

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

## Ranchos Viejos Preserving a Family Heritage



### PLUS:

Readers' Sunrise/Sunset Photos  
Cooking With Fresh Herbs  
Tejas Storytelling Festival



# TEXAS CO-OP POWER



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Texas Co-op Power is the Texas living magazine with a rural, suburban and small town focus. Each month you will read entertaining articles about Texas people, Texas history, Texas nature, Texas travel and Texas food.

And, in every issue we feature a personal look at chosen towns in "Texas, USA" along with "Around Texas," featuring selected events around the state.

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# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

A MAGAZINE ABOUT TEXAS LIVING

## Texas Land Heritage

**O**ne family possessing a piece of land for almost 250 years is hard for some of us to comprehend. Europeans didn't even introduce the concept of private land ownership in this part of the world until the 1700s. So the fact that Dora Perez Villarreal's family has clung to their original Spanish Land Grant since 1767 is extraordinary.

We salute other long-term farm and ranch holders, particularly Dr. Martin E. Garcia, Magic Valley Electric Co-op board president, in Texas Co-op Principles in Action.

Also featured are glorious sunrise/sunset photos provided by our readers. Today we can enjoy sunrises and sunsets simply for their beauty, but as Field Editor Cheryl Tucker, who chose our photographs, said, "For a good part of my grandparents' lives, sunrise meant the start of a workday that lasted until sunset. Because they were rural Texans without electricity, they had to do most of their work while the sun was shining." As her grandfather would say whenever she lagged behind, "Daylight's a-burnin'."

Sunrises and sunsets also play a part in this month's Texas, USA feature on hunting agates at the Woodward Ranch.

Cooking with fresh herbs is this month's recipe topic; we also recommend a trip to the Tejas Storytelling Festival in Denton.

Enjoy!

Peg Champion  
Vice President, Communications/  
Publisher

Dora Villarreal's family acquired their land when the 13 American colonies were still British possessions.



"One morning I looked out the window and this is what I saw—to my delight—as the sun was coming up," said Lanny Maeyers. Lanny and Dan Maeyers are members of CoServ Electric. For more photos of barns, turn to page 35.



Geno Esponda

## Ranchos Viejos . . . . . 6

By Karen Hastings, Photos by Geno Esponda

Dora Perez Villarreal's Spanish forefathers first settled in what is now Starr County in 1767. The untamed scrubland was known then as the Wild Horse Desert. The country is still hard scrabble, but down through the generations, the family has made a go of it.

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By Cheryl Tucker, Photos by Our Readers

A few months ago, readers sent us so many great sunrise and sunset photos for Focus on Texas that we decided to display some of them in a feature. As one contributor said, "God gives [sunrises and sunsets] to us for free. They're like fingerprints—each is one of a kind. I just hate to let one get away."

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Cooking with fresh herbs. Tejas Storytelling Festival in Denton.

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Barns rival sunrises and sunsets for readers' favorite.

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Woodward Ranch, by Jeff Sargent.



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# Stewards of Our Cooperatives Are Also Stewards of the Land

BY KAYE NORTHCOTT

**T**his month's cover story is about three ranches in Starr County that were founded in 1767—nine years before the American Declaration of Independence. Descendants of the original families have had the land in continuous agriculture production since then. Dora Perez Villarreal's ranches are the oldest maintained by one family in Texas, according to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

The department has been documenting the longevity of family farm and ranch properties under the Family Land Heritage Program since 1974. The folks who run that program provided us not only with information on the Starr County ranches but also on several registered properties that are owned or have been owned by cooperative leaders.

It makes perfect sense that people who have been longtime stewards of the land are elected to co-op boards of directors. They also have a strong sense of stewardship for their electric utilities and for their communities.

One of these stewards in Willacy County is Dr. Martin E. Garcia, chairman of the board of Magic Valley

Electric Cooperative (MVEC), based in Mercedes. He and his wife, Celia, are both descendants of Spanish land grantees who helped tame the frontier.

Dr. Garcia, a veterinarian, comes from a distinguished line of merchants, ranchers and entrepreneurs. He is immersed in his family's history. His great-grandfather, Don Francisco Yturria, was a friend of and merchant banker for those legendary ranchers, Richard King and Mifflin Kennedy. (The two former steamboat captains got to Texas late and didn't even begin cattle ranching until the 1850s.) Some of Yturria's property, which abutted the King Ranch, was one of the starting points of the Chisholm Trail and the site of a Texas Ranger post.

It may take time for a visitor from a wetter, greener climate to appreciate this unyielding South Texas brush country once called the Wild Horse Desert, but Dr. Garcia loves it without reservation. His current share of the family legacy is 5,000 acres on which he raises cattle and horses. The family gave up farming last year, but continues ranching and hunting operations.

The Garcias' daughters seem equally



Celia and Dr. Garcia with daughter Alessandra.

Geno Esponda





Garcia at his hunting camp, part of a Spanish land grant.

devoted to the land. Elder daughter Lilia Marisa Garcia wrote her master's thesis at Southern Methodist University on "Don Francisco Yturria—The Beginnings of a South Texas Entrepreneur 1830-1870." She dedicated the thesis (later published by SMU Press) to her dad, saying, "Through my father, I learned to love South Texas and the ranch lands that Francisco bought and my father inherited." Younger daughter Alessandra has an equal appreciation for Hacienda La Esperanza, their family home. She is learning ranch management, while Lilia teaches history at St. Joseph's Academy and The University of Texas at Brownsville.

The Garcias are sophisticated world travelers, but they still prefer the cactus and muted browns of their ancestral brush country to castles in the Alps or Italian villas.

"The land has always been my first love," Dr. Garcia says. "It's something I could never give up unless I had to."

Dr. Garcia served in the 62nd Texas Legislature. He has been on the MVEC board since 1972. "His broad knowledge of our area and of co-op issues is invaluable," said John W. Herrera, MVEC general manager.

Such longevity on a co-op board is not unusual. Across the state, co-op board members bring a similar sense of stewardship to the job of representing their fellow co-op members.

"This is the type of dedication that has enabled cooperatives to be a stable and positive community influence for more than 60 years," said Mike Williams, president and CEO of Texas Electric Cooperatives, the statewide association of cooperatives.

"That may not be much time compared to some of the long-lived farms and ranches of Texas, but we expect to be around a long time to come."

## Family Land Heritage Honorees

Several other co-op directors have been honored by the Family Land Heritage Program, according to the agriculture department. (Note: Most of the information is current only up until the time the family land was registered in the program.)

**Clarence Fischer** is a director of both Bartlett and of San Miguel electric cooperatives. In Bell County, he and Esterleen Fischer own 500 acres of the original 520 acres acquired by his grandfather in 1883.

**Nathaniel Foote Jr.** serves on the board of McLennan County EC. Of his family's original 1,600 acres acquired in 1853, Foote and his sister, Frances, hold 937 acres today.

**Oscar Forgey** was a North Plains EC director and president from 1948 to 1955. His father acquired 1,920 acres in Hemphill County in 1897. The family still owned 290 of the original acres in 1997.

**H. Tom Kingsbery Jr.** served as a director of Coleman County EC for 37 years. He died in 1997. Some 331 of the original 452 acres acquired by his father in 1895 were still owned by the family in 1998.

**Herbert Schumann** of Austin County served on the San Bernard EC board before his death in 1955. The 250 acres his father acquired in 1896 were still in the family's possession in 1998.

**Claude Hampton Wakefield** was elected to the board of Hill County EC (now HILCO) on November 1, 1936, and served until his death on January 9, 1965. Of the 4,605 acres acquired by an ancestor in 1870, approximately 40 acres were held by the family in 1996. The land was part of the Conservation Reserve Program.

When Dora Perez Villarreal's Spanish forefathers first came to what is now Starr County, the 13 American colonies were still a few years short of declaring independence.

# RANCHOS VIEJOS

BY KAREN HASTINGS, PHOTOS BY GENO ESPONDA



Left, a partial wall, the remains of Alfredo Villarreal's grandmother's house, shows the typical building method of South Texas ranchers of the late 1800s. Large blocks of caliche were stacked and cemented together with a mixture of lime and goat's milk, known as *chipichil*.



**B**umping along a muddy *sendero* through La Mahada Ranch—named for a great-grandfather who kept goats here—Dora Perez Villarreal proudly introduces the native plants that provide refreshing patches of green to a bleak landscape emerging from a South Texas drought.

Each bush and tree, it seems, has some practical or medicinal purpose—as well as a nasty set of thorns. You can grind the roots of this one to whiten quilts; the red berries of that one make a tasty jam; another is brewed as a healing tea for bladder

complaints. What her mother and grandmother didn't teach her about these prickly beauties, Villarreal picked up from research on the Internet.

"When we were kids, we would collect the gum of mesquite trees, add water, and use it at school as glue," she recalls. "It tastes sweet."

Villarreal knows her land down to its roots, and that includes its history. When her Spanish forefathers first came to what is now Starr County, the 13 American colonies were still a few years short of declaring independence, and the thorny scrubland north of the Rio Grande was home to semi-nomadic

native tribes and not much else. Men like Ramon Gonzalez, Joaquin de la Garza Falcon and Jose de Yhojosa were granted long strips of real estate with river frontage—*porciones*—in exchange for settling this new frontier.

Some 236 years later, a weathered hunk of limestone marking the common boundary of several *porciones* still stands in a family field north of Rio Grande City. And Villarreal is still keeping the faith with the long line of ranchers that came before her.

"To me, having a ranch, making it bigger, making it better—that's what I want to do," she explains. "But it's





A wagon that belonged to Dora's grandfather in the late 1800s stands behind the Villarreal home at El Colorado. A small museum of relics of the rough-hewn tools her family used more than 100 years ago is inside.

got to run in your blood. If you don't have it in you, you can throw it away the next day."

In 2000, Villarreal's Los Chapotes, El Sauz and La Mahada ranches became the first 200-year-old honorees in the Texas Department of Agriculture's Family Land Heritage Program. Created in 1974, the program aims to preserve Texas' agricultural history by documenting farms and ranches held in continuous family ownership and production for at least a century.

In a region where historic ranches are fast fragmenting into weekend "ranchettes"—or worse yet, subdivi-

sions—Villarreal's achievement is all the more impressive.

"Not many businesses can stay in operation for seven generations," says Agriculture Commissioner Susan Combs, who praised the "diligence and quiet dedication" of families like Villarreal's. "It's amazing to realize that some of these families have farmed and ranched in Texas for more than 200 years."

The story of Villarreal's ranches begins in the mid-1700s, when Spain sent Jose de Escandon to establish settlements along the Rio Grande River. France and England also had colonies

in North America, and Spain was anxious to cement its claims between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River.

Three of Villarreal's ancestors were rewarded in 1767 with large tracts of what is now South Texas. Through wars and uprisings, prohibition and depression, portions of this land remained in the family and eventually traveled down both maternal and paternal branches of her family tree.

According to local experts, such clear and direct links to the past are rare.

"Many of us here are related to the original settlers, but—either for



Tourists sometimes gather around this campfire circle during ranch tours. The pasture beyond is covered in buffelgrass.



Reminders of Dora's ranching heritage, like this 50-year-old saddle that belonged to her father, are preserved for the benefit of the family as well as the visitors who come for educational tours.

legitimate or illegitimate reasons—the land has changed ownership out of the family,” says Adalberto Garza, president of Las Porciones Genealogical Society, a local historical group. “The fact that [Villarreal’s family holdings] survived is quite a tribute to her.”

And survival is not too strong a word.

One of six children born to Teresa Garza and Domingo Perez, Villarreal was actually adopted by her father’s brother, Alejandro, and her mother’s sister, Gregoria, who lived next door on El Sauz Ranch. She speaks interchangeably of two mothers, and “cousins” who were also brothers and sisters.

Early pastimes with younger cousin/brother “Kiko” involved childish versions of ranch work—notching the ears of new calves, clipping the baby lambs, and “washing” the wool in nearby cattle ponds.

“We would tie the calves down ... like the real cowboys. For us, it was a game,” remembers Villarreal. “We were always together, Kiko and I, and now we’re the ones who keep the ranches going.”

Her parents farmed as well as ranched. Young Dora hated picking cotton, but craved the *raspas*—snow cones shaved from blocks of wet, burlap-covered ice—that were the syrupy reward for a hard day’s work.

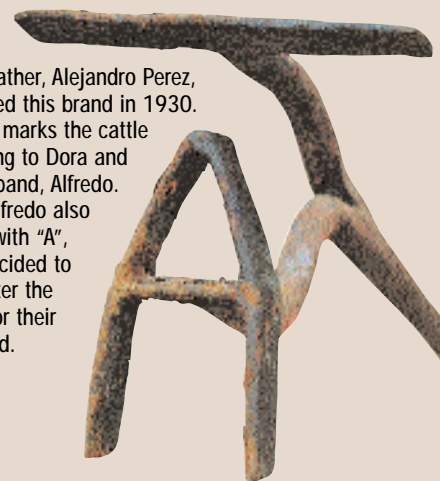
“I loved it when it was watermelon

time—we would give every family in the ranch a watermelon or two and have a party,” remembers Villarreal. “I loved to just break them open and eat out the heart of them.”

After her father died, her mother considered trading in the ranch for an easier life in town. Even at age eight, young Dora knew what she wanted.

“Her dream for me was to be in an air-conditioned office, not out burning prickly pear and worrying about how we’re going to feed the cattle,” Villarreal says. “I told her, ‘You

Dora’s father, Alejandro Perez, registered this brand in 1930. Today it marks the cattle belonging to Dora and her husband, Alfredo. Since Alfredo also begins with “A”, Dora decided to re-register the brand for their own herd.





# SEVERE WEATHER! ARE YOU READY?

## Flooding

**Don't mess with floods. Flooding is the leading cause of weather-related fatalities in Texas. The simple decisions you make can mean the difference between life and death.**

### Flood Safety Rules:

- Never drive through water on a road. It can be deeper than it appears. Flood waters can damage roadways, creating invisible sinkholes or washed out bridges.
- Quickly leave your car if it stalls in water. Water displaces 1,500 pounds of weight for every foot it rises. It takes only 2 feet of water to push a 3,000-pound car downstream.
- Don't attempt to walk through rapidly running water. As little as 6 inches can knock adults off their feet.
- Keep an emergency kit in your car, including a flashlight with extra batteries, drinking water and a battery-operated radio.
- If you have a cell phone, program the number for police or fire department rescue.

**Take the high road when it comes to flood safety. Your life depends on it.**



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can sell your part, but I'm not going with you into town."

In 1970, young Dora married another descendent of the original settlers, Alfredo Villarreal, who has his own historic Rancho El Colorado a few miles north in the rural Jim Hogg County community of Guerra.

Wed just out of high school, the Villarreals quickly enrolled in college. Each weekend—and more often during droughts—the couple would return home from Edinburg with a load of hay for their various herds. While other

students visited the library, they might spend hours walking their land with propane torches, burning the spines off prickly pear cactus so the animals could eat them.

"That was our weekend," says Villarreal. "We didn't have much time to study."

By senior year, the young couple was tired. "My husband said, 'It's either college or ranching.' I said, 'We're going back,'" recalls Villarreal, who would wait another 20 years to finish her degree. "They never could get the



Dora Villarreal and her husband, Alfredo.

# SEVERE WEATHER! ARE YOU READY?

## Lightning

Lightning strikes kill more Americans than tornadoes or hurricanes. Don't take chances with this deadly force of nature.

### Lightning Safety Rules:

- Move to low ground.
- Avoid open fields.
- Do not seek shelter under a tree. Trees are targets for lightning.
- At the beach or in a swimming pool, get out of the water.
- Go inside a building and stay away from windows and doors.
- Stay away from metal objects.
- Avoid electric appliances and metal plumbing.
- Get off the phone.
- Do not touch metal objects, such as golf clubs or bicycles.
- Inside a car is relatively safe, but don't touch interior metal.
- If your hair stands on end, you may be a target. Crouch low on the balls of your feet and try not to touch the ground with your knees or hands.

Stay aware and play it safe during thunderstorms. Don't be a lightning rod.



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ranch out of us; we loved it too much."

Today, the Villarreals live comfortably in Guerra, in a converted convenience store decorated with mesquite furniture and cacti of every description. Rusty gasoline pumps still stand outside, and a flagpole hints of their double life as postmasters in this sparsely populated community. Inside is a small family history museum, including old branding irons, a plow head used by her great-great-grandfather, and a 100-year-old water well pulley, handmade of mesquite.

A typical work day might include hauling in fresh city water to supplement brackish local wells, sorting mail, and then heading out in Villarreal's little red Jeep to tend the family's far-flung Beefmaster herds. When buffelgrass is plentiful, the couple might go out together, a horn honk summoning the herd for extra rations of "ranch cubes." In drought, they go in different directions to cover more territory. Checking new calves, mending fences, monitoring water levels in the ponds—seven small ranches in all; managed by just the two of them.



The research that overflows Villarreal's small home office reveals the activities of what free time remains in her busy schedule. Her collection of old family documents includes an 1890 tax receipt for \$4.08 in the name of grandfather Remigio Perez, and that same gentleman's 1897 school trustee commission. A 1944 farm plan by her father reports crops of sorghum, dry beans and broom corn, as well as cattle and chickens.

Research has revealed that her parents' families were actually related generations ago; that her grandfathers worked as *vaqueros* on long cattle drives; and that one of her mother's uncles went to prison during Prohibition as a *tequilero*, or tequila smuggler. When he returned home, he brought back an elaborate, prison-made coverlet for his daughter, Dora Villarreal's godmother.

"Instead of selling their land and getting money for it, they went for the tequila," says Villarreal, who inherited that crocheted coverlet and proudly uses it on her own bed.

Today, the pressures on family farms and ranches continue to grow. According to the American Farmland Trust, lower Rio Grande Valley agricultural land is threatened not only by commercial development, but by "fragmentation" into smaller parcels that do not support wildlife or agriculture as effectively.

"When ag land sells [in South Texas], it's usually going to someone who lives in the city and is looking for a weekend escape or a place to hunt whitetail deer," says Julie Shackelford, Texas regional director for the trust, which works to protect agricultural land. "And these buyers don't want 2,000 acres; they're perfectly happy with 100 acres."

On the road to El Sauz, simple barbed wire gives way to tight 8-foot game fencing. The Villarreals say buyers from exotic places like Minnesota are moving in, creating weekend getaways and expensive lodges. Meanwhile, historic ranch names are being replaced by new ones like "El Cazador" ("The Hunter") and "Little Reata."

"Some of these new owners ... don't have the respect for history and the names that have been here since the ranches were given," Dora laments.

And what about the Villarreal's only child, Yvonne, who works in San Antonio? Will she preserve the family legacy?

"Some days, it gets to me: Will it stop here?" Villarreal says. "I tell her, 'Your grandmother, your great-grandfather ... had hard times, and they never thought of selling the land. If we sell the ranch, then we have let down the struggle of the past.'"

Whatever happens to her ranches in years to come, it is clear Villarreal counts herself a wealthy woman.

"I've got a heritage that's very rich. To me, it's like having a factory of diamonds."

The Villarreals conduct day tours of the ranch, complete with a breakfast of cowboy coffee and tamales, and lunch around the campfire. For more information, call (956) 486-2356, or e-mail: dora\_villarreal9@hotmail.com. The Starr County ranches in this article are served by Medina EC.

Freelance writer Karen Hastings lives in Harlingen. Photographer Geno Esponda, who lives in Austin, has won many awards for his contributions to Texas Co-op Power.

# SEVERE WEATHER! ARE YOU READY?

Tornadoes

**More tornadoes strike Texas than any other state. Sophisticated warning systems exist, but they're no substitute for preparedness and smart action.**

## Tornado Safety Rules:

- At home or in the office, go to the lowest floor. Stay away from windows.
- Go to a place in the center of the building, such as a closet, bathroom or interior hallway. Protect your head with a pillow.
- If you live in a mobile home, go outside. Lie down in a ditch or low spot. Cover your head.
- If you're in a car, get out. Never try to outrun a tornado. Take shelter in the nearest building, or lie face down in a ditch.
- Know the difference between a "warning" and a "watch." Tornado Watch: Conditions are right for a tornado. Watch the sky. Tornado Warning: A tornado has been spotted.

**Tornadoes kill. Know what to do to avoid weather-related tragedy.**



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# Sunrise

I'd always suspected that Texas has the most spectacular sunrises and sunsets in the world. The boxes and boxes of gorgeous sunrise/sunset photos submitted for the November 2003 Focus on Texas provided enough evidence to support that claim.

We received so many entries, in fact, that Editor Kaye Northcott suggested we incorporate some of the best photos into a full-fledged magazine feature—the beautiful sunrises and sunsets you see on these pages.

Many submissions came to us in small packages that contained dozens of photos. Some depicted a series of photos taken on a single day; other packages contained a collection of photos taken over a span of several years. I asked one of these prolific snapsters why she captured so many sunrises from her front porch and sunsets from her back door. "God gives [sunrises and sunsets] to us for free," she said. "They're like fingerprints—each is one of a kind. I just hate to let one get away."

How lucky we are that these spectacular sunrises and sunsets, each one a beginning or ending, didn't get away.



Photographing down the Louisiana-Texas coastline last winter, Magic Valley EC member Debbie Thomas welcomed in the New Year at sunrise on the Galveston beach.

BY CHERYL TUCKER, PHOTOS BY OUR READERS



# Sunset

Lyntegar EC member Mike McDonald took this sunrise photo of frozen cotton stalks.



On his annual "guy trip" to Big Bend National Park, Karnes EC member Alex Kotara took this photo of a century plant along the lip of the South Rim with a beautiful sunset over the Chihuahuan Desert.



Carla Hamilton took this photo of bats emerging from a cave at sunset in Blanco County. Her sister, Landa Lassberg, is a member of Pedernales EC and submitted the photo.



Jasper-Newton EC member Carolyn Chambliss calls this sunset photo taken at Steinhagen Lake "Royal Gold."

# Sunrise Sunset



Sami Ledbetter gets one last toss from her friend Derrick Story after enjoying a day on Lake LBJ. Pedernales EC member Michelle Ledbetter submitted the photo.



Lamb County EC member William A. Thompson Jr. took this windmill at sunrise photo at Triple Arrow Ranch, about 40 miles northwest of Lubbock.



Jackson EC member Sharon Serrata takes advantage of living on the coast, where she takes beautiful sunrise and sunset photos on the beach.

As she was leaving her Llano County ranch, Central Texas EC member Barbara Spain took this photo. "It was so beautiful," she said, "and it shows rural electricity at work in the Texas Hill Country."







#### HONEY BAKED BANANAS

6 bananas, just ripe  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
¼ cup honey

Peel bananas; place in shallow baking dish. (Bananas with skins still tipped green work the best). Melt butter; combine with lemon juice and honey. Brush mixture on bananas, coating well. Bake at 325 degrees for 15 minutes or until warm and well glazed.

Maude Coleman, *Bryan Texas Utilities*



#### WAFFLE IRON CORNBREAD

1 egg  
1 cup milk  
1 cup flour  
1 cup cornmeal  
¾ teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons sugar  
4 teaspoons baking powder  
2 tablespoons melted fat

Beat egg together with milk. Add dry ingredients, mixing well. Stir in melted fat. Cook in pre-heated, lightly greased waffle iron just as you would regular waffles.

Cindy Walton, *Big Country EC*

## FOUR STAR FARE *for the* LONE STAR STATE

★★★★

*Mouthwatering  
recipes from  
the heart of Texas.*

#### BAKED POTATO SOUP

⅔ cup butter  
⅔ cup flour  
7 cups milk  
4 large potatoes, baked, peeled, cubed  
4 green onions, chopped  
12 bacon strips, cooked crisp  
1 ¼ cups shredded Cheddar cheese  
1 cup sour cream  
Salt and pepper to taste

In Dutch oven, melt butter; stir in flour and heat until smooth. Add milk gradually, stirring until thickened. Add potatoes and onions. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and add rest of ingredients. Simmer for 10–15 minutes. Serve.

Karen Kutac, *Fayette EC*



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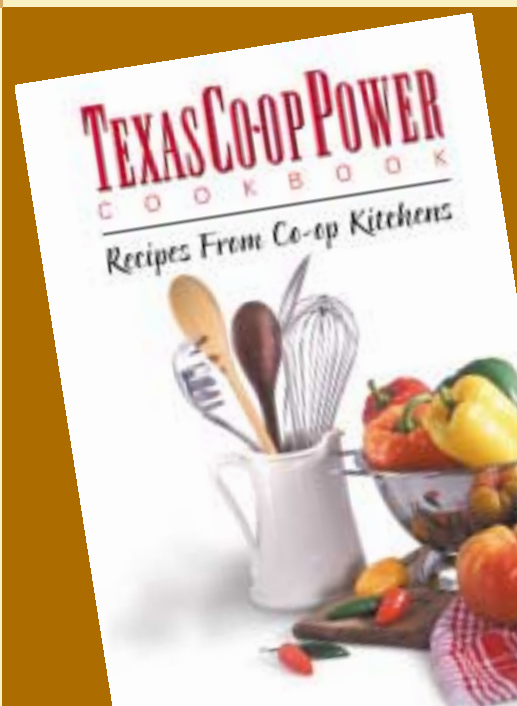
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## Look Up! Watch Out for Overhead Lines and Underground, Too

**A**s you begin to spend more time outdoors during the warm weather, there's one thing you can't afford to overlook: the power lines that bring electricity to your home. Whether overhead or underground, these power lines present a danger to you and your family if not treated with respect. So remember:

Don't trim or cut down trees that are growing near or underneath power lines. Have a qualified contractor take care of the job.

When planting new trees, be careful about placing them beneath overhead lines. The tree might be small now, but in a few years it could grow into the line.

Before you dig anywhere on your property, be sure you know where your underground utility services are—not only electric lines but

also gas, water and cable television. Cutting into these service connections could cause serious injury as well as a lot of inconvenience.

Be careful installing or removing television antennas or satellite dishes. Check your clearance overhead to the power lines. If you aren't sure that you're well clear of those lines, don't take any chances. Have a professional relocate, install or remove the device.

Take the same caution when using tall ladders, pool skimmers or other long tools or equipment. A single, careless motion could cause contact with the overhead line. If you can, use wooden instead of aluminum ladders, and always carry ladders horizontally when moving them.

Supervise your children when

they're flying kites and make sure they know to stay clear of power lines. Use only nonmetallic string on the kite, and if it should get entangled with a power line, drop the cord and call your cooperative for assistance.

Never build a structure or pool beneath the lines that connect your home to power facilities.

Keep yourself, your children and your pets away from substations and other utility equipment. If a toy rolls or bounces inside, call your cooperative. Don't try to retrieve it!



## Remodeling Bathroom Can Save Energy and Money

**I**f you're thinking about remodeling your home, a good place to start is the bathroom. A smartly planned bathroom makeover can make your whole house more comfortable and lower your energy bills. Here's how:

- Install a ventilation fan that blows moist indoor air to the outdoors. Choose a super-quiet model that you can run continuously. Immediately removing moist air from the bathroom helps prevent mold and mildew.



- Choose energy-efficient lighting that complements your bathroom's new look. Suspended lights, ceiling-mounted lights, cabinet lights and recessed lights can hold compact fluorescent light bulbs, which use less energy than regular bulbs.

- Open the walls behind tubs and showers to seal air leaks with caulk and to upgrade the insulation. The walls surrounding the shower often are poorly insulated.

- Replace the bathroom window with a more energy-efficient model.

## Landscape Safely Away From Transformer Boxes

**I**f your home is served by underground electric cable, you may want to plant some flowers or shrubs nearby to disguise that transformer cabinet on your property. Don't do it!

Our line crews need easy access to those cabinets to perform maintenance and repairs. Shrubs and trees and even flowerbeds can block access. And if the unit has to be serviced, you'll likely be unhappy about the condition of your plants when the job is done!

Also, it's dangerous to plant or work close to transformer cabinets. They contain high-voltage lines that should be avoided at all times, except by our trained personnel.

So give those cabinets a wide berth—and teach your children to stay away, too. Warn them not to play around the cabinet. And never open it!



## Tune Up Energy Inefficiencies

**J**ust as your car needs a tune-up every few thousand miles, your home deserves a tune-up each spring and fall.

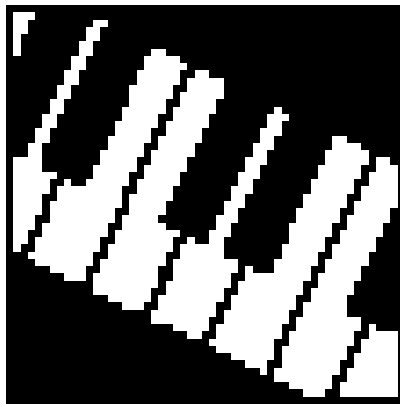
Before summer beckons you to crank up your air conditioner, ask a qualified technician to make sure it's in good working order and ready for another steamy season.

Then get to work cleaning up the energy inefficiencies that can make your summer electric bills soar.

- Remove the glass globes or lenses from your overhead lights and wash them in warm, soapy water. Buildup of dust and dirt dims the light from the bulbs they cover.

- Vacuum or brush the dust from your refrigerator condenser, which usually sits beneath the bottom grille. Take a peek at your owner's manual to learn how old your unit is. If it's starting its second decade, it's time for a new, energy-efficient model that will use half the electricity of an old unit.

- As you pile up the dirty dishrags and rinse the cedar smell from your



stored-away spring clothes, avoid running the washer or dryer unless you have a full load.

- Replace filters in your central air conditioning system and in all window units.

- Buy a dehumidifier so you can run it during the summer to reduce energy costs.

- Apply caulk or weather-stripping around windows so your cool, conditioned air can't escape.

## Keep Yourself Safe While Cleaning This Spring

**I**t's that time of year again—time to tune up the air conditioner and run a dust mop under the guest-room beds for the first time since last spring.

While you're ridding your home of a winter's worth of clutter, play it safe. Some tips:

- **Suit up.** Wear sturdy shoes that will protect your feet in case you drop something heavy, step on a power cord or sharp object, or spill a slippery cleaning product that could cause you to slip and fall.

- **Watch your step.** Your house probably will be in disarray as you pull furniture away from the walls

and pick up throw rugs to shake them out. Keep high-traffic areas clear of buckets, extension cords and boxes.

- **Keep moisture—including cleaning liquids—away from electric appliances and outlets.** Never spray cleaning products directly onto light switches or the fuse panel of an electric stove. Don't use your vacuum cleaner on damp surfaces.

- **Never touch a light fixture while you are standing on an aluminum ladder.** And if you're using a pole to reach ceilings or wash windows, keep it away from indoor lights and outdoor power lines.

## Change Your Password!

**T**he most common password for home and office computers is "password." If it's yours, change it!

A British security firm learned in a poll that the too-easy-to-guess password secures fully 12 percent of personal computers.

Other easy-to-figure passwords are the computer user's name, birthday or anniversary, and favorite sports teams.

And, surprisingly, 95 percent of the men and 85 percent of the women in the poll revealed their personal password in exchange for a cheap pen.

In fact, more people might know your password than you think. The poll disclosed:

- 75 percent said they knew their coworkers' passwords.

- 66 percent admitted they had revealed their password to a coworker.

- 66 percent said they use the same password for everything from the company computer to personal banking, a practice that makes them vulnerable to financial fraud, personal data loss or identity theft.



# The Camel's Lot in Texas

BY SPIKE GILLESPIE

In 1855 U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis contemplated ways the military might best deal with the rugged and mostly unknown terrain of West Texas. There was no railroad yet, and the triple whammy of mountains, desert and fierce Indians had thwarted all but a handful of parties seeking a solid southwesterly route. Robert E. Lee, then a U.S. lieutenant colonel, was directing battles against the Comanches from Fort Mason and points farther west.

Recalling an idea proposed years earlier by Major George Crosman, Davis decided camels, with their desert-adapted ways, could provide a swifter, more efficient and less fatiguing means of military travel than horses and pack mules. He persuaded Congress to appropriate \$30,000, and Major Henry C. Wayne was dispatched on the ship *Supply* to procure a worthy first herd for the "camel experiment."

During his quest, which took him to the Gulf of Tunis, Constantinople, Alexandria and Cairo, Major Wayne came to discover the idiosyncrasies of the ornery beasts. He also learned about the different types of camels: the two-humped Bactrian, a beast of burden; the dromedary (also called a runner, racer or courser), dedicated to riding; and a sterile hybrid of the two called a "booghdee" or "tinlu" or, if female, a "maya."

Wayne returned to Indianola, Texas, in April 1856, having invested \$12,000 in 33 camels (one died during passage, but another was born). The *Supply* sat anchored offshore for several days, her crew waiting for waters calm enough to unload their jumbo, foul-smelling, humpbacked cargo.

In his book, *Texas Camel Tales* (first published by Steck-Vaughn in 1932), author Chris Emmett tracked down folks who had encountered the camels, a sight so exotic that the details remained forever vivid. "Little Miss Pauline Shirkey" (later Mrs. Robert Clark) met Major Wayne when she was nine and

recalled that he gave her mother clipped camel hair, which—after tremendous effort to deodorize the hair of its distinctly unpleasant scent—she spun and knitted into socks for President Franklin Pierce.

Davis was impressed with the herd's abilities both as heavy lifters and deft scouts. Each could easily carry at least a few hundred pounds. In one test, a dozen camels lugged 3,800 pounds straight across the mountains of West Texas in just two days.

During another experiment in 1857,



assigned by the new Secretary of War John B. Floyd, Edward Fitzgerald Beale took 25 camels on road survey duty to the Colorado River. The survey went on to California and the camels, although never cheerful, nonetheless continued to show their stamina.

Then in 1859, two dozen camels were sent to explore the mysterious Big Bend region. During that trip, the camels easily traveled over a hundred miles in less than four days without stopping for water. The clever beasts also figured out how to crush the sharp blades of the maguey (agave) plant to avoid cuts on their feet.

The official home of the U.S. Camel Corps was Camp Verde, about 60 miles from San Antonio, in what is now Kerr County. Breeding, and the importation of a second load of 41 camels in 1857, expanded the herd to 80. Perhaps the experiments would have

continued if not for the Civil War.

On February 28, 1861, Camp Verde was taken over by the Confederacy. The Confederates used some of the camels to transport bales of cotton but mostly thought ill of the beasts, calling them "warts on a stick."

In fact, according to *The Handbook of Texas*, it was the camel's personality above all else that caused the experiment to fail: "The failure of the camel in the United States was not due to its capability; every test showed it to be a superior transport animal. It

was instead the nature of the beasts that led to their demise—they smelled horrible, frightened horses, and were detested by handlers accustomed to the more docile mules."

Between 1865 and 1866, the experiment came to an end when the U.S. War Department, once again in possession of the camels, ordered them to be disposed of. Some wandered off, some were sold to shows and circuses, and some went to Bethel Copwood, a dreamer who had hopes (which ultimately failed) of using them as a lucrative means of transportation to Mexico.

In 1995, former zookeeper Doug Baum opened Texas Camel Corps, a company that started offering camel tours of Big Bend, Monahans Sandhills State Park, and an annual trek to the Sinai in Egypt. Baum also leases his camels for use in films, provides educational programs around the state, participates in annual Christmas programs re-enacting the trek of the Magi, and operates CamelQuest, a camel program for at-risk youth.

For more information: call 1-866-6CAMELS or (254) 675-HUMP, or e-mail [info@texascamelcorps.com](mailto:info@texascamelcorps.com).

Spike Gillespie's second book of essays, *Surrender (But Don't Give Yourself Away)*, was published in the fall by the University of Texas Press.



# What Marvin Doesn't Know About Lightning

**T**hat Marvin! Doesn't he know that you should never fool around when it comes to lightning? What is Marvin doing wrong?

1. He shouldn't be outside during a thunderstorm.
2. Lightning likes tall things, so climbing up high on the roof during a thunderstorm is asking for big trouble.

Lightning is electricity, so it can kill or injure you. Whenever you see flashes of lightning in the sky and hear thunder in the distance, it's time to start looking for a safe place to wait for the storm to pass. Here are some important rules to remember if a thunderstorm is coming:

If you're outside, get inside a building as fast as you can and:

- Stay away from metal and electrical appliances, like TVs and computers.
- Keep away from sinks, bathtubs and all pipes.
- Stay away from windows and outside doors.
- Unless it's an emergency, don't use the phone.

If you're outside, and you can't get inside a building:

- Don't hide under a tree—lightning looks for tall things to strike, like trees.
- Look for a hard-topped car to get in—not a convertible.
- Stay away from tall and metal objects.
- Keep away from pools, lakes or any water.
- Do not use an umbrella.

There's no reason to be afraid of lightning if you understand how to be safe. Just keep these safety rules in mind next time there's a thunderstorm. And don't be afraid to share these rules with others; you might even save someone's life!

To learn more about lightning and lightning safety, visit the Lightning Protection Institute's website at [www.lightning.org](http://www.lightning.org). If you'd like to learn about lightning from a girl who survived a lightning strike, you can go to Sabrina's website at [www.kidslightning.org](http://www.kidslightning.org).





# A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE

BY MARY GORDON SPENCE, ILLUSTRATION BY JIM ANDERSON





“I’M SORRY, MOTHER,” I WHISPERED AS I LEANED DOWN TO PUT THE FLOWERS IN THE VASE. “AREN’T THEY PRETTY?” DADDY ASKED FOR THE THIRD TIME. PRETTY? UGH. THESE PLASTIC FLOWERS? I THOUGHT THEY WERE DREADFUL.

With the same care I had used to pick roses from my Austin garden early that morning before driving to Brownwood, Daddy had removed his prized horticultural treasures from the old Woolworth’s sack. The “50-percent-off” white price tags were still attached. He sniffed them, just as I had smelled my roses. His smelled like plastic; mine smelled like perfume.

“I come out here often and put flowers on your mother’s grave,” he said proudly. “But it’s the durndest thing. Every time I come back, the flowers I left are gone. I guess other people like them so much that they borrow them.”

For the life of me, I couldn’t figure out why anyone would want to borrow or steal Daddy’s sorry excuses for real flowers.

Mother and Daddy had waged their own War of the Roses during their 55 years of marriage. Mother hated artificial flowers. She doubly hated plastic artificial flowers. Daddy took great pleasure in bringing them home from garage sales and putting them in vases around the house. The flowers would mysteriously disappear within a few days of their arrival.

Flowers—plastic or paper, dead or alive—Daddy doesn’t care. He sees beauty in all of them. And he never shows up at the Victory Bible Class of the First Methodist Church in Brownwood without one. His Sunday ritual includes locating the proper boutonniere, and he considers it a victory to find something blooming for free. Early Sunday mornings, he walks up and down the alley to see what’s blooming. If the neighbors have no offerings, he slowly drives the familiar route to church with his eye on the town’s flowerbeds. If he spots something blooming, he rolls to a stop in his 1972 Ford pickup, gets out and picks a flower. If these efforts fail, he’s got a plastic flower, along with a hatpin, stashed in his glove compartment as a backup.

If Daddy knew I was having a problem at the cemetery with the tacky flowers, he paid no attention. He thrust them in my hand and demanded that I

put the green plastic stems with multi-colored blooms in the vase, right above the name Ruth Griffin Spence. I didn’t want to do it, but Daddy wasn’t budging until I did.

I followed his orders and squatted down to stick the flowers in the vase. That’s when I whispered my heartfelt apology to Mother. I stood up and saw Daddy smiling at me.

He opened another sack, took out more flowers and handed them to me. I gritted my teeth.

“Now put these on Susan’s grave.”

I walked the few steps to my sister’s headstone and planted the plastic flowers firmly in the slender vase above the name Susan Spence. Since she didn’t share my mother’s disdain of plastic, I didn’t need to whisper an apology. Instead, I just rolled my eyes. Susan would get my drift.

I had done my duty at the cemetery, and by this time I’d had more than enough of Daddy’s plastic flowers. I began heading toward my car.

“Now wait. Just wait a minute,” Daddy raised his voice. “Come over here and visit your grandparents.”

I had no desire to make another stop on the cemetery tour, but I obligingly trailed behind Daddy as he walked to their site. I saw the names Gordon Griffin and Mary S. Prichard Griffin carved on my grandparents’ double headstone. And then I saw the holes.

“How come this headstone has holes in it?” I asked Daddy. I wondered if termites could eat through granite and steel.

“Mary S. and Gordon’s marker didn’t come with a built-in vase so, a few years ago, I drilled some holes in it. I had to run an extension cord all the way from that pole.”

My eyes followed his pointing finger to the source of electricity, a tall pole more than the length of a football field away. I could picture him on this very spot, an 85-year-old man connecting a series of extension cords and then forcing the drill bit into the stone.

Daddy didn’t tell me to put the flowers on my grandparents’ grave. Instead he stooped over and shoved them in himself. The stems fit perfectly.

Now four white plastic roses stood at attention, securely planted in the holes he had drilled. Daddy slowly got up and stepped back to admire his work.

“Don’t you think they’re pretty?” he asked.

I knew the answer he wanted, so I said “yes.” Again.

As we walked back to Mother’s grave, I smiled as I remembered Daddy’s brilliant “Buy One, Get One Free” plan for a headstone several months after her death. He had called me one night, bragging about it. “Instead of a double headstone, I can get a single one. My ashes can go below your mother’s, and I’ll save a chunk of money. Of course I want the one with a built-in flower vase, and that will cost slightly more, but I’m still getting a bargain.”

As Daddy leaned over to straighten the flowers on Mother’s grave, he told me yet another reason he was proud of his creative headstone plan.

“Not only did I get a bargain by buying a single headstone, but I’ve freed up one of the plots that I bought years ago. That means I’ve gotten a reprieve from my worst nightmare.”

“And what’s that?” I asked.

“See that gravesite?” he pointed to the headstone next to the Spence plot. “Well, that old man buried there was a Republican. I can tell you that I sleep better at night now, knowing I won’t have to lie in perpetuity next to him or any other durn Republican. There will be some space separating us throughout eternity, and for that I’m eternally grateful!”

Daddy took my hand, and we headed back toward the car. As we walked, I looked back. That’s when I felt my hard heart soften. For in the glow of the Central Texas setting sun, I saw the stiff, green, plastic stems topped with red, yellow, white and orange plastic flowers marking the graves of our loved ones. The “50-percent-off” Woolworth’s tags were fluttering in the breeze.

I took a deep breath, and then another. A faint floral scent came wafting over me from the flowers we were leaving behind—each one smelling as sweet as the roses from my own garden.

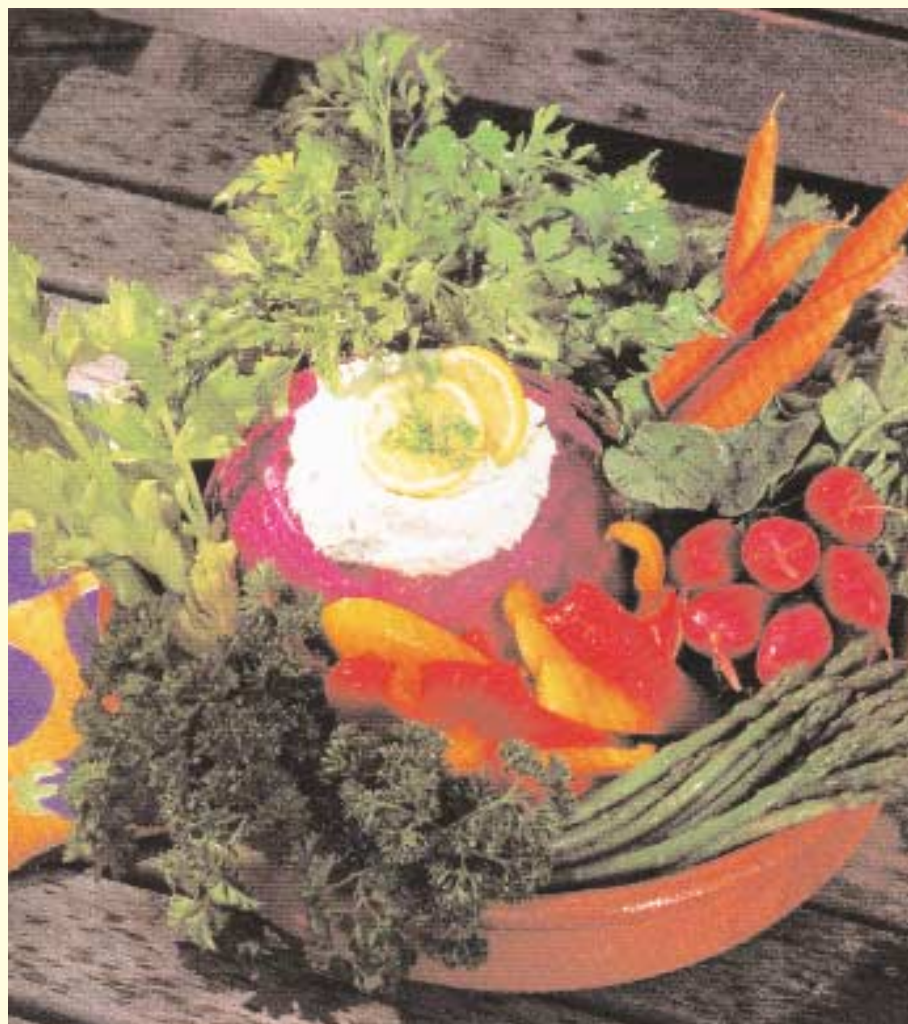
Mary Gordon Spence is an Austin-based storyteller and writer whose work frequently appears in Texas Co-op Power.

# Cooking With Fresh Herbs

**S**pring in Texas ... wildflowers are blooming and garden plants are coming up all over the state. This year, plant a kitchen herb garden. Nothing makes a recipe sing like fresh herbs, many of which will grow throughout the spring, summer and fall in our temperate climate.

The *Herb Garden Cookbook* by Lucinda Hutson (second edition, The University of Texas Press) is a wonderful resource for growing herbs in Texas and for cooking with them. She discusses 20 popular herbs that grow well in the Southwest and gives recipes for each.

Many have a Southwestern flavor. The following recipe for Garden Dip uses a variety of fresh herbs. Don't be afraid to substitute another herb if you don't have all of these. Hutson says, "Don't let the long list of ingredients keep you from making this recipe—it's easy and a sure crowd-pleaser."

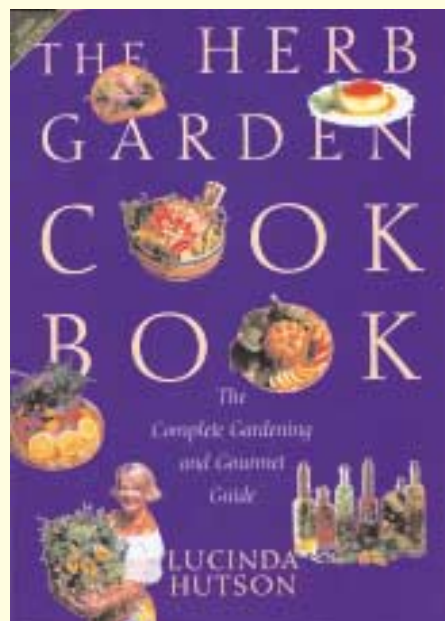


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## Garden Dip

- 1 1/2 cups parsley
- 3 tablespoons fresh thyme (part lemon thyme preferred), removed from stem
- 2 teaspoons fresh rosemary leaves
- 1 tablespoon fresh tarragon or fresh Mexican mint marigold
- 1 tablespoon fresh chives
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 medium-sized shallots
- 1/2 white onion
- 12 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 8 ounces sour cream
- 3 tablespoons capers, rinsed
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- Juice of one lemon
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon pepper, freshly ground
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 can (2 ounces) anchovies, drained and chopped
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Using a food processor or a knife, mince the fresh herbs, garlic, shallots and onion. Blend in the remaining ingredients, whisking in the oil last. Chill several hours; adjust flavorings before serving.





**J**une's recipe contest subject is Peaches. I can't wait till those summertime peaches start to ripen. Whether you buy them at the store or go out and pick a bushel yourself, they're always a treat. Send in your peach recipes by March 10. The winner will receive a copy of the Texas Co-op Power Cookbook. Be sure to include your name, address and phone number, as well as your co-op affiliation. Send recipes to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You can also fax recipes to (512) 486-6254 or e-mail them to [recipes@texas-ec.org](mailto:recipes@texas-ec.org)

Janet Phipps, a member of FEC Electric, is this month's recipe contest winner for her yummy Garden Tomato Pie. It's like eating a hot BLT in a crust. This will be a great way to use your fresh garden tomatoes this summer. Save this recipe until you've got big, red ones ripening on your vines. Janet will receive a copy of the Texas Co-op Power Cookbook.

### Garden Tomato Pie

1 9-inch pie shell  
2-4 tomatoes (depending on size), sliced thick  
Salt and pepper to taste  
2 tablespoons fresh basil leaves, chopped  
2 tablespoons fresh chives, snipped  
1 teaspoon fresh thyme  
8 slices bacon, fried crisp and crumbled  
1/2 to 1 cup mayonnaise (to taste)  
1 cup grated Cheddar cheese

Bake pie shell until set, not brown, and let cool. Fill pie shell with tomato slices, salt and pepper, herbs and bacon. Mix mayonnaise and grated cheese and spread over tomatoes. Bake 30 minutes at 350 degrees or until cheese is lightly browned. Yield: 8 servings.

Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 401 calories, 8 grams protein, 37 grams fat, 13 grams carbohydrates, 562 milligrams sodium, 30 milligrams cholesterol

### Cilantro Pesto Pasta Salad

1 pound dry rigatoni  
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil  
1 cup fresh cilantro leaves, washed and loosely packed  
1/4 teaspoon dried oregano leaves  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
1/4 cup pine nuts

1/2 cup sliced black olives

Salt and pepper to taste

Cook rigatoni according to package directions, drain well. Blend oil, cilantro, garlic and oregano in blender. Toss with pasta. Toss in pine nuts, olives, salt and pepper. Cover and let stand at room temperature up to 2 hours, or cover and refrigerate. Toss again before serving. Yield: 8 servings.

Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 365 calories, 8 grams protein, 17 grams fat, 44 grams carbohydrates, 145 milligrams sodium, 0 milligrams cholesterol

Mattie Broyles, Trinity Valley EC

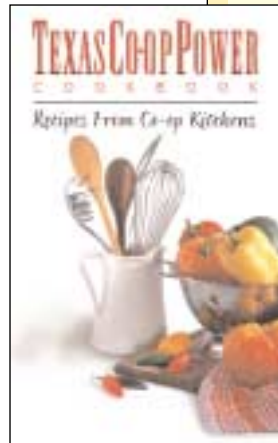
### Herb-Roasted New Potatoes

1 pound red new potatoes, well scrubbed and wiped dry  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
2 teaspoons granulated garlic  
1 1/2 teaspoons fresh rosemary  
1 1/2 teaspoons parsley  
1 1/2 teaspoons fresh thyme  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Toss together all ingredients. Place on a cookie sheet. Bake for 45-55 minutes or until soft. Serve as a side dish with beef, chicken or pork. Serves 4.

### The new Texas Co-op Power Cookbook: Recipes From Co-op Kitchens is a hit!

We're already into our second printing to meet demand. The cookbook features 250 recipes from Texas co-op members and makes an affordable gift. The cookbook is available at most local cooperatives. Or, send name, address and phone number, along with a check or money order for \$18.75 (\$15 plus tax/S&H), to: Texas Co-op Power Cookbook, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.



Serving size: 1/4 pound. Per serving: 155 calories, 3 grams protein, 4 grams fat, 22 grams carbohydrates, 540 milligrams sodium, 0 milligrams cholesterol

Mary Jane Morphew, Grayson-Collin EC

## Prevent Electricity-Related Injuries

**A**ccording to the latest statistics from the National Fire Protection Association, an average 111,400 home fires are caused by faulty electrical systems, appliances and equipment, or heating and air conditioning systems each year. These home fires take an average of 860 lives, injure 3,785, and cause nearly \$1.3 billion in property damage.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (formerly the National Electrical Safety Foundation) makes these recommendations for protecting yourself and your family from electricity-related injuries:

- Check outlets and extension cords to make sure they aren't overloaded.
- Examine electrical cords to make sure they aren't frayed, damaged or placed under rugs or carpets.
- Make sure that the proper wattage light bulbs are being used in light fixtures and lamps.
- Consider installing ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs).
- One of the most important precautions consumers can take is to test their smoke detectors and replace the batteries annually.
- Always follow appropriate safety precautions and manufacturer's instructions.

## AROUND TEXAS

### March

- 2. Brush Country Music Jamboree, **Three Rivers/George West**, (361) 786-3334
- 2. Toast to Texas Independence, **Woodville**, (409) 283-2272
- 5-6. Stitches in Time, Keystone Square Museum, **Lampasas**, (512) 556-2224
- 5-14. Austin Founders Trail Ride, **Hill Country**, (512) 477-4711 or [www.USATrailRides.com](http://www.USATrailRides.com)
- 6. Auction, **Llano**, (325) 247-4158
- 6. Ole Time Music, **Pearl**, (254) 865-6013
- 6. Chili Supper, **Newark**, (817) 489-2201
- 6. Market Day, **Rockdale**, (512) 446-2030
- 6. Trades Day & Swap Meet, **Montgomery**, (936) 447-1922
- 6-7. Elgoatarod Festival, **Eldorado**, (325) 853-2434 or [elgoatarod@hotmail.com](mailto:elgoatarod@hotmail.com)
- 6-7. Central Texas Ceramic Expo, **West**, (214) 327-8984 or (210) 680-1500
- 6-7. Trades Day, **Bonham**, (903) 640-1972
- 6-7. Antiques Show & Sale, **Boerne**, (830) 995-3670 or [www.texasantiqueshow.com](http://www.texasantiqueshow.com)
- 7. St. Francis Xavier Festival, **Stonewall**, (830) 644-2218
- 8-14. Heritage Festival, **Nederland**, (409) 724-2269
- 11-12. Community Garage Sale, **Kirbyville**, (409) 423-5827
- 12-14. Flea Market Days, **Jewett**, (936) 348-5475
- 12-14, 26-28. Chicken House Flea Market, **Stephenville**, (254) 968-0888
- 12-14. Trade Days, **Livingston**, (936) 327-3656
- 13. Redbud Festival, **Buna**, (409) 994-5586
- 13. Fly Fish Texas, **Athens**, (903) 676-2277
- 13. 1st Reunion Car Show, **Conroe**, (936) 441-1217
- 18-20. County Fair, **Goliad**, (361) 645-2012
- 19. St. Patrick's Day Motorcycle Rally, **Del Rio**, (830) 775-0063
- 20. Azalea Festival, **Jasper**, (409) 384-2762
- 20. Juried Art Show, **Livingston**, (936) 365-3044
- 20. Gospel Music Show, **Fredericksburg**, (830) 997-2835
- 20. Wheel Spinners & Crank Twisters Antique Farm Equipment Show, **Goliad**, (361) 645-2012
- 20-21, 27. Southwestern Regional Rendezvous, **Henrietta**, (940) 538-5610
- 25-26. National Senior Pro Rodeo, **Myrtle Springs**, (903) 887-7002 or [www.seniorrodeo.com](http://www.seniorrodeo.com)
- 25-27. Jazz Festival, **Temple**, (254) 298-8554
- 25-April 4. Antique Show & Sale, **Warrenton**, (512) 260-2405 or [www.antiquedays.com](http://www.antiquedays.com)
- 26-27. Jubilee, **Liberty**, (936) 336-3684
- 26-28. Azalea Quilt Show, **Tyler**, (903) 536-4101 or [www.geocities.com/qgetx](http://www.geocities.com/qgetx)
- 26-31. Montgomery County Fair, **Conroe**, (936) 760-3631
- 26-April 3. Walker County Fair, rodeo, barbecue cook-off, **Huntsville**, [www.walkercountyfair.com](http://www.walkercountyfair.com)
- 27. Hill Country Lawn & Garden Show, **Burnet**, (512) 355-3216
- 27. Iola VFD Barbecue & Auction, **Keith**, (936) 394-3205
- 27. Trade Day, **Coldspring**, (936) 653-2009
- 27. Wild Game Dinner, **Kerrville**, (830) 257-7611
- 27. Flower & Garden Show, **Brenham**, 1-888-BRENHAM
- 27. Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine Open House, **College Station**, (979) 272-1375 or [www.cvm.tamu.edu/openhouse](http://www.cvm.tamu.edu/openhouse)
- 27-28. Wild Hog Festival, **Sabinal**, (830) 988-2709

## FESTIVAL OF THE MONTH

BY JIM GRAMON

### Tejas Storytelling Festival: Denton, March 25-28

**T**ry to remember the very best story you have ever heard, face to face. Maybe it was told by one of your grandparents, or maybe by a friend. Perhaps it was a funny story that made you laugh till tears rolled down your cheeks. Maybe it was told in the dim light of a campfire, leaving you scared for the rest of the night.

Now imagine the fun of listening to some of the best storytellers in the world weave their magic. You'll find all this at the 19th Tejas Storytelling Festival in Denton, just northwest of Dallas, March 25-28.

Although I've never had the opportunity to "tell" at the Tejas Storytelling Festival, it's one of my favorite events. Storytellers from across the nation will be coming to Denton to share their skills. Many of my friends will be there, like Liz Carpenter, P.J. Pierce and Doyle Carter (who won the first Austin Liars' Contest). Other featured tellers this year will be Mary Gay Ducey (California

storyteller with Louisiana roots), Syd Lieberman (Jewish and literary tales), Charlotte Blake Alston and Kathy Culmer (African and African-American folktales), and



Syd Lieberman tells Jewish and literary tales.



- 27-28. Crawfish Festival Beauty Pageant, **Mauriceville**, (409) 745-1202  
 27-28. Antique Truck & Tractor Show, **Nursery**, (361) 578-8484  
 27-28. Spring Festival and Texas Crafts Exhibition, **Winedale**, (979) 278-3530 or [www.cah.utexas.edu/divisions/winedale.htm](http://www.cah.utexas.edu/divisions/winedale.htm)

## April 2004

- 2-3. Fine Art Show, **Mineola**, (903) 569-8877 or [www.mlota.org](http://www.mlota.org)  
 3. Billy the Kid Day, **Hico**, 1-800-361-HICO  
 3. Dogwood Festival, **Woodville**, (409) 283-2632  
 3. Spring Art & Craft Show, **Burnet**, (512) 765-0834  
 3-4. Air Show, **Jasper**, (409) 384-2626  
 4. Spring Gala, **Cyclone**, (254) 985-2393

Event information can be mailed to Around Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, faxed to (512) 486-6254, or e-mailed to [aroundtx@texas-ec.org](mailto:aroundtx@texas-ec.org). All information must be submitted by the 10th of the month two months prior to publication. E.g., May submissions must be received prior to March 10. Events are listed according to space available.

Cathy Crowley (traditional folktales).

Saturday's events include two hours of traditional Native American storytelling. Featured tellers in the afternoon are Carpenter, Lady Bird Johnson's press secretary, and Pierce, who is currently writing Carpenter's biography.

All events are held in Civic Center Park, just a few blocks from Denton's historic Courthouse Square. Beneath large circus-style tents, audience members relax under the spell of traditional storytelling, complete with shaggy dog stories and tall tales. You may learn a new urban legend or reminisce about times gone by. Don't miss the fun.

For more information on the Tejas Storytelling Association, go to [www.TejasStorytelling.com](http://www.TejasStorytelling.com), call (940) 387-8336, or send an e-mail to [tsa@TejasStorytelling.com](mailto:tsa@TejasStorytelling.com).

Jim Gramon is the author of several books on Texas festivals and storytellers. [Jim@Jim-Gramon.com](mailto:Jim@Jim-Gramon.com), [www.JimGramon.com](http://www.JimGramon.com).



### WAFFLE IRON CORNBREAD

- 1 egg
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup cornmeal
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 tablespoons melted fat

Beat egg together with milk. Add dry ingredients, mixing well. Stir in melted fat. Cook in pre-heated, lightly greased waffle iron just as you would regular waffles.

Cindy Walton, *Big Country EC*

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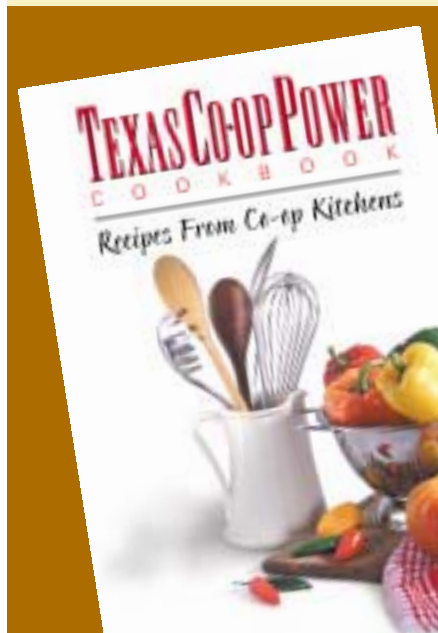
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Carrie Killough spotted this "parson's barn" while driving around in search of wintry photo subjects on a snowy day. Sadly, she reports that the barn has fallen since this photo was taken. Her husband, Doug Killough, is an employee of Grayson-Collin EC.

## Barns of Yesterday and Today

**P**erhaps no other native architecture better exemplifies the spirit of the American pioneers than their barns. Sadly, many old barns—no longer needed—are disappearing from the countryside. Today's barns aren't necessarily the picturesque, hand-hewn variety of yesteryear; but they're mighty useful for storage and farm implements, not to mention living quarters for livestock (and sometimes people). We hope you enjoy these photos of an important part of our agricultural heritage.

The topic for May is Best Friends, so send us your favorite photo to "Best Friends," Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. Digital photos will also be accepted at [focus@texas-ec.org](mailto:focus@texas-ec.org). Image files should be high resolution (at least 300 pixels per inch or ppi) or very large low-resolution images (72 ppi, minimum size is 13x20 inches). All entries must include name, co-op name, daytime phone, mailing address, and description or story. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you'd like your photo returned.



In 1931, Harold Pressley built this 100' x 60' barn of sandstone to complement the house he built of petrified wood the same year. The rocks and wood were dug out of the ground as he plowed and worked the sandy land on his farm. His daughter, Mrs. Lyle (Paulie) McDermott, writes, "Isn't it remarkable that the farmer at that time [the Great Depression] could build quality like this with what he could produce on the land?" The McDermotts, Belfalls EC members, have lived in the house since 1983.

At right, the picturesque old "Bowden barn" in Cumby was photographed by FEC EC member Carol R. Allen.

Bandera EC member Geraldine M. Dickerson grew up in a small town in New Hampshire and enjoyed playing in barns at her uncle's dairy farm. "Since moving to the Texas Hill Country, [I have found that] barn settings such as this one give me the gentle pleasure of nostalgia," she writes. "Barns of every stage, age, function and form will always be a gateway to wonderful memories."



"As a little girl, I loved barns, especially red ones," writes Pedernales EC member Jan Droptini. "When my husband had spare time, he built me one on our place in Leander. It took two years, one nail at a time." Like Jan, we love her little red barn!



### UPCOMING in Focus on Texas

Subject	Issue	Deadline
Best Friends	May	March 10
Water Towers	June	April 10
Family Fun	July	May 10
On the Farm	August	June 10
Caught Napping	September	July 10
The Big Game	October	August 10



# The Woodward Ranch

**T**he sun is close to setting as I wind my way slowly up the rough ranch road to the agate fields. I bump and bounce along in my long-suffering truck to the top of a ridge, and then I see the most amazing and beautiful sight. A few miles to the west toward Cathedral Mountain, a fog bank has rolled in and the clouds are piling up on the north face of the mountain like waves on a rocky shore. The clouds spill into the lowlands below, and then, for only a few dazzling moments, the vanishing sun sets the scene ablaze.

Dumbstruck, I do my best to capture the scene on film, wanting to share it with someone. Out here, though, it's just me and a magical mountain sunset.

At first light the next morning, I'm out picking my way along high ridges on the Woodward Ranch, 16 miles south of Alpine in Big Bend country. It's a treasure hunt, you see. I'm looking for Texas red plume agates, found nowhere else in the world. I walk slowly, hunched over, up one hill and down the next. Nothing. And then I see one, with its distinctive "biscuit" shape, smooth on one side and bumpy on the other. And then another and another until my bucket is half-full. No, it's half-empty. Greedy, I must have more. I know what beauty lies within. Cut the stones open, and it's as if a Cathedral Mountain sunset is frozen inside.

Finally, my manners get the best of me and I drive down to meet my host, ranch owner Trey Woodward. He's sitting at his rock shop waiting for me, probably wondering where I've been.



Texas moss agate.



Cathedral Mountain at sunset with Eagle Peak in the background.

I hold up my bucket of rocks. No further explanation required.

Trey shows me his shop and little store, filled with spectacular agates, opals and minerals from his family collection. I'm mesmerized by the backlit displays of thinly sliced agates that seem to have little pictures inside them. Trees, landscapes, even figures of winged horses. His house next to the shop is like a museum. In fact, the Smithsonian Museum now exhibits specimens that once rested on his fireplace mantle. And what a fireplace it is! The rockwork is a flower garden of color with geodes, crystals and agates of every description, a monument to more than 100 years of collecting by three generations of Woodwards.

This is a cattle ranch, but gemstones have become a major source of revenue. Texas red plume agates, discovered here in the 1930s by Frank Woodward Sr., lie beside flower garden, pom pom, moss and iris agates—more varieties perhaps than anywhere else in North America. Texas' only precious opal is found here as well.

A unique geology created this phenomenon. You can look over toward Cathedral Mountain and see the stump of an ancient volcano called Eagle Peak.

It erupted about 40 million years ago, flooding the area with lava. Gasses within the lava formed pockets into which seeped water laden with silicates and other minerals. Slowly, over millions of years, quartz crystallized in these pockets (along with metals and other impurities) to form these intricate rock patterns.

You never know what wonder one of these biscuit-shaped rocks conceals. When you come, wear your hiking boots, bring a small handpick or pry bar for stubborn specimens, maybe a pair of binoculars, and your camera. Definitely bring your camera. The next sunset may be one you want to keep forever.

The ranch is open seven days a week and is closed only during mule deer season. It's best to call ahead for directions and weather conditions. The Woodwards can be reached at (432) 364-2271 or by e-mail at [treywoodward@hotmail.com](mailto:treywoodward@hotmail.com). For more information, check out [www.woodwardranch.net](http://www.woodwardranch.net).

Jeff Sargent, who lives near San Marcos, makes jewelry, which may explain his interest in gems. He's a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.