THISTLE

federal listing in 2014. In May 2023—nine years later—the USFWS finally listed the bracted twistflower as threatened. In Coryell County, the imperiled Texabama croton faces similar challenges.

Plants of all kinds in Texas face many pressures. Every year, development scrapes away one natural area after another. Invasive plants, agriculture, poaching, mining, weather, loss of pollinators, and land and water management also negatively impact the state's flora.

But does it really matter if a few of Texas' estimated 5,000-plus native plant species go away? The answer is yes.

"We have biodiversity for a reason," says Anna Strong, a rare species botanist with TPWD. "Each organism interacts with others in specific ways. Regardless of whether it's rare or common, if we take out one organism, we don't know the implications amongst all the organisms. If we take out one flower, we may take a food source away from a specific insect that relies on that species."

At the San Antonio Botanical Garden, botanist Michael Eason works to conserve and propagate rare Texas plants. "We have more than 90 species in our collections," Eason says. "Some are displayed in our gardens, which helps to educate the public. Others are seed collections, which haven't been propagated yet."

One of those species, prostrate milkweed, a low-growing perennial, is endemic only to Starr and Zapata counties and northeastern Mexico. Since at least 1980, invasive



Glossary

An endangered species is defined under the Endangered Species Act as “any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

A threatened species is defined under the ESA as “any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

Imperiled is not a legal term. Biologically, it refers to unprotected species that are in decline and may be in danger of extinction.

Rare plants have very limited ranges or exist in low numbers.

buffelgrass, road construction and development have drastically reduced its numbers. After several petitions to the USFWS, prostrate milkweed—an important monarch butterfly host plant—was federally listed as endangered in March 2023. The agency also designated 661 acres as critical habitat needed by the species to survive.

For his part, Eason spent five years tracking down the scarce milkweeds and collecting seeds, then having a milkweed specialist grow the plants to maturity. “We ended up with 150 plants,” he says. “We passed some to other botanical gardens. We’ll install some in our rare plant gardens. The remainder will be kept for perhaps reintroductions in South Texas and donations to other institutions with the Center for Plant Conservation.”

Headquartered in Escondido, California, the CPC is a



TEXAS SNOWBELL

TEXAS SNOWBELL: CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD. TEXABAMA CROTON: RAY MATHEWS | LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

Grassroots Efforts

The Texas Department of Transportation monitors for rare plants prior to road construction and along state highways and rights of way. Edd Paradise, a TxDOT environmental planner in Pharr and a Magic Valley Electric Cooperative member, worked with USFWS to relocate endangered Zapata bladder-pods in Starr County.

Aaron Lincoln—a biodiversity manager with Lhoist, a global corporation—oversees a pilot project to restore grasslands and a pocket prairie at a 3,000-acre chemical lime plant and quarry in Bosque County. So far, he’s documented glandular blazing stars, Hall’s prairie clover, lemonscent and other declining species. Lincoln also hopes to set aside 122 acres as a refuge for white troutlilies and morel mushrooms.

The Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery in Dallas rallied to transform the historic cemetery’s neglected grounds into native habitat. Today, the Constellation of Living Memorials pilot project includes eight old cemeteries and will serve as an example for revitalizing the state’s 5,000-plus historic cemeteries. One project goal is to encourage the recovery of threatened and endangered plant species.



TEXABAMA CROTON

nationwide network of organizations working together to save imperiled native plants. The San Antonio Botanical Garden partners with the CPC, as do the Botanical Research Institute of Texas at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, Mercer Botanic Gardens in Humble and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

As part of its conservation efforts, the wildflower center stores seeds of 575 Texas plant species for research and sharing with botanical gardens and conservation organizations. The seed bank, housed mostly in freezers, also serves as an insurance policy against the loss of imperiled species.

“We visit wild populations that we have permission to access, either on public land or through contacting land-owners,” explains Jonathan Flickinger, conservation collections manager at the wildflower center. “We harvest seeds



BRACED TWISTFLOWER

from plants, but we don't take too many because our priority is to conserve the plants in their natural habitat."

In some cases, researchers may rescue plants by digging them up. That happened with the Texas poppy-mallow, listed as federally endangered in 1981. The tall perennial with reddish purple flowers grows in deep sandy soils along the Colorado River in four counties.

In 2010, some conservation-minded landowners asked that a population of poppy-mallows be removed from a future construction site on their property. That summer, wildflower center staff and other colleagues extracted 54 plants and fostered them in pots for three years.

"We harvested more than 3,000 seeds from them for our seed bank," Flickinger says. "Then we identified another site where they were reintroduced."

Landowners play a huge role in plant conservation, namely because about 95% of Texas' land is privately owned. When threatened or endangered plants grow on private land, landowners are not legally required to manage them under the Endangered Species Act (the law differs for listed birds and animals).

Botanists and other officials must always ask permission before accessing private land. Typically, they want to survey plant species, perhaps harvest a small amount of seeds and collect plant material for herbarium vouchers.

The Fish and Wildlife Service offers a program that provides property owners with free technical and financial assistance for improving wildlife habitat on their land. "We're always looking for opportunities to work with landowners," says Chris Best, USFWS botanist. "Most of the ones I've met want to protect their land's natural resources."

That aptly describes attorney Liz Rogers, a Medina Electric Cooperative member. For more than two decades, she's welcomed researchers onto her family's 8,000-acre cattle ranch in southeastern Brewster County, along the Mexico border. "They always show me cool things, which has made me appreciate our ranch even more," she says.

Eason has been among many plant conservationists who have botanized the ranch's Trans-Pecos deserts, canyons and mountainsides. "Liz has an assortment of rare plants found along cliff faces and other protected areas," he says. "We've collected plants such as Turner's cliff thistle, rock-daisy and Barton's dalea. She also has a small population of night-blooming cereus."

Whether rare or not, showy or inconspicuous, every native plant matters. "We shouldn't focus conservation merely on species that have declined so far that they're teetering on the brink of extinction," Best says. "We should be working to keep common plants common." ■



Noah's Arks for Seeds

Just as the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin stores seeds of 575 Texas plant species for research, national and global seed vaults do the same—preserving plant types in case they are wiped out by natural or human-made disasters.

The National Laboratory for Genetic Resources Preservation on the campus of Colorado State University is run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It houses more than 850,000 plant seeds and materials, as well as DNA samples from about 160 breeds of livestock.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, located about halfway between the North Pole and the coast of Norway, is more than 300 feet inside a mountain, where the permafrost maintains a stable temperature between 26 and 39 degrees. Three large concrete chambers have the capacity to hold 3.5 million seed samples.



HOLDING PROMISE

BANDERA'S **HELPING HAND** PUTS RELIEF WITHIN REACH FOR NEIGHBORS IN NEED



FROM THE ROAD, it doesn't stand out from any other small office complex you might find in the Hill Country. But once you pass through the towering iron gate, get out of your car and start walking, the landscape becomes much more inviting: winding paths that lead to a peaceful courtyard and a sprawling pergola nestled against a scenic lily pond.

This is what hope looks like. More specifically, the Village of Hope—the cluster of buildings owned by Bandera County Helping Hand, a haven for residents facing a personal crisis. Are you sick? There's a free medical clinic. Is your cupboard bare? Head over to the food pantry. Do you need shoes, clothes or basic household items? The thrift store has what you need.

Since 1984, Bandera Helping Hand has been a steadfast safety net for folks who have hit hard times.

"We're here to help people get on their feet," says Jesse Parks, executive director of Helping Hand. "You never know what tomorrow will bring. Everything's great until all of a sudden there's a car wreck and somebody's gone or there's a flood or a fire and you've lost everything. It's devastating."

Parks speaks from experience. In the late 1990s, she and her husband uprooted their lives in Corpus Christi and moved to Medina, just west of Bandera, where they signed a long-term lease on a piece of land and started working on their dream: building a facility for teens experiencing crisis. Two years later, without warning, the landowner sold it out from under them, including the structures and improvements they'd funded with their own money.

They lost everything. To make ends meet, Parks got a job at the Apple Store in Medina (which actually sells fruit). One day a friend came in and told her that she'd recommended Parks for the director position at Helping Hand. Even though she'd never worked at a nonprofit, Parks accepted the position and has led the organization since 2000.

Helping Hand began 16 years earlier, in 1984, when local churches came together to assist neighbors in need. The aim was to pool resources and provide a central place where people could go for help. In the early days, Helping Hand operated a thrift store and a food pantry and provided school supplies for children. It also helped struggling residents pay their utility bills.

But when the Medina River swept through the town during the devastating South Texas floods of 2002, it demolished Helping Hand's facilities. Quite suddenly they were among those in crisis.

"Our building was completely destroyed," Parks remembers, "so we set up shop in a warehouse and started gathering donations from other food banks. The Salvation Army came in and helped us provide aid for flood victims as well."

Seeing how generously and efficiently Helping Hand had been serving the community, Bandera's city council offered them space so they could continue helping residents while they figured out how to start over themselves. And that's when offers of help started pouring in.

"A retired grant writer by the name of Dan Wise got in touch and offered to help us raise funds to rebuild," says Parks, a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative. "I looked forever for land that was not in a flood plain and finally found this 3.77 acres. We bought it with money we borrowed from Bandera Bank but were able to pay it back within a year using the grants that Mr. Wise helped us get from various foundations."

By early 2004, Helping Hand's crisis intervention center was complete. At the building's dedication, then-board President Comellia Rue announced that the next structure they would build was a free medical clinic to serve the county's uninsured residents. But no one had any idea where the money would come from.

Enter Kerrville businessman Arthur Nagel, who approached the pastor of a local church and told him God had given him a vision to start a medical clinic in Bandera. The pastor introduced Parks to Nagel, who donated \$150,000 to construct the shell of the clinic building on the Village of Hope grounds. Within a year, Helping Hand had raised enough money to complete the clinic and operate it for a year. The clinic formed its own nonprofit and opened its door to patients in 2008.

Today the Arthur Nagel Community Clinic is open three days a week. In addition to primary care, the clinic offers mental health services and teen and elder care programs. Healthy cooking and cardio fitness classes are also available. The clinic provided an estimated \$1.9 million in health services to 443 Bandera County residents in 2023, says clinic director Chuck Lutke.

The food pantry stays stocked thanks to food and cash donations from individuals and contributions from other food banks. As a result, Helping Hand can feed an average of 130 families a month.

At the thrift store, which thrives on steady donations of gently used clothing and household items, residents purchase what they need at affordable prices. Sales cover nearly three-fourths of Helping Hand's annual operating budget.

"Helping Hand is about community," Parks says. "We all work as a team. I see us as a community of 'hands' that resources pass through. Each one of us has been through hard times and knows what a little compassion and love can mean in a crisis situation.

"Helping people get back on their feet and feeling good about themselves as they overcome whatever they're going through is a privilege.

"It's not a *handout*, it's a *hand up*." ■

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The Village of Hope welcomes folks who have hit hard times. Angelica Hernandez greets patients at the medical clinic, which is open three days a week. The food pantry can feed 130 families a month.

TCP See this story on our website to donate to the Village of Hope.

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Peace Silver Dollar: With a beautiful design memorializing peace following the end of World War I, the 90% silver Peace Dollar was intended as a one-year only release struck in 1921—but it proved so popular with the American people, it was struck until 1928, then again in 1934-35. Extremely Fine (XF) condition coin included in set.

Eisenhower Dollar: The last circulating U.S. dollar coin, the Eisenhower Dollar, aka the "Ike Dollar," was prized by Americans, with its design featuring war hero President Dwight D. Eisenhower, backed by an image symbolizing the Apollo II moon landing. First struck with silver 1971-1976, the Eisenhower Dollar in this set was struck in 40% silver for collectors, and you will receive a coin in Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition.

Silver Eagle Type 1: The first-ever U.S. Silver Dollar minted in 99.9% silver, these coins were first minted in 1986 following President Ronald Reagan's signing of the Liberty Coin Act into law on July 9, 1985, which authorized the U.S. Mint to strike America's new silver bullion coin. This gorgeous Silver Dollar features the original, revered Type 1 "Heraldic Eagle" reverse design by John Mercanti, 12th Chief Engraver of the U.S. Mint. Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition coin included in set.

Silver Eagle Type 2: In honor of the popular 99.9% silver coin's 35th anniversary in 2021, the Silver Eagle received a new, esteemed Type 2 "Eagle Landing" reverse design. This is the current issued coin by the U.S. Mint. Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition coin included in set.

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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO
JEFF LANE

Our Heroes Wear Hard Hats

LINE WORK IS NOT A glamorous or easy profession. It takes years of specialized training and ongoing education and, equally important, a sense of service and commitment to your community. How else can you explain the willingness of lineworkers to leave the comfort of their homes to tackle a challenging job in difficult conditions, when most other folks are sheltering safely with their families?

This dedication and service is truly what sets our lineworkers apart. That's why Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, and electric cooperatives across the country, set aside the second Monday in April—April 8 this year—to celebrate and recognize the men and women who work around the clock to keep the lights on.

We join other electric cooperatives across our state and nation in celebrating Lineworker Appreciation Day to recognize those workers'

Our lineworkers are heroes in every sense of the word.

critical roles in providing our members with the power they depend on.

Every day, lineworkers face immense risks.

Carrying heavy gear, they regularly scale 40-foot poles near high-voltage power lines, often in the wake of Mother Nature's worst. It's no wonder their profession is among the most dangerous in the country.

TVEC's lineworkers maintain thousands of miles of power lines, keeping the lights on for our members. Our lineworkers are heroes in every sense of the word. As the first responders of our workforce, we count on them to get us through some of our darkest hours, day or night. They truly deserve this special day of recognition.

We appreciate our dedicated lineworkers and are proud of their commitment to our members. They deserve all the appreciation and accolades that come their way.

On April 8, and any time you see a lineworker, we hope you'll take a moment to thank them for their dedication to serving TVEC members. ■



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Lineworker Appreciation Day
Monday, April 8

ELAINE FROSCH | TVEC



TVEC April Updates: Call for Recipes is Open, Notable Retirements

WE KNOW THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF great cooks with great recipes among Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative members, so we are expecting great things from the first TVEC Annual Membership Meeting cookbook. Help us compile a wonderful keepsake to share the flavors and family stories that make them great.

The book will be presented as a special gift to attendees at the annual meeting on October 10. Visit tvec.net/annual-meeting or see the ad on Page 19 for a link to submit your recipe online.

► **Targeting Transaction Fees:** Credit card fees cost the co-op thousands of dollars per year, which adds up to higher operating costs. As a nonprofit, member-owned utility, any reduction in our expenses means more money back to members in the form of capital credits. Please consider bank draft or e-check payments to reduce operating costs and put more money back in your pockets.

► **Retirements:** Judy Brown has retired after 58 years of service to TVEC members. As the senior staff accountant, Brown worked tirelessly behind the scenes keeping things in order. Over the last few decades, she also served as a key mentor for the accounting department staff.

Attorney John Mosley has also retired. He served as the co-op's primary legal counsel for 16 years. He also regularly acted as master of ceremonies for the TVEC annual meeting. ■



Judy Brown



John Mosley

Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative

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1800 E. Highway 243, Kaufman

Athens District Office

909 W. Larkin St., Athens

Cedar Creek District Office

1012 W. Main St., Ste. 102
Gun Barrel City

Wills Point District Office

582 N. Fourth St., Wills Point

Lobby Hours

8:15 a.m.–4:45 p.m.

VISIT US ONLINE

tvec.net



Check us out at
TexasCoopPower.com/tvec



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TVEC ENERGY
MANAGEMENT SUPERVISOR
CHRIS WALKER, BAP

Get Your Home Ready for Summer

YOU STILL HAVE PLENTY of time before you need to blast the air conditioning at home during hot summer weather. Use the spring season to do some maintenance that could help your AC run more efficiently and reliably this summer.

Here are some tips:

Replace air filters before you turn the air conditioner on for the first time. Then, replace them again about once a month until autumn. Clean air filters allow conditioned air to flow easily through your rooms. And they lower the amount of dust, dander and pollutants that get pushed into your indoor air.

Move lamps away from thermostats. Electronics and lamps give off heat when they're turned on, which can fool your AC into "thinking" the room is warmer than it is.

Seal leaks. If you felt cold drafts coming inside during the winter, find the sources of the leaks and caulk them. Look around ducts, cables and wires on the indoor side of exterior walls. Those same leaks will let cool, conditioned air escape during the summer.

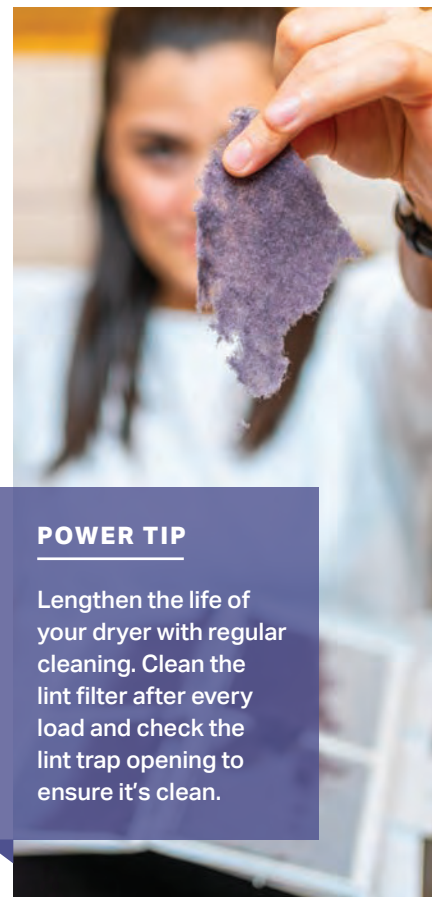
Switch the direction of your ceiling fan blades. For warm weather, the blades should rotate counterclockwise.

Schedule an inspection. A qualified HVAC pro can spot problems with your AC system before they cause a malfunction and make sure your equipment is maintained and ready for warm weather.

Change out any old lightbulbs for LEDs. The latest lighting technology makes these the most energy-efficient choice, and bulbs come in various tones to suit your home's needs.

Check your insulation. If your home is older, it might not have the recommended amount or optimal type of insulation.

Clean air vents. Vents covered in hair and dust won't circulate air as efficiently as clean ones. ■



POWER TIP

Lengthen the life of your dryer with regular cleaning. Clean the lint filter after every load and check the lint trap opening to ensure it's clean.

Safely Power Your Outbuilding



VOLGARVER | ISTOCK.COM

EQUIPPING A BARN, shed or garage on your property with electricity begins with determining which local code requirements may apply for safety purposes, with specifications for detached garages being much more stringent.

Exterior garages and workshops are used to store vehicles and often house fuels and power tools. As a workspace for projects, the area might also be heated and provide a place for using those power tools, both of which have increased risk to people and property and therefore have different regulatory requirements than a storage shed.

Your municipality will determine whether your detached structure is a garage or shed. That designation will determine how you run electricity to your building. 128928001

Keep in mind that while running an extension cord to the separate garage might seem like a convenient shortcut, it's not safe or sustainable. Whereas an attached garage can be powered by adding a circuit to the home's existing system, a detached outbuilding requires a separate system.

Because of the complexity of wiring in an outbuilding, hiring a professional is best. A licensed electrician will help ensure that your outbuilding receives electricity in a way that's safe and compliant.

The job involves installing a new breaker box and calculating load, wiring and conduit needs. An electrician can make those determinations based on safety code.

Before attempting to power a detached garage with an underground trench, you or your electrician must contact your local utility locating service—by calling 811—to determine if there are any gas lines or electrical cables in your yard.

It's also a good idea to contact Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative before adding any substantial electrical load to your property. As your trusted energy adviser, your co-op can provide suggestions and recommendations to make powering your outbuilding go smoothly and safely. ■

A vertical graphic with a background of handwritten recipes on lined paper. At the top, there are illustrations of various vegetables like onions, garlic, and leafy greens. The text 'Watt's Cooking?' is written in a large, white, cursive font on a dark green background. Below this, the text 'Spark your Tastebuds' is written in a smaller, cursive font. The main title '2024 MEMBER RECIPE BOOK' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A large QR code is centered in the middle, framed by a thick black border. Below the QR code, the text 'SCAN CODE TO LEARN MORE' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the TVEC logo is displayed in a bold, green, sans-serif font, with 'TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE' written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it. The background also features faint, handwritten recipe snippets like 'chocolate', 'over hot water', 'sugar +', 'smooth', 'a pinch of salt', 'gradually to butter', 'tion of', 'fever', and 'all'.



We love our trees, but when branches are too close to power lines, they can cause power outages, fire hazards and other safety concerns. Here are some rules to follow:

If a tree or a large branch is touching—or falls on—an electric line, call your electric cooperative immediately.

Never trim trees that grow close to power lines; that is a job for professionals. Call your electric cooperative for assistance and guidance.

Use extreme caution when doing any overhead trimming. Branches often fall in unexpected places.

Don't allow children to climb trees or build treehouses close to power lines.

Plant appropriate distances from all power lines.

When planting a tree, consider how tall the tree will grow. At maturity, trees should be at least 10 feet away from power lines.

Trinity Valley EC encourages you to always practice safety.





PROSTOCK-STUDIO | ISTOCK.COM

Security Tips for Connected Devices

THERE ARE A PLETHORA of new gadgets and devices that claim to make our homes smarter, safer and more efficient. But when dealing with any new smart technology, consumers should take extra precautions to ensure these devices are secure.

Internet-connected cameras have brought significant convenience to the way we monitor the security of our homes, children and even furry family members. With a swipe of a smartphone, homeowners can instantly keep a watchful eye from afar. But hackers have been able to tap into internet-connected security cameras, allowing them to view and speak to the people, including children, inside the homes.

As connected devices become increasingly popular, it's important that we know how to secure our digital lives.

Get creative with passwords. Change your device's factory security settings from the default password. This is one of the most important steps to take in the protection of internet-connected devices. Consider creating the longest password or passphrase permissible, and use familiar phrases you'll remember, like the lyrics to your favorite song.

Keep tabs on your apps. Most connected devices are supported by a smartphone application. Your smartphone could be filled with apps running in the background or using default permissions you never realized you approved, gathering personal information without your knowledge. Check your app permissions and say "no" to privilege requests that don't make sense or don't seem necessary.

Secure your network. Properly secure the wireless network you use for internet-connected devices. Consider placing these devices on a separate and dedicated network.

Connect and protect. The best defense is to stay on top of things by updating to the latest security software, web browser and operating system. If you have the option to enable automatic updates to defend against the latest risks, turn it on.

Convenient, connected devices are here to stay—and unfortunately, so are hackers. By taking extra steps to safeguard your network and devices, you can keep your digital life as secure as possible. ■

Did You Know You're a Business Owner?

EVERY CONSUMER WHO buys electricity from an electric cooperative is a part owner of the electric cooperative. That makes you a business owner!

The cooperative business model revolves around consumer ownership. You may have heard of food co-ops, which are owned by the shoppers. The same is true of electric co-ops, whose consumers are considered members and owners.

As evidence, look at your cooperative's board of directors. Board members are member-owners just like you. They advise the staff and approve important policies, which means the consumers have a say when it comes to business strategies and anything that could affect the membership.

You can vote during the annual election of board members. You also can attend your cooperative's annual meeting to keep up to date on the business of the utility you own.

So get involved. Exercise your right to vote. Attend meetings when you're invited.

It's your right as a consumer-member. ■



EVA-KATALIN | ISTOCK.COM



The Bradford Cafe

Anderson County boasts a country cooking hotspot.

A SIGN ON THE WALL SAYS “Voted Best Cafe in Bradford,” which is undoubtedly true, since the Bradford Cafe is the only eating establishment in town. According to Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative linemen, the cafe may also be in the running to be one of the best in the area.

“Any time we are working in that area, we make it a point to try to get over there,” said Coin Pool, first class lineman. “Even if we are down there on a big job like changing substation equipment, they are able to take care of our whole crew, and it is always so good.”

Located on Highway 19 about halfway between Palestine and Athens, and just north of Montalba, the restaurant is far enough out for a country drive, but close enough to get to for a long lunch.

Menu items cover the typical country cafe fare, as well as a nice selection of Tex-Mex dishes. From fried pickles to carne asada, they can cover just about any appetite.

“You can’t go wrong, but the chicken-fried steak is on point,” Pool said. “They have a good grilled chicken sandwich as well.”

Bradford is a small place, so you’ll have to pay attention. Thankfully the bright red roof is easy to spot on the way by. Sit down for a meal, and you will understand why TVEC line crews think the bright red roof might as well be a stop sign. ■



Win \$100 Just for Reading

Somewhere, hidden on pages 16–23 is a TVEC account number. Read closely. If the account number is yours, contact the member services department by April 30 to receive a \$100 credit on your electric bill. Don’t miss out—you could be our winner.



TVEC
TRINITY VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



Energy Quiz

What is the phone number to call for utility location before digging?

w

A • 411

B • 800-SAFEDIG

C • 811

Win **\$100!**

Send your answer and contact information to contest@tvec.coop or contact TVEC Member Services by April 30.

One \$100 bill credit winner will be chosen from all correct replies. Look for the correct answer in a future *Texas Co-op Power*.

March Energy Quiz: Lightning

LIGHTNING BOLTS CAN BE beautiful, but also deadly, with temperatures hotter than the surface of the sun

Thankfully, most lightning strikes make harmless contact with the ground or water and dissipate the electrical charge built up by stormy weather.

The electrical power of lightning bolts is about 300 million volts and 30,000 amps. By comparison, a typical household outlet carries 120 volts and 15 amps. It is best to avoid contact with either electrical source.

Congratulations to February Energy Quiz winner, Janet Baska of Terrell.

Look for the winner of this month’s contest in the May issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. ■



Charitable Foundation


Your Generosity in Action

MORE THAN 10 YEARS OF Operation Round Up has netted almost \$4 million in grants to charitable organizations and first responders who make a tremendous impact in our community.

A big "Thank You" is in order to all of the more than 92% of TVEC members who round up your bills each month to make this possible. While an average donation of 50 cents may seem like small change, your combined generosity really adds up. Check out tvec.net/charitable-foundation to see the many ways your donations are used.

You can also help us spread to word to organizations that should apply for a grant. Thanks again for your support of Operation Round Up. ■

Find a complete grants list and how to apply at tvec.net/charitable-foundation



February 2024 Grants

- Athens Animal Rescue Shelter - \$2,000
- Delilah's Hope Rescue - \$750
- Eustace Snack Pack Program - \$3,000
- Humane Society of Cedar Creek Lake - \$3,000
- Eustace Intermediate School - \$5,000
- Kaufman NOW Backpack Program - \$3,000
- Stage Notes Academy of Performing Arts - \$2,000
- The Belief Center - \$2,500
- The King's Rein - \$2,500

Member Bill Assistance

- God's Helping Hands, Mabank - \$5,000
- Salvation Army of Kaufman - \$5,000



Jasper Holmes



Natalie Rogers



Holly Walton



Ethan Williams



Tatum Cox



Tucker Brown

Six Area Students Set To Attend Washington D.C. Youth Tour

A TOTAL OF SIX AREA HIGH SCHOOL students will visit the nation's capitol in June as part of the Government-in-Action Youth Tour. Along with the two slots normally filled by Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, we had two additional winners sponsored by our generation and transmission provider Rayburn Electric Cooperative, and another two slots that were made available by Fannin Electric Cooperative.



This year's winners are Tucker Brown of Canton High School, Tatum Cox of Wills Point, Jasper Holmes of Forney, Natalie Rogers of Athens High School, Holly Walton of Mabank High School and Ethan Williams of Mabank.

As always, the tour is set to be the "trip of a lifetime," with educational opportunities and sightseeing filling a nine-day schedule. Students start the trip in Austin, where they gather with the Texas delegation of students and learn about state government. Then it is on to Washington, D.C. for visits with lawmakers, seeing the sights and getting to know how the government works.

Find out more about Youth Tour at tvec.net/youth-tour. ■

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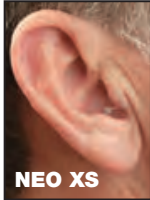
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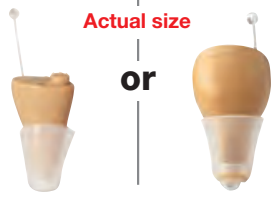
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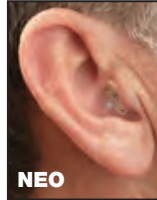
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Republic's End

'Many a manly cheek was wet with tears' when the Texian flag was lowered for the last time

BY W.F. STRONG

IN ABOUT A YEAR and a half—December 29, 2025—we'll mark the 180th year of Texas statehood. That's the day the proudest of Texans would say the U.S. was allowed to join Texas.

The vast majority of Texans—95%—voted for statehood, a level of agreement we haven't enjoyed since. President James Polk signed the joint resolution making Texas a state December 29, 1845, but there was some confusion as to the official moment that the Republic of Texas passed into history and statehood status began.

Anson Jones, president of the republic at that time, said that February 19, 1846, was the actual day that the republic

ceased to exist. That day, Anson presided over a ceremony in Austin where the flag of the young but venerable republic was lowered for the last time and the U.S. flag was raised in its place.

You see, Texas couldn't just let President Polk's signing of a document 1,300 miles away be all there was to the moment. They couldn't allow the republic that so many had died for to pass into history without properly memorializing the occasion.

So Jones arranged a ceremony in front of the Texas Capitol, really just a wooden house at that time, to mourn the passing of the republic and to celebrate Texas as the newest (and by far the largest) state in the union.

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



What was needed here was what linguists call a speech act, a moment in time where something is made real by virtue of pronouncement.

Jones began with "I, as president of the Republic ... am now present to surrender into the hands of those whom the people have chosen, the power and the authority which we have some time held."

Noah Smithwick, a blacksmith in attendance, recorded the moment the Texas flag came down. Here is what transpired in that brief ceremony.

"Many a head was bowed, many a broad chest heaved, and many a manly cheek was wet with tears when that broad field of blue in the center of which, like a signal light, glowed the lone star, emblem of the sovereignty of Texas, was furled and laid away among the relics of the dead republic."

The U.S. flag was raised, and the mood changed dramatically.

"We were most of us natives of the United States, and when the stars and stripes, the flag of our fathers, was run up and catching the breeze unrolled its heaven born colors to the light, cheer after cheer rent the air," Smithwick recalled.

He tended toward that creature still common in Texas—the exceptionally proud Texan. Smithwick thought the star in the lower left corner of the U.S. flag should have been especially dedicated to Texas.

The exchanging of the flags made one statement. Jones made another: "The Republic of Texas is no more." He made it politically true but never absolute because the republic lives on in the minds of Texans who still think of it as their country and their nation. ■

Perfect Potluck

Dishes so good you'll be tempted to eat them en route

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Iliana de la Vega, esteemed owner of the Austin restaurant El Naranjo, shares her ultimate potluck dish: "*Rajas poblanas* (poblano strips) is a vegetarian dish that goes beautifully with grilled meats or fish but also with rice and pasta. You can make tacos with it or even use the rajas as a filling for quesadillas and omelets."



Rajas Poblanas

6 poblano chiles, seeds and veins removed

1 tablespoon canola oil

1 white onion, julienned

1 cup crema Mexicana

Salt, to taste

Corn tortillas

COOK'S TIP If crema Mexicana is unavailable where you shop, making your own is simple. Combine 1 cup heavy cream, 1 cup sour cream, 1 teaspoon salt and 1 tablespoon lime juice, and stir until smooth.

1. Preheat broiler. Place poblanos on a baking sheet. Roast under broiler, carefully flipping with tongs until charred on all sides, about 5 minutes. Place charred poblanos in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap until cooled enough to handle, about 15 minutes.

2. Remove skin from chiles. Slice them lengthwise into strips ½ inch thick.

3. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté the onion just until soft; do not brown.

4. Add the chile strips (rajas) and the crema Mexicana. Cook the chile mixture until heated through, about 5 minutes. Season with salt.

5. Serve immediately with warm corn tortillas.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in *Cocina Gris* at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mexican Corn Salad.



Perfect Potato Salad

CHERYL LEE
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Lee's potato salad is hearty and tangy, with a hint of freshness from the dill. It was so tasty and good that I'd eat plates of it by itself—no need for any of the bris- ket, sausage or hot dogs being served.

- 10 small russet potatoes, unpeeled, rinsed and cubed**
- 1 cup mayonnaise**
- 4 tablespoons mustard**
- 1 large onion, finely diced**
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic**
- 1 tablespoon ground oregano**
- 1 teaspoon onion salt**
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt**
- 8 hard-boiled eggs, cubed**
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill for serving**

1. Place potatoes in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until potatoes are fork tender, about 10 minutes. Drain and allow to cool.
2. In a large bowl, stir together mayonnaise, mustard, onion, garlic, oregano, onion salt and garlic salt. Gently stir in potatoes and eggs.
3. Chill until ready to serve.
4. Sprinkle with dill before serving.

SERVES 20

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Easy Chicken Spaghetti Casserole

DONNA KENNEDY
WOOD COUNTY EC



I love this casserole because it's so simple to make. Leftovers heat up great on day two, plus it freezes like a dream! (If there are leftovers of course.) This is serious comfort food.

SERVES 8

- 2 chicken breasts**
- 3 chicken thighs**
- 1 box spaghetti (16 ounces)**
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter**
- ½ bell pepper, stem and seeds removed, diced**
- 1 medium onion, diced**
- 1 can cream of chicken soup (10.5 ounces)**
- 1 can cream of celery soup (10.5 ounces)**
- 1 can chicken broth (14.5 ounces)**
- 2 cups shredded mild cheddar cheese**

1. Place chicken in a large saucepan, cover with water and simmer until fork tender.
2. Prepare spaghetti according to package directions.
3. In a skillet over medium-high heat, melt butter. Sauté bell pepper and onion until the onion is light and translucent.
4. Shred chicken and mix all ingredients except cheese together in a large bowl.
5. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spoon mixture into a 10-by-14-inch baking pan. Bake 15 minutes.
6. Sprinkle cheese on top and bake 10 more minutes or until bubbly.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

FOOTBALL FAVORITES DUE APRIL 10
What do the fans of your cooking crave on game day? Send us your recipe by April 10 and you could score big: \$500.





Cold Broccoli Salad

ALEXANDRA DIBRELL
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

This is one of the best broccoli salads I've ever had. Why? It's crisp and fresh, with a pop of heat—exactly what I want broccoli salad to be. It's also seriously addictive, thanks to the sweet and tangy combination of fresh lemon juice and rice vinegar.

- 1 pound fresh broccoli**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar**
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard**
- 2 cloves garlic, minced**
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes**

- 1.** Cut broccoli into bite-size pieces. Steam until tender. Allow to cool, then place in fridge.
- 2.** In a large bowl, stir together olive oil, lemon juice, rice vinegar, mustard, garlic, salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Place in fridge to chill.
- 3.** When ready to serve, remove bowl from fridge and add broccoli, stir to coat and serve chilled.

SERVES 4

TCP Potluck options abound on our website. After trying all these here, see what else has come out of Co-op Country kitchens. Simply search for a dish or key ingredient.

Don't Leave It All to Luck

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Consider whether your contribution will add to high demand for an oven or increase crowding in the kitchen.

If you're not hosting, bring food that travels easily.

Bring the appropriate utensils for your dish: a serving spoon, pair of tongs or ladle. This way dishes won't be double-dipped, and you won't have guests grabbing food with their hands.

Consider the advantages of disposable pans: less mess, no lost casserole dishes and easier cleanup.

Consider the dietary restrictions of other guests.

Remember that beverages will be needed, and this can be your contribution.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Carried Treasure

Canton has hosted the World’s Largest Flea Market since the 1850s

BY CHET GARNER

THIS DEFINITELY wasn’t the shopping trip I expected, I thought, as I loaded an 8-foot-tall Bigfoot sculpture into the back of my truck. I had just finished securing my new (to me) cowhide, vintage street signs and antique chair. I should have brought more tow straps.

This is the experience of visiting the World’s Largest Flea Market, which happens every month in the town of Canton, midway between Dallas and Tyler. My legs, wallet and stomach were not prepared.

The tradition goes back to the 1850s when the circuit judge would make his monthly trip to town and the locals would congregate around the courthouse. They started bringing items to swap and sell: a gun for a dog or a cantaloupe for a dozen eggs. Soon a tradition was born that now attracts upwards of 150,000 visitors to First Monday Trade Days (which actually happens the weekend before the first Monday of each month).

As soon as I stepped onto the grounds, I realized that this wasn’t a normal swap meet. The official area boasts more than 5,000 vendors across 400 acres. That doesn’t even include the dozens (if not hundreds) of merchants who fill the streets and buildings of the town.

I walked from booth to booth, chatting with junkers and thrifters who had brought their special wares in search of the perfect buyer. While there was more than enough vintage “junk,” I was surprised at the unique artisans selling incredible handcrafted goods—furniture, décor and even metal tools.

Very soon I had worked up an appetite and stuffed my face with some of the best fair food in Texas, including corny dogs and “upside-down” lemonade. Hey, with all the walking I did, I figured I had earned it. And so I ordered an extra piece of peach pie. ■

ABOVE The finds for sale at First Monday Trade Days in Canton stretch across 400 acres.

TCP Join Chet as he wades through acres of stuff. Watch 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.

APRIL

8

Kerrville Totality at the Ridge, (830) 896-0420, shopsattheridge.com

McKinney Total Eclipse of the Heard, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

12

Poteet [12–14] Strawberry Festival, 1-888-742-8144, strawberryfestival.com

13

Sealy Spring Fest, (832) 492-4244, sealyhistoricalsociety.org

Waxahachie Cowboy Gathering, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecowboy.com

Chappell Hill [13–14] Bluebonnet Festival, (979) 836-6033, chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com

Temple [13–14] Texas State Button Society Spring Show and Sale, texasstatebuttonssociety.com

19

Granbury [19–20] North Texas Gourd Festival, (903) 258-7410, texasgourdsociety.org

Lakeway [19–21] Art Walk, (512) 261-1010, lakewayartsdistrict.com

20

Burton Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, texascottonginmuseum.org

Channing Panhandle Children’s Foundation Hogs at the Point, (806) 935-5598, talonpoint.org

26

Gun Barrel City [26-27] Quilt Show, (903) 391-3241, gunbarrelquiltersguild.org

Hallettsville [26-28] Texas State Championship Fiddlers Frolics, (361) 798-2311, fiddlersfrolics.com

Ingram [26-27, May 2, 4-5, 10-12] The Explorers' Club, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

27

Castroville Alsatian Festival of Texas, castrovilletx.gov

Corsicana Derrick Days, (903) 654-4850, derrickdays.com

Huntsville Gen. Sam Houston Day, (936) 294-1832, samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com

Lewisville ColorPalooza, (972) 219-3401, visitlewisville.com

Wimberley Pie Social, info@wimwic.org, wimwic.org

28

Bellville Fruehling Saengerfest, (713) 582-2461, bellvilleions.org

MAY

2

New Braunfels Soul Sessions' Tribute to Tina Turner, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

4

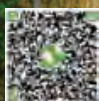
Brenham [4-5] Maifest, (979) 337-7580, brenhammaifest.com

TCP Submit Your Event

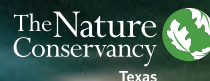
We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your July event by May 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

Thanks a Million

The Nature Conservancy is proud to have protected **one million acres of land in Texas**. This milestone could not have been achieved without the collaborative efforts of landowners, partners and supporters across the Lone Star State. Yet, the urgency to protect and preserve Texas' treasured landscapes, rivers, wildlife and way of life is greater now than ever. Together, we can find a way to achieve even more.



nature.org/millionacremilestone



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Pollinators

All aflutter, we are humming with anticipation. Photos flew in from every corner of the state, and we managed to alight on a few critters that have crawled their way to the top. No sting of disappointment here, just a swarm of entries that leave us buzzing with excitement.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 MARK BONAME
JACKSON EC

"It is a rare sight to see hummingbirds feeding on sunflowers, but the drought this year in Texas made these little guys feed on whatever they could find."

2 CINDY VIGIL
GVEC

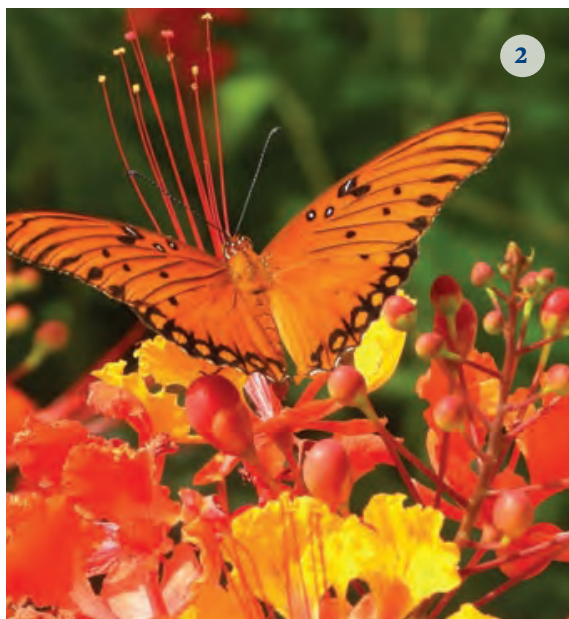
"Gulf fritillary butterflies love this pride of Barbados."

3 SUSAN KNAPP GIBBONS
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

A feeding butterfly.

4 GAIL EINKAUF
SAN BERNARD EC

"Taken at Sweet Berry Farm in Marble Falls."



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

- DUE APR 10 Textures
- DUE MAY 10 Parenthood
- DUE JUN 10 Climbing High



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Seedy Behavior

Gardening scavengers stoop low to help native species

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS
ILLUSTRATION BY
CHANELLE NIBBELINK

COME MID-MAY, I turn into a street walker. Not *that* kind, mind you. Instead, I ply my trade with a green plastic cup and sharp eyes.

“Oh, there you are,” hollers James, my husband, who’s strolling along Greenlawn Parkway. “I figured I’d find you over here!”

My gaze is fastened on clumps of lazy daisies growing along the street. Among the white-petaled blooms with orange centers, I scan for dried seed heads. Now and then, I spot one. Happily, I lean down, pinch it off, then drop the itsy-bitsy treasure into my cup.

We walk while I scope out wildflowers that grow along a ditch. Patiently, I’m watching for Texas prairie parsleys, wine-cups and beeblossoms going to seed. I’ll collect some seeds—but not all. I want to admire them again next spring.

I also want to establish them in our yard. Since 2008, we’ve nurtured Texas native plant gardens at our Blanco home and adjoining meadow, a former vacant lot. Since then, I’ve expanded into rescuing, preserving and protecting overlooked native species that grow in our neighborhood. I collect seeds whenever I can.

Sometimes I dig up and relocate plants, too. For instance, a next-door neighbor several years ago gave me permission to transplant a yellow passionflower, Texas lespedeza and hoary false goldenaster that grew on her side of the fence, where they were often mowed down. Now the trio grows, unrestrained and lush, in our backyard.

I’ve also relocated Indian mallow, Texas snoutbean, scarlet pea, narrowleaf blue-eyed grass and Texas frogfruit to our gardens. Roemer’s mimosa, too. I love to show kids how their tiny leaves fold up when touched. Magic!

Two regular walkers once rang our doorbell. “What’s this?” asked Yalene, while daughter Arden held up a slender branch with yellow flowers. I eyeballed the specimen. Lindheimer’s senna? James and I beelined to the easement where they’d found the plant. It was twoleaf senna, a new-to-me species. A few weeks later, I collected seeds from the site, which has since been cleared. Hopefully the seeds will germinate in our meadow, and the twoleaf senna will live on.

Why go to all that trouble? Because I deeply care about these plants. Because they were here long before us. Because they’re resilient and adapted to our soils and climate. Because they, unlike most ornamental plants, sustain the pollinators and other wildlife that inhabit this place we call home.

From blunt-leaf rabbit-tobacco to zizotes milkweed, we’ve welcomed neighborhood natives into our gardens, where I hope they’ll be appreciated and perpetuated for years to come. So call me a renegade. Or call me a tree hugger. I’ll answer to either one and make no excuses.

I’m a street walker on a mission in a green-light district. ■