

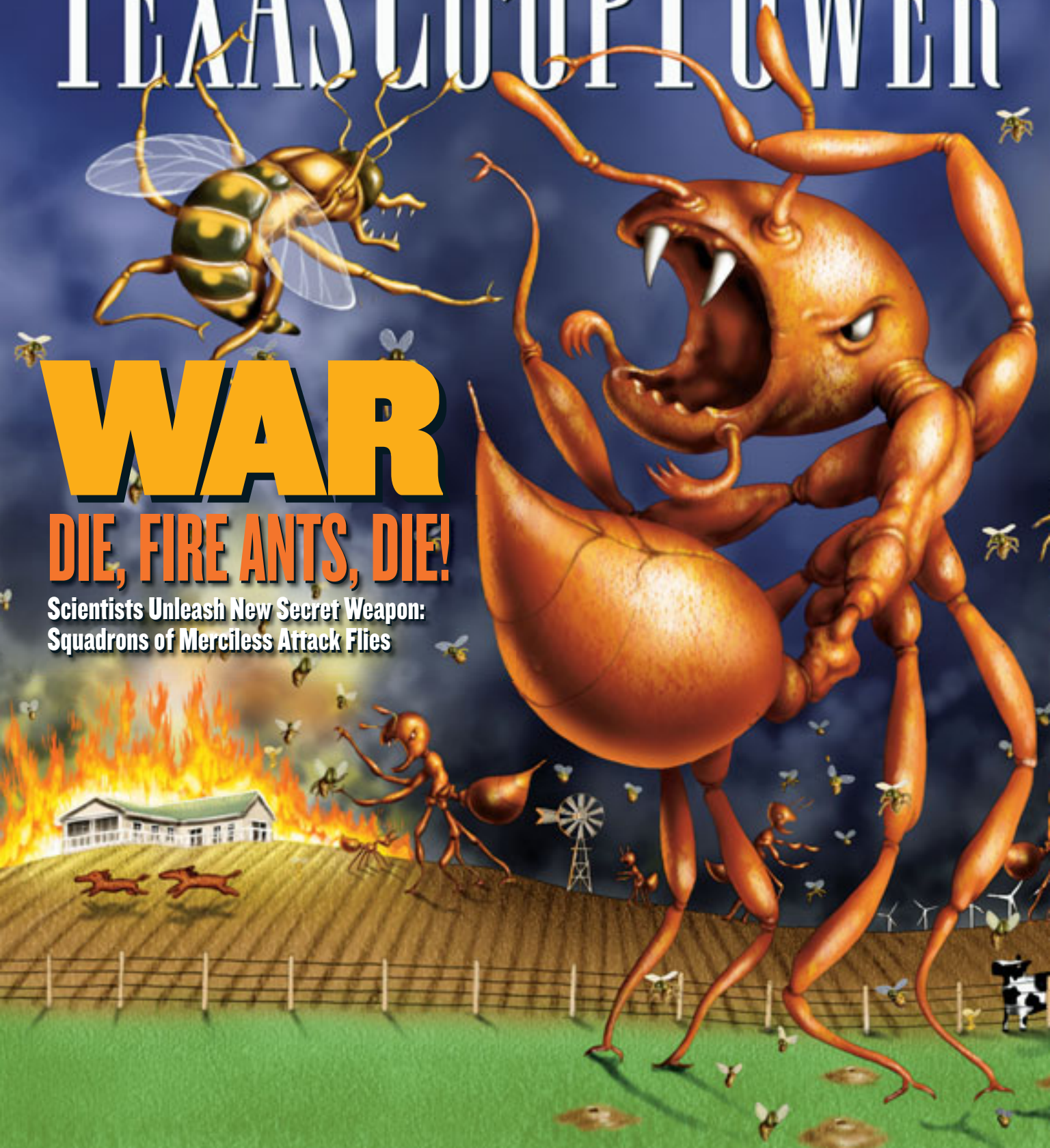
PANCAKES: BATTER UP!

ROUND TOP ANTIQUE SHOW

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

WAR DIE, FIRE ANTS, DIE!

Scientists Unleash New Secret Weapon:
Squadrons of Merciless Attack Flies





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FEATURES

8 WAR

By Melissa Gaskill

Texans burn, drown, smash, poison and cuss red imported fire ants. But researchers are finding success as they unleash a secret weapon: tiny phorid flies from South America.

WEB EXTRA: Watch as flies mercilessly dive-bomb fire ants in a National Geographic video.

12 Finds on the Farm

By Charles Boisseau

Photos by Will van Overbeek

Twice a year, tens of thousands of people make the pilgrimage to Round Top for one of America's largest antiques fairs. No. 1 shopping tip? Get there early.

DEPARTMENTS

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- Focus on Texas *Springtime in Texas* 35
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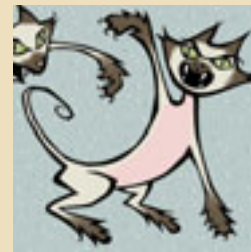
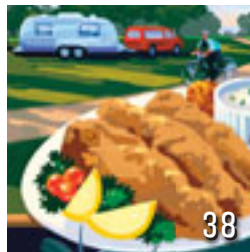
The following March stories are available on our website.

Observations by Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

A Close Shave for Three Cats

Texas USA by Charles Boisseau

Lone Star flag photographer E. Joe Deering



TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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letters

RURAL VETERINARIANS

Both my business and volunteer time crisscross the veterinary community, so I really enjoyed the rural veterinarian story ("Emergency Call," January 2011). I will be sharing it with many Houston-area vets.

Also, for some reason, a postmortem exam on an animal is called a necropsy instead of an autopsy.

JANET HUEY

San Bernard Electric Cooperative

PRESERVING DARK NIGHT SKIES

Preserving West Texas' pristine dark skies ("Starstruck," December 2010) is an outgrowth of a larger nationwide movement to protect our cherished natural sanctuaries from urban encroachment.

For centuries, mankind's ability to control light was limited to fire and crude devices that could transport it from one locale to another. The advent of the lightbulb changed all of that by making light ubiquitous and cheap to control. In our

POWER TALK

quest to modernize, we felt that a light on every sign, street corner, building and tower was only a good thing. However, the power to turn night into day also comes with responsibilities, espe-

READ MORE LETTERS

See "Letters to the Editor" in the March Table of Contents at

TexasCoopPower.com

cially after we are learning that light at night leads to increased risks of cancer, obesity and irritability and higher levels of stress. The message that Bill Wren and the folks at McDonald Observatory are spreading is a simple one: Use light only when it is necessary, in moderation, and turn it off when you don't need it.

Not only will you be helping Texas preserve its dark skies, but you might also improve your own health!

BENJAMIN JONES

Former coordinator, Texas Section of the International Dark-Sky Association

My husband and I recently vacationed at Big Bend and spent one evening on the patio of the Chisos Mountains Lodge restaurant watching the sun set through the famous Window view. As we slowly walked back to our room at Emory Peak Lodge, which is set back in the woods, we realized we should have brought a flashlight. We could not see one step in front of us on that moonless night. Nonetheless, we enjoyed picking out constellations, the Milky Way and even a couple of satellites. We

made it safely back to our room with memories of so many stars that they could not be counted.

MARY BETH FRANCIS

Medina Electric Cooperative

On our first trip to Big Bend National Park in the 1990s, we had my husband's homemade 20-inch telescope sandwiched between him and me in the front seat and resting between our two young sons in the back seat. We had only a week to vacation there, but from our tent, we could see the Andromeda Galaxy with our naked eyes! I took off my wristwatch so I wouldn't be tied to any civilized constraint to prevent me from experiencing every unfolding minute in a land that time forgot.

HARRIETT GUMLER

Farmers Electric Cooperative

The story about the West Texas stars reminded me of an incident back in the late '40s or early '50s. We had electricity but no indoor toilet, so every night before I went to bed, nature called me outside. I especially remember one cloudless, moonless night with millions of stars. I glanced up and behold, a contrail was

DUTCH OVENS ON THE RANGE

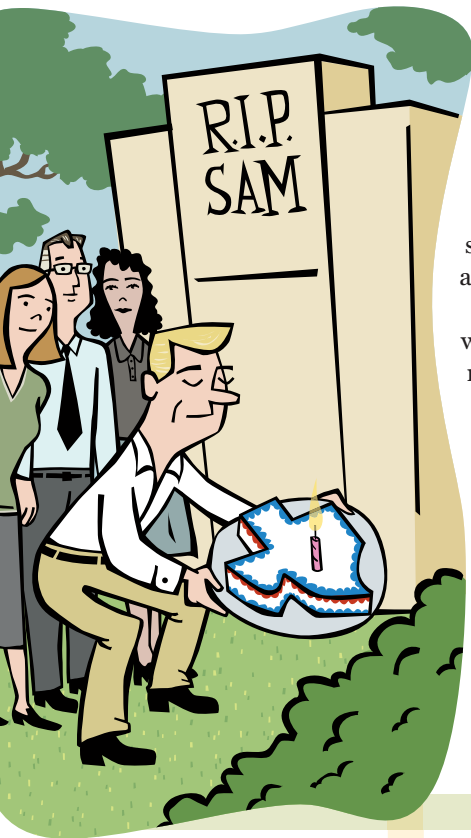


PAUL KIME

wearing the white jacket and white ten-gallon hat, is my dad, Charles Roy Sellars.

There's no way to tell the contents of the Dutch ovens on the far left and middle, but Kime said the one on the right contains cornbread. It just goes to show how valuable Dutch ovens were to people in days gone by.

Milton Sellars, *Karnes Electric Cooperative*



Happy birthday, Sam Houston—and happy anniversary, Texas.

On March 2, 1836, Gen. Sam Houston celebrated his 43rd birthday by signing the Texas Declaration of Independence. On March 2, 2011, the City of Huntsville, in a tradition that started more than a century ago, will celebrate both occasions: **HOUSTON'S BIRTHDAY** and the 175th anniversary of **TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY**.

The history of the celebration dates back to 1889, when students at the Sam Houston Normal Institute—now Sam Houston State University—would mark the occasion by marching to Houston's grave in Oakwood Cemetery. That tradition ended in the mid-1960s but was resurrected in 1981 by the Walker County Historical Commission, which is coordinating the event for the 30th consecutive year.

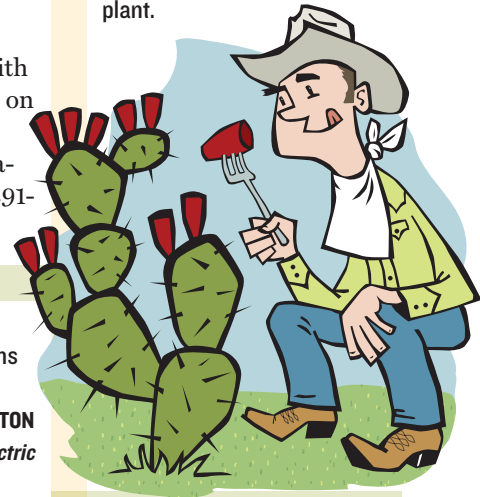
The march, which traditionally includes Sam Houston State University students, culminates with a gravesite ceremony. Houston died in Huntsville on July 26, 1863.

For more information about the full-day celebration, which features a variety of events, call (936) 291-5920 or go to <http://huntsvilleculturaldistrict.com>.

WHO KNEW?

OFFICIAL PLANT

Found in the deserts of the American Southwest, the fruits of most prickly pear cacti are edible and have been a source of food for Native Americans for thousands of years. The fruit—or tuna, as it's called—can be made into jellies, jams, teas and cheese, among other tasty treats. In 1995, the Texas Legislature named the prickly pear cactus the official state plant.



traveling northeast to southwest. In a short time, it had traversed the sky. You talk about the hair standing up on the back of your neck. Wow.

WILLIAM H. NOWLIN

Fannin County Electric Cooperative

TEXAS MATH LESSON

I am new to www.TexasCoopPower.com and especially enjoyed the "Scootch Over a Tad Bit" article (December 2010). One day when I was about 7, my dad was in the middle of a project and needed sawhorses. The closest thing we had were 5-gallon, metal gas cans. Dad hollered at me, "Son! Get me a couple of them gas cans outta the well house and bring 'em to me." I hustled off to the well house, but finding only "two" cans, I proceeded to hunt for more.

I could find no more, and I heard him holler, "Are you gonna bring me them gas cans, or not?" "Yes sir," I answered, grabbing the cans. "What took you so long?" he asked. "I was

looking for more cans, Pop," I said. With disgust, he asked, "Don't you know how many a couple is? Sheesh! And you're in the second grade? A couple is TWO."

I learned that simple "numbers" lesson that day and never forgot it! But after reading Richard Husby's essay, I reckon Daddy forgot we wuz in Texas!

GAYLON STAMPS
Panhandle

A FRONTIER JOURNEY

Like Elaine Robbins (author of "A Journey Through Texas, 1853," December 2010), I recently discovered this rich resource written by Frederick Olmsted. As my ancestors were migrating at the exact time period, it allowed me to visualize their challenges on the road to settling the Texas frontier. This was quite a collective group entering Collin County from the Winchester, Kentucky, area, which included my Bush family as

well as the Haggards, Elkins and Quissenberrys.

STEVE BENTON
CoServ Electric

OUT ON A LIMB FOR MEMBERS

Recently, Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative technicians from the Mart office cut down a very tall, dead tree for us. The removal of the tree involved the electric lines. This saved us in many ways, mainly a ton of heartache if this dead tree had fallen on neighbors, friends or family members or our precious grandchildren. I just wanted to let someone know of our heartfelt thanks.

BESS AND JOSEPH TUCKER
Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative

We want to hear from our readers. Submit letters online at www.TexasCoopPower.com, e-mail us at letters@TexasCoopPower.com, or mail to Editor, Texas Co-op Power, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and are printed as space allows.

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A Green Way to a Green Lawn

Staying on the cutting edge with nonpolluting mowers

By Brian Sloboda

Most summer weekends are filled with the sounds of splashing in swimming pools and the steady noise of lawn mowers. Lawn mowers and other gasoline-powered lawn equipment roar to life in many neighborhoods to keep yards beautiful. However, these small engines emit a large amount of pollution. By some Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates, engines used to maintain lawns and gardens account for 5 percent of U.S. air pollution.

Most of us love the look of a well-manicured lawn. But mowing is a chore, and gasoline-powered lawn mowers are an assault on peace and quiet—just ask someone who wanted to sleep in on a Saturday morning when a neighbor decided to get an early start on the yard work.

The air pollution emitted by gasoline-powered lawn mowers and other yard equipment is significant. According to the EPA, operating a gasoline-powered lawn mower for one hour produces the

same amount of smog-forming hydrocarbons as driving a vehicle almost 200 miles.

As with any fuel-powered motor, lawn mowers and other yard equipment emit carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless gas toxic to humans. The engines also emit unburned hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxide, which contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone. New rules governing emissions from small engines are expected to go into effect in the next year or two.

In the meantime, there are options for reducing noise and air pollution and still maintaining a beautiful lawn.

The best option might be a manual, or push, reel mower. With no engine, the mower produces little noise, save for the satisfying sound of blades cutting grass.

Reel mower prices start at around \$70. To maximize their effectiveness, the blades should be sharpened regularly and the wheels lubricated. These mowers can last years with proper care. Though it's still hard to push a reel

mower through tall grass, today's models are lighter and easier to maneuver than those of several decades ago. They are best suited for smaller yards but can be used on any size lawn as long as the person pushing the mower has plenty of energy.

Electric- and battery-powered mowers offer another clean alternative. Like gas mowers, they are motorized but are much quieter and emit no direct pollutants. Electric mowers can be corded or cordless.

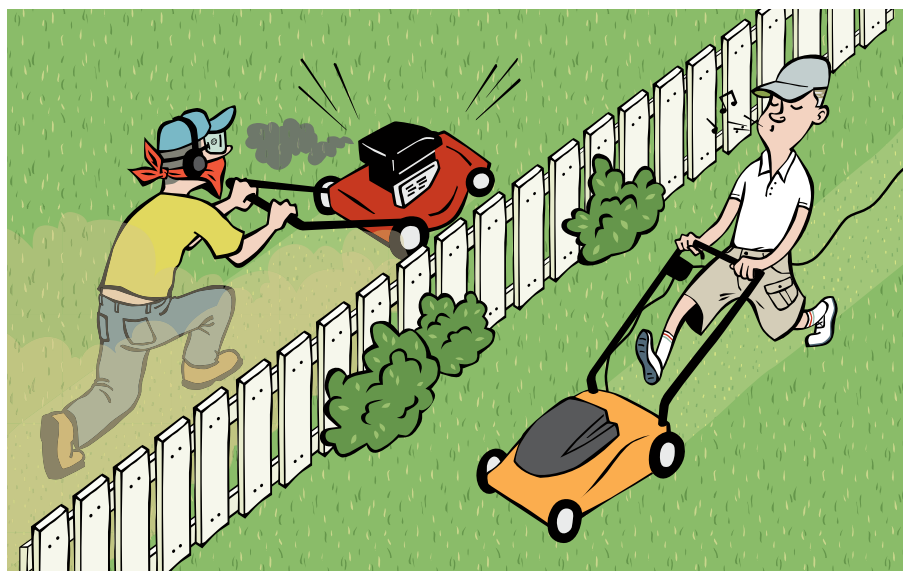
Costs for a corded mower can range from \$150 to more than \$400—similar to the cost of a gas-powered mower. However, corded mowers do come with one big annoyance: They must be connected to the house via an extension cord, and users must also be careful not to run over the cord with the mower.

Cordless, rechargeable mowers can range from \$200 to more than \$500. They are more convenient than corded mowers and are powered by a removable, rechargeable battery. Limitations of rechargeable mowers are the size of the yard and the life of the battery pack. Many manufacturers claim that their cordless mowers can mow 1/3 to 1/2 an acre during a cutting time of 45 to 60 minutes. Actual times will vary depending on the age of the battery, height of the grass and how quickly the user can get the job done.

In recent years, the choice in cordless mowers has expanded, with models introduced by well-established companies such as Toro and Black & Decker and new entrants coming from makers such as Neuton. But given the cost of cordless mowers, careful attention should be paid to the brand and model being purchased. Customer reviews online are a helpful resource.

Gasoline-powered lawn mowers are a noisy, ubiquitous part of our culture. However, in the face of rising fuel costs and environmental concerns, more people are switching to nonpolluting, human-powered mowers or electric varieties that won't disturb your neighbor's summer nap or pollute the atmosphere.

Brian Sloboda is a program manager specializing in energy efficiency for the Cooperative Research Network, a service of the Arlington, Virginia-based National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



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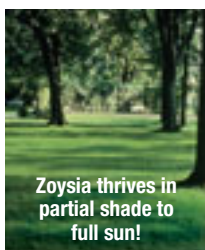


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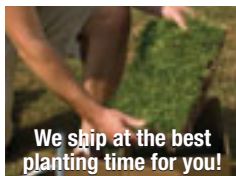
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JOHN FRASER

WAR

BY MELISSA GASKILL

**Under attack. Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide.
The fire ants cower. They panic.
The flies keep coming. Dive-bombing. Injecting eggs.
No mercy. It's a fight to the death.**

And the flies always win.

Texans burn, drown, smash, poison and cuss red imported fire ants. But 20 years of research at The University of Texas reveals that one of the most effective weapons in our arsenal against these relentless invaders just might be—drum roll, please—tiny phorid flies.

The gray-brown, gnat-like insects from South America star in a scene straight from a B-grade horror movie. A female fly sneaks up behind an unsuspecting worker ant and lays an egg in its body. The egg hatches, and the larva moves into the ant's head, sending the host ant out of the colony—zombie-like—to find a place to die. The ant's head eventually falls off, providing a nice, hard shell in which the larva pupates into an adult fly. The whole process takes about 45 days.

It's too soon to say just how much damage the flies are actually inflicting, but scientists know this: The presence of phorid flies around mounds drives ants crazy and disrupts their normal behavior.

So does this mean we'll never again have to spend hard-earned dollars on ant bait, or precious time pouring boiling water over swarming mounds? (The latter method, by the way, is reasonably successful—see the story on Page 10 about what works and what doesn't in trying to kill these fierce invaders.) No. But for Texans waging war against red imported fire ants, it feels as if the cavalry—in the form of tiny winged crusaders—has arrived.

Texans hate invasive fire ants, and with good reason. Armed with back-end stingers and serrated mandibles, or jaws, they aggressively attack and can injure or kill livestock and wildlife, particularly when animals step into or lie down on mounds. They can produce life-threatening allergic reactions in people. The ants render lawns, parks and other outdoor areas inhospitable. They displace native ants, reduce native insect populations and interfere with pollination. A bane of agricultural producers, the ants build mounds that can damage mowing, shredding and baling equipment.

These invaders aren't satisfied with spoiling the outdoors, either: During the winter, fire ants seek out the warmth of electrical circuit boxes, causing shorts responsible for fires (although fire ants are named for their burning sting, not their ability to ignite flames).

Red imported fire ants, in fact, according to Texas A&M University researchers, cost Texans roughly \$1.2 billion a year—a total that includes the damage these critters cause and the cost of our efforts to fight them.

STOWAWAY FIRE ANTS

Fire ants haven't always been such a problem. Texas is home to a native species of fire ant (*Solenopsis geminata*), but natural enemies and competition have kept its numbers at a tolerable level. The natives seldom bother most people.

Red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*), however, are native to South America. They arrived in the U.S. around 1930 as stowaways on a ship from northern Argentina that docked at Mobile, Alabama. The ants quickly spread throughout the southeastern U.S. Crossing into East Texas in the late 1950s, the ants rolled unimpeded to the western edge of the Hill Country, where cold and dryness slowed their progress.

With no natural enemies here, the invaders quickly outnumbered native ants. No one knows just how much greater their numbers are, says Rob Plowes, a research associate at The University of Texas' (UT) Brackenridge Field Laboratory in Austin. But 200,000 to 250,000 imported red fire ants live in a typical colony, and many a landowner reports mounds covering pastures like a deadly pox. The ants' numbers vary with rainfall and temper-

ature, with more found in warm, moist areas or where soil has been disturbed. Their highest densities occur in the eastern and southern portions of Texas.

Fortunately for us, and unfortunately for them, fire ants showed up at the Brackenridge lab, 82 wooded acres on the shores of Lady Bird Lake, in the early 1980s. Watching them bulldoze across the property inspired Larry Gilbert, professor of integrative biology and lab director, to create The University of Texas Fire Ant Research Project, with the goal of finding a self-sustaining, biological control method.

In contrast to chemicals—which kill pretty much everything in their path, cost a lot and must constantly be re-applied—biological control, or biocontrol, mostly targets the invasive species and is something that will keep going on its own, Plowes explains.

But biocontrol is complicated to figure out and establish. First, using their genes, researchers matched invasive ants to the specific locations from which they originated in South America. Then, the scientists explored those home ranges for potential ant predators and parasites. This somewhat tedious work revealed that the natural enemies keeping fire ants in check in their native habitats include wasps, nematode worms, pathogens such as bacteria, fungi and viruses—and flies belonging to the Phoridae family (genus *Pseudacteon*).

ATTACK OF THE KILLER FLIES

UT researchers worked with South American biologists to identify 24 phorids, Plowes says. Each is very host-specific and primarily attacks the *invicta* ant species, the type menacing Texas. (The flies will attack native fire



© CHRIS HOWES/WILD PLACES PHOTOGRAPHY/LAUNY

No matter where the trail leads, nobody rolls out the red carpet for invasive fire ants. Texans, with good reason, hate these aggressive attackers that wield back-end stingers and serrated mandibles, or jaws.

ants, but don't make them hosts.)

UT began experimental releases of phorids in Austin in 1995, initially setting flies loose near mounds in hopes that they would attack the ants. Later, the lab began using what Plowes calls a Trojan horse approach, using infected fire ants to unwittingly carry the enemy back to their homes.

To do this, researchers bring a bucket full of ant colony members into the field lab, fill it with water to float ants to the top, and transfer the scrambling insects to a tray. In the Mass Attack Chamber—a room entered space station-style via an air lock—trays are placed in boxes containing flies. The flies lay their eggs, and the infected ants are returned to their original colony.

UT's phorid fly research was great news for landowner Wesley Hornbuckle. By the early 1990s, invasive fire ants had infested his family's 1,875-acre ranch on the Trinity River near Centerville, building mounds roughly every 15 feet in open areas. Hornbuckle observed a marked decline in the number of quail and blames the ants for failed efforts to re-establish wild turkeys on the land. For four years, he

WEAPONS IN THE WAR ON ANTS

We despise fire ants so much, we try all sorts of things to get rid of them. Wizzie Brown, extension program specialist with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, sorts out what works from what doesn't. Hint: Eat the grits yourself.

Amdro Ant Bait. Works. The bait attracts worker ants, who carry it back to the colony and share it. Voilà, curtains for the mound. Keep it fresh, Brown warns; ants won't take old, rancid bait. Apply the bait while ants are foraging, when no rain is forecast and at least 12 hours before watering. Brown adds that baiting many yards at the same time reduces the problem of mounds moving in where others have died. Encourage neighbors to bait on a specific day. Brown has been doing this in her neighborhood and has seen fewer fire ants and more native ants (better foragers, fire ants usually pick up the bait first). Main drawback: expense.

Boiling water. Works, if done properly. After a rain, fire ant mounds grow larger above ground as the ants try to avoid water-

saturated soil. Boiling water only kills the ants it hits, Brown says, so pouring it on a mostly above-ground mound can kill up to 60 percent of the colony. Start at the edge and pour toward the center. Drawback: Hot water kills nearby plants.

Club soda. Does not work. While it looks impressive when poured on the mound, fire ants do not die. Brown even ran a field trial, and mounds popped right back up. Proponents claim the carbon dioxide in the soda kills the ants. But as research associate Rob Plowes notes, he and other researchers at The University of Texas' Brackenridge Field Laboratory blow pure CO₂ over trays of ants to anesthetize them—and if that concentration doesn't kill them, Schweppes certainly won't. Some claim the soda displaces air in the mound and drowns the ants, but mounds are quite extensive and this scenario would take an awful lot of club soda, applied all at once. What likely happens, Plowes says, is displacement—pouring stuff in the mound bothers the ants

and they move. But not always very far.

Grits. Do not work. People believe that fire ants eat grits and then can't digest them and explode, Brown says. "That would be really cool if it actually happened, but fire ants can't eat solid food, only sip liquids," she says. "Even with the chemical baits, they just suck off the soybean oil. The mound will move because you poured a bunch of junk on top of it, and they aren't real keen on that." In other words, there's displacement again. You could spend the year chasing mounds around your yard. Chances are you'll wimp out before the ants will.

Orange Oil. Works. A pesticide, d-limonene, made from orange oil extract, kills ants on contact. Start from the outside of a mound and spiral in, Brown advises, and follow the label's directions. This typically works best when the mound is built up, perhaps after a rain. Summer is a difficult time to kill ants by any method, because they get deep in the ground when it's dry.

MELISSA GASKILL

fought back with expensive chemicals—\$2,000 per application—but the ants always came back.

So in 2009, Hornbuckle, his brothers Brad and Will and friend Kevin Johnson made nine trips between the ranch and the Austin-based lab, bringing buckets of ant beds and returning the infected residents to their original mound sites. Within a year, phorid flies were well established on the ranch.

“Over time, Rob says we should see the ants decline about 15 percent a year,” Hornbuckle says, explaining that with the flies present, the mounds aren’t expected to be as big or as numerous.

Chemical treatment, Hornbuckle says, temporarily depleted the ants’ numbers, and after applications, he would see a huge increase in cottontail numbers.

But the flies offer the promise of a long-term solution in the fight against red imported fire ants. “I just hate those suckers,” Hornbuckle says. “It is personally rewarding to see them go.”

MOUNDS OF TROUBLE FOR FIRE ANTS

Researchers can’t yet quantify how many fire ants the flies are killing. But projections show that in areas where flies are introduced, they infect up to 1 percent of worker ants. “That’s a huge amount of fire ants going down the drain,” Plowes says.

But what’s more important, Plowes says, is that the mere presence of phorid flies makes life harder for the ants. The ants clearly don’t appreciate being hijacked as larval hosts and frantically try to escape dive-bombing phorids by going underground or hiding in the nest. This restricts the ant colony’s ability to gather food, effectively limiting the size of a colony and its ability to found new ones (ant colonies spread much like beehives; when things get crowded, a queen and workers leave to start a new mound). So, with phorids around, fire ant mounds aren’t as big or as numerous, putting the invaders more on the par with native ants.

In more good news for Texans, Plowes says that phorid flies introduced on public and private land by UT, Texas A&M, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and various state agencies have spread to about 160 million



© ABBOTT NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

In a scene straight from a B-grade horror movie, a South American phorid fly hovers in preparation for a dive-bombing mission. Such attacks terrorize invasive fire ants.

acres, more than half the fire ant range in Texas (see map at www.sbs.utexas.edu/fireant).

Prevailing winds apparently have aided their spread. “The flies normally move maybe tens or hundreds of meters a year,” Plowes says, explaining that the leading edge of the population moves about 40 or 50 miles per year, representing 10 to 12 miles per generation. Small insects, including phorids, can get wafted 5,000 or 6,000 feet up in the atmosphere and picked up by winds aloft, then rain down somewhere else.

Naturally, Plowes has been asked whether Texas will be plagued by swarms of the flies. Not likely, he responds. As already noted, the South American phorids have a significant preference for a specific host ant, and the lab’s years of research prove that bringing them here hasn’t changed that. The flies don’t attack any old fire ant, and without the proper ant host around, the flies die off.

Plowes stresses that despite the promising results of phorid fly attacks, we’ll never eliminate invasive fire ants,

in Texas or anywhere else. But long-term, he believes we can reduce them to more tolerable levels through some combination of flies, pathogens, native ant recovery and environmental stress. However, it will, he cautions, take time—perhaps decades.

Meanwhile, landowners plagued by invasive fire ants can take comfort in the knowledge that at least help is on its way. So for now, keep on burning, smashing, drowning or poisoning them. And practicing patience.

Melissa Gaskill, a freelance writer based in Austin, is a frequent contributor to the magazine.

ON TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM

• **Native or invader?** Make sure it’s the enemy you have in your sights before launching assaults on fire ant mounds.

• **In a National Geographic video** that plays more like a horror flick, scientists unleash phorid flies on red imported fire ants and watch destruction ensue.

Finds ON THE FARM

At Round Top's legendary antiques show, it's all about the thrill of the hunt.

On a Tuesday morning during harvest season, I arrive at a farm in rural South-Central Texas, park in a dusty field and get out of my car.

Inching forward nearby is a long line of cars and trucks, their drivers forking over cash to parking attendants, some of whom zip around in golf carts and communicate on crackling walkie-talkies.

This is like no farm patch I've ever seen. Instead of cotton and corn, Marburger Farm sprouts 10 circus-sized tents and 12 restored buildings, each spilling over with antiques: Victorian furniture, quilts, early 1900s jewelry, folk art, old farm tables, light-

ing fixtures and much, much more.

This is the heart of the Round Top Antique Show, one of America's largest antiques fairs, where twice a year tens of thousands of people pick through the goods hauled here by dealers from across the U.S. (and beyond).

Located about halfway between Austin and Houston, Round Top is one of Texas' smallest incorporated cities; signs at its city limits list a population of 77. That's a laughable number on this fall morning, given that I am within shouting distance of perhaps a thousand shoppers, dealers, promoters and handlers.

Four decades ago, Houston antiques maven Emma Lee Turney launched the

first Round Top antiques fair—up the road in Round Top's quaint Rifle Hall, where she had just 22 dealers. Turney, now an energetic octogenarian who

ANTIQUES SHOW FACT
*Some **100,000** shoppers attended the 2010 fall and spring shows.*

continues to operate a venue nearby during the event, says she is among the few who weren't surprised by the success of the ever-sprawling show, a collection of individually run events that now stretches over a roughly two-week period each spring and fall. Known simply as "Round Top," the show



attracts 4,500 dealers at some 60 venues at half a dozen hamlets surrounding this countrified art colony.

Round Top's vast scope became clear as I drove the two-lane Texas Highway 237 northeast from La Grange and passed the farming communities of Rutersville, Oldenburg and Warrenton, where it seemed every restored storefront, feed store and empty field was crammed with antiques, collectibles and, to the untrained eye, assorted junk.

Just outside of Round Top was my destination, Marburger. Launched in 1997 on what had been a working farm, Marburger now ranks among the largest and best-known of Round Top's venues: 43 acres, more than 350 dealers and a reputation for high-quality merchandise.

I arrived in time for the start of early bird shopping. Pay \$25, and you get first crack at the goods from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the opening of Marburger's five-day run.

WOMEN LEAD THE WAY

You don't have to be a cultural anthropologist to notice the place is dominated by women. The first two people I approach marching along the well-worn promenade tell me they came

with a group of six women for an annual shopping spree. They always "shop the fields" for bargains over the weekend and then visit Marburger on opening day, says Shelley Beckman, an employee of Southwest Airlines in Dallas. She is dressed for shopping on this warm, sunny day: wide-brimmed hat, oversized sunglasses, casual sleeveless dress and comfortably worn cowboy boots.

Rick McConn, whose family purchased Marburger from John Sauls—one of its founders and a quilt dealer—in 2007, estimates that three-quarters of the customers are women. Veteran Round Topper Cathy Branch, shopping with longtime friend Harriet Davis, says: "It's not the thing you bring your husband to, unless he really likes to shop. Ours would rather be on the golf course."

Standing next to the porch of a restored farmhouse, the two women discuss the merits of a selection of aqua-blue coral harvested from the South Seas. Would the color match the shade in an oil painting Davis had recently hung in her McLennan County home? After a few moments, they decide yes, and Davis purchases five chunks of coral from a Springfield, Massachusetts, dealer for \$325.

PROFESSIONAL SHOPPERS

Shoppers like these rub shoulders with the second chief type of customer here: the professionals—antiques dealers and interior designers who come in search of goods with which to stock their own stores or for clients. These pros say Round Top rivals the top antiques shows in the country, including an older show held three times a year in Brimfield, Massachusetts.

Among the highly discerning buyers is Rachel Ashwell, owner of Rachel Ashwell Shabby Chic Couture in Los Angeles, New York and London, the inspiration

ANTIQUES SHOW FACT

The priciest items ever sold here include an 18th century commode—a low chest of drawers—which brought more than \$100,000.

for a line of furnishings sold at Target stores and onetime star of a cable TV design show.

Sitting with two employees under the shade of a tent, Ashwell, wearing a bright pink head wrap, spots a tufted headboard across the way and asks an assistant to investigate. For whatever reason, the gold-colored piece fails her test. "We are known for having a specific



1. Something to smile about: When it comes to antiques, the joy of the business never grows old for Marburger Farm owner Rick McConn, sharing a laugh here with two family members—sister-in-law Ashley Ferguson, left, and mother-in-law Margaret Mebus **2.** One-of-a-kind finds: Longtime friends Cathy Branch, foreground, and Harriet Davis examine aqua-blue coral harvested from the South Seas as the veteran shoppers expertly patrol the Round Top grounds. **3.** In stitches: Shoppers are delighted to discover quilts made by John Sauls, one of the founders of Marburger Farm. **4.** Like a kid under the big top: Vendor Mandie Murphree, owner of The Shop Antiques in Sugar Land, brings carnival and circus memorabilia to the antique show.

palette, based on white and authentic, distressed woods,” she explains.

Even so, she will come away with plenty. Workers later load a shipping container filled with merchandise to send back to her California headquarters.

Among the other savvy buyers are two employees of a Japanese antiques seller. By 3 p.m., they have bought 70 items, and they plan to fill a 40-foot container destined for Japan, where their company has 10 stores, says Mika Ryder, a freight forwarder who also serves as an impromptu translator.

VARIETY OF VENUES

While some venues carry downscale eclectic merchandise, Marburger and the nearby Big Red Barn—home to the Original Round Top Antiques Fair, the oldest and second-largest venue with 250 dealers—provide the widest gamut, from inexpensive curios to rare antiques. They also offer lots of amenities: porter and shipping services, wireless Internet and food booths serving shrimp BLTs, pimento cheese sandwiches and caffe lattes. Standing near a restored blacksmith shop, McConn notes the recent addition of a full bar and air-conditioned portable restrooms with flush toilets and full-length mirrors.

There’s no denying that getting the goods and making money are priorities, but Round Top’s secret goes deeper, say some. There’s a strong social aspect that compels shoppers to come back year after year as they develop friendships with their favorite dealers and strengthen bonds with friends and family.

ANTIQUES SHOW FACT

Vendors from about 40 states and countries, including France, Italy and Brazil, displayed their wares at the 2010 fall and spring shows.

The shopping excursions, which often include staying overnight at a bed-and-breakfast or country inn, provide precious quality time and memory-building activities, says Susan Franks, a 25-year shopper at Round Top before she and her husband, Bo, a longtime merchandise manager for Willie Nelson, purchased the Big Red Barn from Turney.

“I can look at [each of my] pieces and tell you exactly where I was when I bought it, who I was with, why I bought it and the feeling that I had when I bought it,” Susan Franks says. “I guess that’s what it is: Pieces evoke feelings.”

All the quality time is well and good,

of course, but it’s also clear these shoppers don’t let that get in the way of the big thrill: the hunt.

Taking a refreshment break, friends Robyn Moore and Diana Humphrey of Houston stop long enough to offer advice: Yes, certainly come with a friend, but make sure to bring one with a similar temperament and tastes. One mustn’t be slowed when in hot pursuit of one-of-a-kind objects amid the countless booths, tents, bins and stacks.

“We have a similar rhythm of how we go through the tents together,” says Moore.

Their speed? “Medium to fast,” Humphrey adds.

Also, they advise, get here early, start in the back and work forward so you can get first crack at items before they are picked over.

“That’s top secret,” Humphrey says of this last tactic.

If you reveal that, “we’ll hunt you down,” says Moore, with a laugh.

Charles Boisseau, a former associate editor of Texas Co-op Power, is a freelance writer in Austin.

1. Mirror, mirror on the wall: What’s the best antiques fair of all? Certainly in the running would be owner Susan Franks’ Big Red Barn, which is home to the Original Round Top Antiques Fair. **2.** So much to see: Shoppers James and Heidi Chapman of Ardmore, Oklahoma, plot their next move.

1



2

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP

Shopping veterans provide this advice for those attending the biannual antiques show:

★ **Arrive early on the first day for first dibs at the best goods.** (Some of the largest shows charge admission, usually \$10 per person but as much as \$25 for early bird shopping. Admission is good for the duration of the show. Smaller venues have no admission fee.)

★ **If you can't arrive early, you may find that the best prices are often had on the second Saturday.**

★ **Bring cash and be ready to haggle.** Some vendors don't take plastic.

★ **Grab a free Show Daily, the more than 100-page local guide with the latest vendor info and maps.**

★ **Wear comfortable shoes.** You'll do a lot of walking, including in dusty fields.

★ **Go against the crowd.** When a venue opens, most people shop at the first booths. If you go back to front, you get first crack at items that haven't yet been picked over.

★ **Since you'll never know what you'll buy, empty the bed of your pickup or your car's trunk.** (You also can ship items home. Some venues offer porter and shipping services.)

★ **Planning to stay the night? Make your reservations early.** Many shoppers reserve their rooms at each show for the next one.

★ **Come prepared for the weather.** The show goes on, rain or shine. (Bring appropriate gear: suntan lotion, hat, umbrella, etc.).

2011 shows: March 21 through April 3 and September 19 through October 2. Some dealers open or close earlier and later, so check official schedules beforehand.

CHARLES BOISSEAU

For more about the venues, dealers and their schedules, visit:

★ Show Daily's website, www.showdaily.us

★ The Round Top Area Chamber of Commerce (www.roundtop.org) provides links to nearby lodging options.

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The right tools—in good condition—and the right person are crucial to outdoor safety. Children should never be allowed to handle electrically powered tools. When it comes to getting your yard and garden in shape for spring, the No. 1 rule is this: Think safety first.

Think Outdoor Safety for Spring

With warmer temperatures comes an increase in outdoor activity, especially for homeowners getting their yards and gardens back into shape. Think safety first, especially around electricity, when performing spring chores.

- Before plugging in your electric mower for the first time this spring, ensure that the blade is sharp and in good condition; the discharge chute is free of dirt and debris; and the insulation on the power cord is in good repair.
- Appliances or electrically powered tools should not be used outdoors unless they are equipped with a heavy-duty cord and three-pronged plug. If the grounding prong is missing or damaged, have it repaired before you attempt to use it.
- Ensure that all outdoor electrical outlets are weatherproofed with plug covers and equipped with a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI).
- Before digging, whether it's to plant a tree, make a new garden bed or embark on a construction project,

call 811 to find out whether a buried electric cable or other infrastructure might be on your property. The call not only is required by Texas law, but it might even save your life!

- If an electrical fire starts at an outdoor wall outlet, pull out the plug by the cord or turn off power at the breaker and call 911. If the fire is small, you can attempt to put it out with a carbon dioxide-based or general-purpose fire extinguisher. Never put water on an electrical fire.
- If you are not sure you can handle a job, employ an expert—especially when it comes to electrical repairs.
- Keep tools clean and maintained. Check them over before each use.
- Plan ahead and don't rush a job. Accidents are more likely when you are in a hurry.
- Wear the correct clothing and sturdy shoes when mowing or using other power tools in the yard.
- Before attempting to adjust or repair an electrical tool, don't merely turn it off—unplug it.

UPGRADE WINDOWS AND SAVE

If you live in an older home, it's a good bet that its windows are made from single panes of glass.

Newer homes typically come with double-pane windows, and for good reason: They're far more energy efficient. In fact, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates that you can save between 7 percent and 15 percent on heating and cooling bills when you replace single-pane windows with double-pane versions, especially if they're rated by the government's Energy Star program as extra energy efficient.

You can find out how much money you can save each year if you replace your old windows with more efficient models. Visit www.energystar.gov for a list of savings for different regions in Texas. Look under the Products tab to find the energy efficient products page, then click on the Windows, Doors and Skylights link.

Average annual savings in Texas is \$114 with double-pane windows vs. single-pane.

The insulating air between the layers of double-pane windows provides significant energy saving improvements over single-pane versions.



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Balance Building Efficiency with Comfort

BY JAMES DULLEY

DEAR JIM: I am planning to build a new house. I want one that is very energy efficient but still livable. I know that standard stick-built is not the most efficient. What construction methods do you recommend? —*Pete S.*

DEAR PETE: You are wise to think about the livability of a house in addition to efficiency measures. While building a small, simple house with thick insulation and very few windows would save energy, it likely would not suit most families. You should balance a home's energy efficient aspects with comfort and convenience. Often, by making minor lifestyle changes, your family can dramatically reduce utility bills even in a less efficient house.

The typical “to-code” stick-built house—a home constructed entirely or largely on-site—is not very energy efficient, but this does not necessarily mean all stick-built homes are inefficient. With adequate insulation (exceeding code), high-quality windows and doors, and attention to construction details, a typical lumber-framed house can be very efficient. Attention to detail, such as sealing all the vapor/air barriers, is particularly important.

Several new construction methods are inherently much more efficient than those used in a rectangular lumber house. These methods include round panelized, geodesic dome, steel-framing, foam block/concrete, structural insulated panels (SIPs) and post-and-beam houses.

A round house is particularly energy efficient because it provides the greatest amount of indoor floor space with the least amount of exterior wall surface area. Since heat loss (or gain) from a house is directly related to wall surface area, less wall area results in

less potential loss. Also, wind tends to flow smoothly over the exterior, resulting in fewer air leaks.

A circular panelized house, such as ones made by Deltec Homes (www.deltechomes.com), uses a series of 8-foot-wide flat panels to create the round house. These panels are made specifically to your house plans and are delivered ready to assemble. A combination of insulation inside the hollow panels and thick foam sheathing on the exterior results in a high level of insulation. Manufactured in the con-



These insulated concrete forms use webs between the foam panels to create the width of the gap for the concrete.

trolled factory environment, the panels fit perfectly together for an airtight house.

The roof is self-supporting using trusses. This provides the opportunity to have an open floor plan, which is an efficiency advantage with solar or other alternative heating methods. Many house manufacturers have energy efficiency experts on staff, such as Deltec's “Green Team,” to help you design a super-efficient round house.

Geodesic dome houses are the ultimate in circular design, but the interior living space is quite different from a typical house. The most efficient and strongest ones are made of triangular foam pieces covered with concrete. Because of their shape, both circular panelized and dome houses are inherently resistant to damage from severe weather such as hurricanes.

Although it seems counterintuitive—metal conducts heat—steel-framed houses provided by businesses like Kodiak Steel Homes (www.kodiaksteelhomes.com) are very energy efficient. Since the steel members replace the lumber in the walls, these houses can look similar to a standard stick-built house.

The most efficient steel-framed houses use large steel framing members (called red iron) spaced very far apart. This greatly reduces the number of thermal bridges (no insulation at studs) inside the walls. The steel members are strong and stable, so the house stays airtight without the settling typical with lumber framing.

Foam-block houses are assembled somewhat similar to hollow LEGOs. The lightweight foam blocks are stacked on top of one another to create the walls. When stacked together, open channels are created throughout the blocks. A concrete truck pumps concrete into the top of the wall, and it flows throughout the wall. When it sets up, the wall is extremely strong. The foam blocks provide super-high insulation levels. This construction method offers architectural design flexibility, and the homeowner can easily help with the basic construction.

SIPs are very strong panels with thick insulating foam in the center. They are also called stress skin panels because the interior and exterior skins provide the structural strength for the house. These long panels are factory-crafted to fit your house plans. With the high insulation level and few joints needed between the panels, these houses are efficient.

Standard-form, core-wall panels are similar except the skins are not self-supporting. These panels are often attached over post-and-beam framing that supports the house.

© James Dulley

Flag 'Em Down

*From belt buckles
to a hot air balloon,
photographer captures
Texans showing off
their Lone Star pride.*

By Charles Boisseau



Photographer E. Joe Deering shoots the Texas flag.

Mind you, not any old Texas flag. No, those don't do for Deering. Nothing against the store-bought flag (most likely made in China) that your neighbor runs up his flagpole, but those do not interest this former big-city newspaper photographer who now lives near Kerrville.

Deering's standards include one-of-a-kind versions of the Lone Star's red, white and blue banner, ones dreamed up by Texans, like the homey state flag painted on the Clarendon Steakhouse, or a custom-painted pickup truck, or on the roof of a barn in the Piney Woods. These, Deering does.

Lone Star flags on belt buckles, jogging shorts, boots, even bathtubs? Yep, you can bet Deering has also captured these with his camera as part of what he calls his "flagtography" project. Deering has gotten so good at tracking down and capturing all the ways Texans show off the Lone Star flag that you could call him our Official State Flagtographer.

It might seem an odd specialty for this native of Kalamazoo, Michigan, but Deering said he has long been impressed by the pride Texans show in their state.

"It's just because they like being in Texas and being a Texan," the 6-foot-2-inch, bespectacled photographer said of why so many people paint the Lone Star flag. "It's that Texas pride."

While he may not be a native Texan, the 67-year-old Deering sure acts a lot like one. He retired in 2005 from the Houston Chronicle and now lives in a house on about 10 acres in the Hill Country, a place where red, white and blue paint has not been in short supply. He has painted the Lone Star flag on his propane tank, back gate, mailbox and on another old mailbox that he converted into a birdhouse and stuck atop a 12-foot pole. "Actually it's a duplex," said Deering, chuckling. He put in a dividing wall to accommodate two families of birds.

Deering started his flag project in early 2002 when he was on an assignment and noticed the Lone Star flag painted on a building in Cisco. As he was walking around the small North Central Texas town, a 1950s Chevy pickup passed with a flag painted on its side. Then, en route to Lubbock for another gig, he noticed the flag painted on a barn roof. After that, he started snapping the colorful images wherever he went and spent hours talking to folk artists who honor our state's flag in all its glory.

He found they all have their own stories. There's Don Jones, a retired business manager at the Hamilton Independent School District, who spent a three-day Labor Day weekend to fulfill his dream of painting a Texas flag on his 7,000-gallon water tank on his land near Lanham. "All my adult life I've flown the Texas flag," Jones said. "You could say I've got the passion of Texas."

Musician Doug Moreland of Manchaca painstakingly restored a 1972 Cadillac convertible with the Lone Star flag painted on and then affixed genuine 8-foot-



wide longhorns just above the grill.

Balloonist Bruce Lavorgna of Austin contracted with a company in England to custom-make his Lone Star hot air balloon.

Over the years, Deering has captured Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson's Texas flag necktie, the squad cars of the Palmer Police Department when they were painted with the Lone Star flag, and the custom-built solid silver Lone Star spurs worn by rancher Dana Nelson of Hempstead.

In 2005, the folks at the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station were so impressed that they arranged an exhibit of 137 of Deering's photos, each adorned with one-of-a-kind frames Deering made using scrap lumber and doodads in his woodshop. The exhibit is now part of the museum's permanent collection. This got the attention of the editors of Texas A&M University Press, who in 2009 published a coffee table book, *Lovin' that Lone Star Flag*, to showcase Deering's photos.

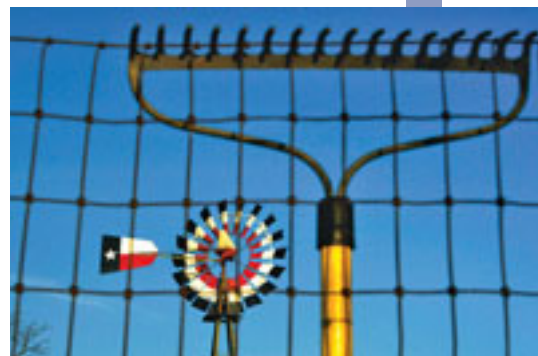
With Texas celebrating the 175th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence from Mexico, we thought nothing could be finer than a shout-out to Deering and a salute to all Texans who proudly show off their folk flag creations.

By the way, Deering can still be found on the trail. While he said it is doubtful that he will create another flag book (though he isn't ruling it out), he continues to shoot flag photos, some of which may be added to the collection at the presidential library.

One dreary afternoon in an Austin school parking lot, as rain began to fall, Deering snapped photos of Halle Gaines, 16, behind the wheel of her first car: a 1976 Lone Star flag-painted Volkswagen Beetle. Also on hand was Halle's mother, Susan, and the balloonist, Lavorgna, who had given Deering the tip.

Later, drying off and drinking hibiscus tea at Threadgill's restaurant in Austin, Deering explained that Lavorgna is one of many "spotters" who alert him when they see a creation that merits a look. With all the homemade Lone Stars all over the state, it looks like Deering won't be selling off his camera equipment anytime soon.

Charles Boisseau is a freelance writer in Austin and former associate editor of Texas Co-op Power.



Wherever Texans show off the colors of the Lone Star flag, photographer E. Joe Deering is there to capture their artistry in what he calls his 'flagtography' project. Deering, a native of Kalamazoo, Michigan, says he's impressed by the creative ways Texans keep the spotlight on their state: 'It's just because they like being in Texas and being a Texan. It's that Texas pride.'

A Close Shave

*Nothing like
herding cats when
the fur's flying.*

BY SHERYL
SMITH-RODGERS

Five after 9 in the morning. Our appointment was in 25 minutes. I had plenty of time. “If you want to catch her, I think you’d better get her in the house first,” warned my husband, eyeing Mandy, our longhaired cat, who crouched in a dark corner of our garage. Feral as a kitten, she’d calmed down so much with age that I just smiled sweetly at James and ignored his suggestion. “Aw, she’ll be easy to take to the clinic for shots and a shave,” I thought.

Wrong. Ten minutes later, beyond frustrated and mad, mad, mad, I had a towel in my hand and no cat. Mandy, owl eyed and scared to death, had beelined around the house. Twice. With me in dogged pursuit. Somehow, we managed to corral her back into the garage. “I might as well call and cancel!” I sputtered, near tears and defeated.

But not James. Onward he rallied. As Mandy bolted and we lunged with towels, a butterfly net—one we’d bought to capture wayward birds in our garage—unexpectedly swooped over her head. James and I looked up in shocked surprise. At the other end of the net stood Joe, a local fix-it guy we’d hired to paint house trim. “It was handy,” he shrugged.

By 9:25 a.m., I was second-guessing the need for vaccinations, much less barbering. “You’re going to SHAVE a cat?” friends asked, dumbfounded. “No,” I told them, “not a cat. THREE cats!” Yes, I continued, because Mandy’s long fur mats into thick clumps in the summer. However, after her first (and only) buzz, our semi-Siamese cats, brothers Abe and Gabe, pegged her for a stranger. So for days, they tormented and chased poor Mandy. I worried endlessly that they might really hurt her. Which was why I’d decided to have all three shaved.

“We’ll call you when we’re done,” Penny, the groomer, said. She’s shaved many a cat in her lengthy career. So three more—even one glaring through a net—didn’t faze her. “Oh, they’ll be *fine*,” she assured me. “Don’t worry!”

Dubious but trusting, I slipped out the door, then returned two hours later to fetch my furry felines. Or rather, fur-less felines. No one said much on our short drive home. And I didn’t want to peek in anyone’s carrier. I knew the cats would associate me with the harrowing experience they’d just endured until at least day’s end. “We’re almost there!” I said, soothingly. “Everybody’s going to be just fine.”

We’d soon find out. In our driveway, Abe and Gabe, blinking their sky-blue eyes, cautiously sniffed the air, then ventured out from their carriers. At the sight of our

two manly cats—who now sported only cheek tufts, fuzzy knee-high boots and a skinny rat’s tail—I *had* to laugh!

But not for long. As soon as the brothers took one look at each other, the hissing and growling ensued. Gabe, who looked like he had a hangover, sounded serious. Worried about possible bloodshed, I ushered him inside the house. Then I STUPIDLY tried to corral him back inside his carrier. *YRRRWWW!* “Well, go ahead and kill your brother!” I stormed as Gabe streaked past me, back into the garage. “I DON’T CARE!”

Meanwhile, Mandy remained in safe seclusion in our darkened living room. Every hour or so, I’d tiptoe in, pull back the towel and peek inside her carrier. All I could see were two huge owl eyes. She never uttered one sound. But I could read her mind: “*Watch your back, Bozo—you’re gonna be history soon!*”

Fortunately, by the next morning, Mandy had forgotten my lead role in her traumatic experience. She was more concerned with keeping a safe distance from the boys, who were more concerned with bullying one another. “*Yrrrrrrrrrrrrr,*” Gabe growled from deep within his chest whenever Abe got close. Then paws swatted. Teeth bared. Snarls rumbled. No fur flew, though, because there was none.

I just didn’t get it. The two apparently had no recollection of having lived together since birth!

“Mandy?” I said, peering under my car in the garage. Two owl eyes stared back at me. Forget it, she wasn’t coming out any time soon. “Just wanted to make sure you were OK,” I added, backing away. Behind me, I heard Gabe growling. Or was it Abe? I fled back inside the house. “I am NEVER going to have those cats shaved again!” I vented to James. “Never ever! This is way too much drama!”

Day two unfolded much the same. The brothers hissed and spit. Mandy hid. So did I. And I did for most of the next day, too, until I ventured outside to water plants. At the sight of Abe and Gabe, I cringed. Instead of squabbling, though, they frisked up a nearby live oak. Then back down again. They raced and played in the yard like kittens. Meanwhile, Mandy, sprawled on a patio chair, snoozed contentedly.

“They must really feel good without all that fur,” James observed.

“Yeah, they must,” I agreed. “I’m so glad we got them shaved! Aren’t you?”



Sheryl Smith-Rodgers is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.

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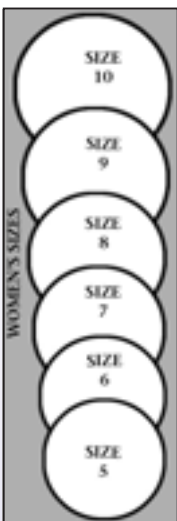
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C.W. Post: Cereal Czar and Rainmaker

BY MARTHA DEERINGER

In the early 1900s, a tiny town launched by cereal magnate C.W. Post sprouted beneath the majestic Caprock in West Texas. On the advice of his doctor, Post had moved his family from the Midwest to southeast of Lubbock, where he hoped the dry climate might improve his poor health. Inspired by the sweeping vistas, he set out to create a perfect town, a utopian village in what would become Garza County. With little fanfare and a great deal of cereal money, he began to develop Post City, which he envisioned as a place where hard-working families could buy a home for a reasonable price and live in a self-sustaining society.

But Post's genius was clouded by mental problems. Before the psychological terms manic-depressive and bipolar disorder were tossed about in everyday conversation, Post was merely considered peculiar, a gentleman with mood swings that rivaled the peaks and valleys of the Rockies. From the crests of his psychological highs, Post's inventive mind conjured up new products that made him a household name and launched wildly ambitious projects that might normally be considered the province of Mother Nature. His low points often terminated in a visit to a sanitarium, from which he would emerge many months later rejuvenated and begin anew.

Born in Springfield, Illinois, in 1854, Charles William Post climbed to his first pinnacle of success by inventing and patenting his own models of agricultural equipment. At a sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, where he went for a "rest," Post met John Harvey Kellogg, a doctor who was destined to become a competitor in the cereal aisle at the grocery store. Fed a grain-rich vegetarian diet at the sanitarium, Post became convinced that coffee was killing him. He invented Postum, a grain-based coffee substitute, followed quickly by Grape-Nuts and cornflakes. At first, Post called his cornflakes "Elijah's Manna," but, scolded by the devout, he changed the name to Post Toasties and built a breakfast food empire.

Post soon discovered that his West Texas utopia had two major problems: weather and water. Weather was often uncooperative, and water for the green gardens and orchards he had envisioned was going to be hard to come by. He remembered reading tales of the deluges that occurred just after major battles in the Napoleonic Wars, and old soldiers who had fought in the American Civil War recounted rumors that heavy cannon fire seemed to bring rainfall. After considerable research, the cereal king decided to make his own rain.

In Post's first rain experiment in 1910, he attached two pounds of dynamite to a kite, flew it into the clouds and ignited it. Too dangerous, he concluded. On the high elevations of the Caprock, he tried igniting 14-pound bundles of

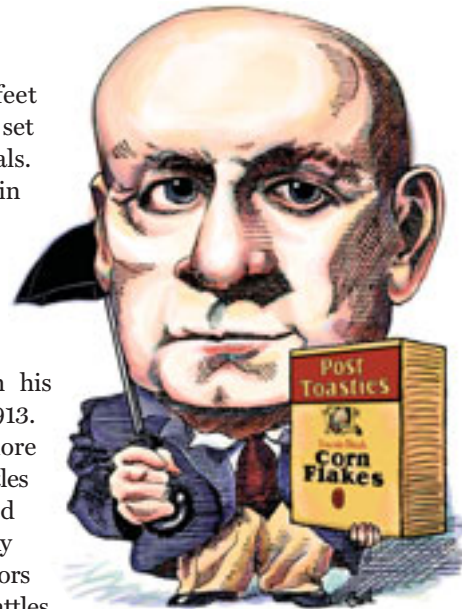
dynamite spaced 50 feet apart on the ground and set off at 10-minute intervals. Post's most successful "rain battle" blasted 24,000 pounds of explosives. By some accounts, a refreshing rain fell.

Post's attempts to tweak the weather in his favor continued through 1913. Reportedly, he spent more than \$50,000 on rain battles and claimed he enticed seven showers from the sky in 13 attempts. His detractors insisted that the rain battles occurred during the time of year when natural storms were most likely to happen anyway.

In between attempts to blast water from the sky, Post threw himself into the development of his utopian town. Bungalows sprouted amid mesquite trees. Parks cropped up in the middle of town. Orchards produced fruit, and Bermuda grass, seeded around the model houses, spread into lush lawns. A modest home outfitted with leather wallpaper was built for Post and his family, although he lived there only intermittently.

The huge amount of energy required by all these projects took a toll on Post. In 1914, a Chicago newspaper reported: "C.W. Post has broken down from overwork and mental strain." He was rushed in a private train to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he underwent surgery for appendicitis. Post's daughter, Marjorie, and his parents were by his side. After the surgery, he seemed to be recovering and traveled back to where he was living in California. But melancholy took possession of his spirit once again. Post's death by suicide followed two months later.

Today, Post, the seat of Garza County, is an ordinary little town of about 4,000 people. About 35 historical markers around the county point out landmarks to visitors, and the Garza County Historical Museum in town offers glimpses of life from the mid-1800s through present-day. The buildings in Post have an eerie similarity, a reminder that the design of the town grew from the creative mind of a genius with a vision for the future.



Martha Deeringer is a frequent contributor to Footnotes in Texas History.

It's Saturday Morning: Batter Up!

BY KEVIN HARGIS Pancakes and weekend mornings just seem like a natural fit sometimes.

On occasional Saturday mornings during my childhood, I remember my mom standing at the stove—already having made bacon or sausage—cooking pancake after pancake on our old cast-iron skillet and serving them to family members sitting around the kitchen table.

Once everyone had eaten enough to swell their bellies, there would inevitably be enough batter for two or three—or five—more of those delicious golden discs, and I seemed to always be the one enlisted to finish them off. My skill as the human hot-cake disposal earned me the nickname “The Great Gut” from my brother.

When I got a little older, I went from pancake devourer to cook, so I'd take my place at the griddle. Somehow, the results of my pancake efforts did not look as good as my mom's. As much as I enjoy cooking—and, for the most part, I do it well—I still haven't managed to get my pancake technique down perfectly.

But here are some things I've learned over the years:

- Mix batter with a fork or wire whisk until ingredients are just combined—take care not to overmix.
- Don't get your griddle surface too hot, or the pancakes will scorch on the outside and be gummy on the inside. Medium-low heat usually works best. Before

pouring the first pancake, make sure the surface is hot enough by adding a few drops of water. If the water sizzles, you're ready to go.

- Have patience: Allow pancakes time to cook before the initial flip. (You'll see bubbles on the surface burst open and not close, and the surface will look less shiny.)

- For prettier pancakes, use a pitcher with a spout to pour batter evenly round, and don't crowd the cooking surface.

My pancake chef skills could still use improvement, but these days, when I'm in the mood for good ol' fried batter for breakfast, I'll most often break out the waffle iron.

Those breakfasts don't happen as often as they used to. I've retired my title as The Great Gut, started running and lost more than 40 pounds in the process. But an occasional carb-heavy treat straight out of the waffle iron is worth adding a few extra laps around the neighborhood.

And when I'm in a really decadent mood, perhaps before a big Saturday of yard work, I dig out this recipe along with the waffle iron. I hope you enjoy these eggy, butter-rich, crispy—but not greasy—treats in moderation.

NO DIETER'S WAFFLES

- 4 eggs
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 cups buttermilk, divided
- 1 cup butter, melted

In large bowl, beat eggs slightly. In separate bowl, sift together dry ingredients. Add half of dry ingredients and 1 cup buttermilk to eggs and mix with wire whisk. Follow with remaining dry ingredients and remaining buttermilk. Mix again. Add melted butter and mix until incorporated. Drop by 1/3 cupfuls onto waffle iron heated to a medium-high setting and greased with cooking spray. Regrease after every one or two waffles cooked.

Servings: 7. Serving size: 2 waffles. Per serving: 437 calories, 10 g protein, 28.1 g fat, 31.4 g carbohydrates, 1 g dietary fiber, 680 mg sodium, 4 g sugars, 181 mg cholesterol



2011 © KATHY BURNS. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM



DESSA THOMAS, *Comanche Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Cream Cheese Pancakes**

Nothing warms up a chilly March morning like something hot from the griddle or waffle iron. After eating our way through a wide variety of pancakes and waffles on a recent morning at the Texas Co-op Power office, staff members crowned Dessa Thomas' simple-to-make, but rich and delicious, Cream Cheese Pancakes the hit of our taste testing.

CREAM CHEESE PANCAKES

- 3 cups self-rising flour
- 4 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 egg
- 1½ cups milk
- ½ cup honey

Combine ingredients in blender jar and blend until smooth. Pour onto hot griddle. When bubbles rise in batter, pancakes are ready to turn. Serve with fruit-flavored syrup or desired topping.

Servings: 4. Serving size: 4 pancakes. Per serving: 503 calories, 12.7 g protein, 10.8 g fat, 87.6 g carbohydrates, 2.1 g dietary fiber, 1,062 mg sodium, 32 g sugars, 69 mg cholesterol

ENERGY PANCAKES

- 1 egg
- 2½ cups milk
- 2 tablespoons honey (optional)
- ¼ cups whole wheat pastry flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 2 tablespoons oil
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- ¾ cup rolled oats
- ¾ cup raisins
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds
- ¼ cup sesame seeds
- ¼ cup wheat germ
- ¼ cup bran
- 1 apple, cored and shredded

In large bowl, combine egg, milk and honey, if desired. Sift flour with baking powder and add to egg mixture with oil and vanilla. Blend well. Mix in remaining ingredients. Refrigerate overnight. When ready to cook, spoon batter onto hot griddle and cook until browned on both sides. Serve with Apple Syrup.

Servings: 6. Serving size: 3 pancakes. Per serving: 457 calories, 15.6 g protein, 17.3 g fat, 63.5 g carbohydrates, 10.3 g dietary fiber, 299 mg sodium, 20.1 g sugars, 41 mg cholesterol

APPLE SYRUP

- ¾ cup frozen apple juice
- 2 tablespoons vanilla
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch

½ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

Heat juice with ¾ cup water and vanilla. Simmer 5 minutes. Mix cornstarch with 1½ tablespoons water, then add to juice with spice and continue to cook, stirring, until thickened.

Servings: 6. Serving size: ⅓ cup. Per serving: 61 calories, 0.2 g protein, 0.1 g fat, 12.7 g carbohydrates, 0.1 g dietary fiber, 6 mg sodium, 10.8 g sugars

DOROTHY MOTT

Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative

Our testers were divided on these tasty syrups. The creamy Delicious Sauce for Pancakes reminded many of maple cream; the tart lemon and spicy cider syrups paired nicely with the Cream Cheese Pancakes.

SPICED CIDER SYRUP

- ½ cup sugar
- 4 teaspoons cornstarch
- ⅛ teaspoon cinnamon
- Dash cloves
- Dash allspice
- 1 cup unfiltered apple cider
- 1 tablespoon cranberry juice (100 percent juice, not cocktail)
- 2 tablespoons orange juice

In medium saucepan, combine sugar, cornstarch and spices. Add juices; mix

well. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until thickened and bubbly.

Servings: 8. Serving size: ⅓ cup. Per serving: 143 calories, 1.6 g protein, 2.5 g fat, 34.7 g carbohydrates, 7.1 g dietary fiber, 40 mg sodium, 16.7 g sugars

SARAH WRIGHT

Farmers Electric Cooperative

DELICIOUS SAUCE FOR PANCAKES

- 1 cup whipping cream
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch

Put all ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Let cool for two minutes, then serve.

Servings: 8. Serving size: ⅓ cup. Per serving: 158 calories, 0.6 g protein, 10.4 g fat, 15.2 g carbohydrates, trace dietary fiber, 15 mg sodium, 13.4 g sugars, 40 mg cholesterol

YOLANDA HARDER

Lamar County Electric Cooperative

MAMIE'S LEMON SYRUP

- 1 cup fresh squeezed lemon juice (about 4 lemons)
- 2 cups sugar

Squeeze lemons and remove seeds. Bring lemon juice to a boil. Add sugar and stir until sugar is completely dissolved. Remove from heat and serve.

Servings: 10. Serving size: ⅓ cup. Per serving: 160 calories, 0.1 g protein, 42.1 g carbohydrates, 0.1 g dietary fiber, trace sodium, 40.6 g sugars

THOMAS ROBERTSON

United Cooperative Services

MORE RECIPES ONLINE

Find more of our favorite Batter Up recipes on our website, www.TexasCoopPower.com

\$100 RECIPE CONTEST

July's recipe contest topic is **Gluten-Free Cooking**. **Gluten allergies can hamstring cooks and hamper diners. How do you get around this obstacle if you or a loved one cannot digest gluten? Please share your stories and your recipes. The deadline is March 10.**

Submit recipes online at www.TexasCoopPower.com under the Submit and Share tab. Or mail them to Home Cooking, 1122 Colorado, 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You may also e-mail them to recipes@TexasCoopPower.com or fax them to (512) 763-3408. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. Also, let us know where you found the recipe or whether it's one you developed yourself. The top winner will receive \$100, a copy of 60 Years of Home Cooking and a Texas-shaped trivet. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

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Drink in the energy of spring.

Peanut Protein Smoothie

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups fresh blueberries
- 3 tablespoons peanut butter
- ½ cup 1% low-fat milk
- 2 cups fat-free vanilla frozen yogurt
- ½ cup ice

PREPARATION:

1. Place blueberries, peanut butter and milk into a blender container. 2. Cover; blend at high speed for 30 seconds. Add frozen yogurt and ice; blend for 30 seconds or until smooth. 3. Pour in glasses and serve.

Note: For a burst of protein, add 3 tablespoons low-fat peanut flour along with the frozen yogurt.

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Enter online at www.TexasCoopPower.com. Each entry **MUST** include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Specify which category you are entering, savory or sweet, on each recipe. Send entries to: Texas Co-op Power/Holiday Recipe Contest, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can fax recipes to (512) 763-3408 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org. E-mails must include "Holiday Recipe Contest" in the subject line and contain only one recipe (no attachments). Up to three entries are allowed per person/co-op member. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. Mailed entries can all be in one envelope. For official rules, visit www.TexasCoopPower.com.

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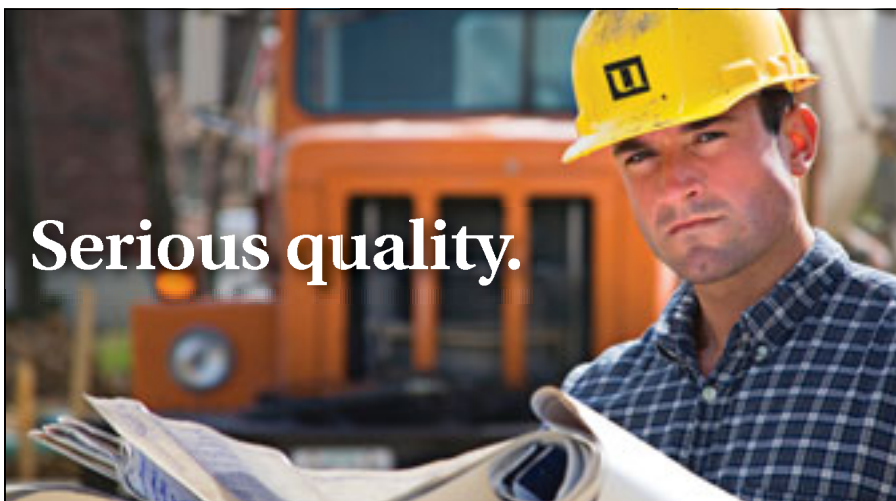
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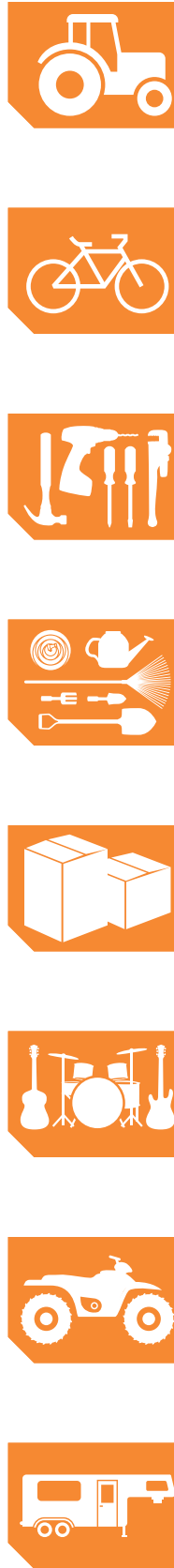
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▲ **Paul Garcia**, a member of Medina Electric Cooperative and a previous Focus on Texas photographer, thought these two moths on his birdbath looked like a beautiful floral hat.



◀ **Martha Dye** captured this quintessential Hill Country spring scene at Longhorn Cavern State Park. Dye is a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.

SPRINGTIME IN TEXAS

March is one of the prettiest times of the year in Texas. The cold breath of winter gives way to warming days, and popping up in pastures, along our highways and in our own backyards is the beautiful evidence of spring. It's time to get twitterpated—happy spring, everyone!

—ASHLEY CLARY

Pedernales Electric Cooperative member Sandy Mathis said that Dottie, a longhorn mama, was just as gentle with this fawn as she would have been with one of her own calves. ▼



◀ Pedernales Electric Cooperative member **Vicki Strother** stumbled onto this Texas flag gate—surrounded by wildflowers—while exploring the Hill Country near Burnet.

Showers bring flowers: Comanche Electric Cooperative member **Meridith Martin** caught this bed of black-eyed Susans just before a spring storm. ▼



Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
May	Unlikely Duos	Mar 10
June	Murals	Apr 10
July	Those Were the Days	May 10
Aug	Milestones	Jun 10
Sep	State Parks	Jul 10
Oct	Cemeteries	Aug 10

UNLIKELY DUOS is the topic for our **MAY 2011** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Unlikely Duos, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701**, before **MARCH 10**. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). **Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate.** If you use a digital camera, submit your highest resolution images on our website at www.TexasCoopPower.com. We regret that Texas Co-op Power cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. Please note that we cannot provide individual critiques of submitted photos.

AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

This is just a sampling of the events and festivals around and about Texas. For the complete listing, please visit www.TexasCoopPower.com.

PICK OF THE MONTH

MARCH 12 STONEWALL

Kite Day, Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site, (830) 644-2252, <http://tpwd.state.tx.us>



MARCH

04 HALLETTSVILLE [4-6]
TDHA Hunt for the Hungry Hog Hunting Tourney, (903) 738-4280, www.tdha.org

05 LAKE JACKSON
Nature Day at Sea Center Texas, (979) 292-0100

SPRING [5-6]
Wine Art Festival Old Town Spring, 1-800-653-8696, www.oldtownspring.com

ROBSTOWN [5-6]
Gulf Coast Gem & Mineral Society's Annual Show, (361) 767-7045, www.gcgms.org

11 CROCKETT
The Irish Sopranos, (936) 544-4276, www.pwfaa.org

BUNA [11-12]
Redbud Festival, (409) 994-5586



11 LA GRANGE [11-12]
Best Little Cowboy Gathering, (979) 249-3033, www.bestlittlecowboygathering.org

12 CANYON
Real Housewives of the Wild Frontier, (806) 651-2244, www.panhandleplains.org

WEIMAR
St. Anne Society Annual Baked Goodies Sale, (979) 263-4308

12 CAT SPRING [12-13]
Antiques & Garden Show, (979) 865-5618, www.ruraltexasantiques.com

HILLSBORO [12-13]
Outlets at Hillsboro Antique & Craft Show, (254) 582-2047, www.outletsathillsboro.com

18 ROUND TOP [18-19]
Herbal Forum at Round Top, (979) 249-3129, www.festivalhill.org



KITE : 2011 © EDYTA LINEK. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM. COWBOY: 2011 © VARINA PATEL. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM. HERBS: 2011 © TIM SCOTT. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM.

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March 10-12 - Victoria, TX
Victoria Community Center

April 7-9 – Canutillo, TX
Rio Grande Valley Ranch Arena

June 2-5 – Burleson, TX
All Star Equestrian Arena
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June 10-11 - Hutchinson, KS
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Bureau of Land Management
Wild Horse and Burro Program

AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS



25

SOMERVILLE
Big Creek Country
Cajun Festival

19 **WOODVILLE** [19-20]
Festival of the Arts,
1-800-323-0389,
www.heritagevillage.org

CYPRESS MILL [19-27]
Bunkhouse Art Expedition
and Sale, (830) 825-
3465, [http://wenmohs
ranch.com](http://wenmohs
ranch.com)

25 **SOMERVILLE** [25-26]
Big Creek Country Cajun
Festival, (979) 596-1616

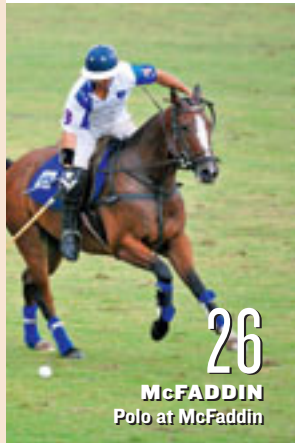
VICTORIA [25-26]
QUILTS, QUILTS, QUILTS
ACT VI, (361) 741-2790,
<http://quiltguildvictoria.org>

26 **McFADDIN**
Polo at McFaddin, (361)
575-8227, [http://victoria
regionalmuseum.com](http://victoria
regionalmuseum.com)

26 **LAKEHILLS**
Lakehills United
Methodist Church Fish
Fry, (830) 751-2404

SMITHVILLE [26-27]
Paper Doll Party, (512)
786-3612, [www.texas
paperdollparty.com](http://www.texas
paperdollparty.com)

27 **LULING**
Celebration of Life and
Music, (830) 875-3214,
www.celebratetom.com



26

McFADDIN
Polo at McFaddin

28 **HAMILTON**
Home & Garden Spring
Fling 2011,
(254) 386-3919,
<http://hamiltontx.tamu.edu>

APRIL

01 **GEORGETOWN** [1-2]
Georgetown Quilt and
Stitchery Show,
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[http://georgetownquilt
show.org](http://georgetownquilt
show.org)

02 **BRAZORIA**
Battle On the Bernard,
(979) 964-4332,
[www.battleonthebernard
.com](http://www.battleonthebernard
.com)

WOODVILLE
Tyler County Dogwood
Festival, (409) 283-
2632, [www.tylercounty
dogwoodfestival.org](http://www.tylercounty
dogwoodfestival.org)

READY TO GO? GO ONLINE FIRST.

Before you hit the road, stop at the new and improved www.TexasCoopPower.com to search for events by date, region, type and keyword. You can also find the easy-to-navigate Travel section with all our popular Hit the Road and travel features.

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Event information can be submitted on our website at www.TexasCoopPower.com, mailed to Around Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, or faxed to (512) 763-3407. **Please Note:** We are no longer accepting e-mailed submissions. Please submit events for May by March 10.

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As the crow flies, it's less than 50 miles from Windom in Fannin County to Miller Grove in Hopkins County, first veering some 22 miles to the southeast for a stop in Pecan Gap in Delta County. As "doable" as that sounds to Texans who think nothing of driving two hours for, well, for anything, even the hardest catfish lover might want to pace himself on this road trip through Northeast Texas just below the Oklahoma border. And by pace, I don't mean dinner at 5, then 7, then 9.

LET THE EATIN' COMMENCE

The lowly catfish may be beneath the notice of those in other parts of the U.S., but around here, we know good eatin'.

Owners Tracy and Laura Lackey opened the **WINDOM FEED SACK** in March 2007 in a circa 1910 building. Laura recruited a cousin to paint a mural of downtown Windom on the east wall. Rocking chairs are on the covered sidewalk for waiting restaurant customers who can't be accommodated on the old church pews inside. With three catfish preparations—fried, Cajun and baked—and homemade chocolate cobbler, a full salad bar and all the catfish trimmings, you'd think being open on Friday and Saturday nights would be sufficient. But customers can also enjoy lunch Thursday through Saturday and a homestyle buffet on Sundays.

Those hungry for live stage performances should check out the **RED RIVER COMMUNITY THEATRE**, which holds performances inside the old Windom school auditorium on many weekends.

Outdoors types looking for a place to spend the night, meanwhile, can head west on Texas Highway 56 to Bonham. Just south of town, the **BONHAM STATE PARK** offers camping, fishing, hiking and biking. If you're more the indoors type, the **CARLETON HOUSE BED AND BREAKFAST** is a restored 1888 three-story Victorian home just off Bonham's square.

NO ONE LEAVES HUNGRY

THE FISH PLACE, the home of a popular

HOOKED ON NORTHEAST TEXAS

For catfish lovers on this small-town tour, every day is fry day.

BY KAY LAYTON SISK



Friday and Saturday night catfish buffet, is a must stop in the little town of Pecan Gap, southeast of Windom. A former grocery, its walls are lined with license plates and fishnets. Toys and old tin cans provide points of interest on shelves, and the scarred, wooden floor is from the Pecan Gap train depot.

With a salad bar, pinto beans, boiled shrimp, hand-cut fries, hush puppies and cobbler, you won't leave hungry. But if a major holiday falls on a weekend, you'll need to call ahead to any of the area's buffets to make sure they're open.

While **THE FISH PLACE** is the destination spot in Pecan Gap, just getting there can be lots of fun. Besides pulling over to read the historical markers, there's ample adventure at the **PETE PATTERSON FOSSIL PARK** just north of nearby Ladonia on Texas Highway 34. Long revered as a fossil and arrowhead hunter's dream, the park showcases the North Sulphur River, accessible on uneven rock steps that

require careful footing.

Southeast of Pecan Gap is the **DOCTORS CREEK UNIT** of **COOPER LAKE STATE PARK** with RV and tent camping spaces, hiking and nature trails, two playgrounds and shoreline fishing. For an afternoon pick-me-up, drive into Cooper for a malt or milkshake at **MILLER'S PHARMACY**, where the original soda fountain built in 1930 is still open.

You can sip your drink while studying the Wurlitzer jukebox in the corner or reading the labels of the vintage medicinal cure-alls in the wooden and glass cases.

BROCCOLI SALAD? YOU BET

In Sulphur Springs, south of Cooper, the entire family will enjoy the **SOUTHWEST DAIRY MUSEUM**, and the young ones will have a ball at the **KIDS KINGDOM** playground at **BUFORD PARK**.

Head southwest, and you'll find the **COTTON PICKIN' THEATRE** on U.S. 69 in downtown Point. Housed in a converted cotton gin, it's the home of family, country, gospel, folk and bluegrass

music on Saturday nights. Generally speaking, the Rural American Idol contest takes place every fourth Saturday night.

Just to the northwest of Point is Miller Grove, where **STACEY'S FISH FRY** has been open since 1996 in an old general store built in 1912. In the '40s, this rustic building was moved to its present location from "down the road" by rolling it on logs. The waiting area is a screened porch with benches. Inside, minnow buckets serve as light fixtures, and fishing lures hang from the ceiling fans.

Stacey's fries about 500 pounds of Mississippi farm-raised catfish every weekend.

But owner Stacey Mitchell acknowledges that the most popular buffet item is the broccoli salad—which just goes to prove that in Texas we can try to eat healthy and have our catfish, too.

Kay Layton Sisk is a romance novelist and freelance writer based in Bonham.

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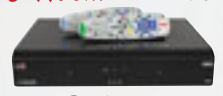
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