

REMEMBERING THAT  
FIRST LIGHT BULB

DON'T MIND THOSE  
ALLIGATORS

WINDMILLER KEEPS  
WITS IN A PINCH

# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

AUGUST 2024

## On the Road Again

A photographer  
piles on the miles to  
capture rural Texas



MESSAGE FROM  
GENERAL MANAGER  
MARK STUBBS

# Electricity 101: The Flip of a Switch

Have you ever wondered why they call it electricity?

It's named after those tiny particles of atoms called electrons, and that's the place to start in understanding how power plants make something that reliably lights your home with the flip of a switch.

Getting all those electrons to march together inside a wire has been described as one of civilization's greatest and most complex engineering feats.

Just about all electricity starts with the same scientific phenomenon: Spinning a magnet inside a coil of wires generates electricity. That's why, deep inside most power plants, are large turbines turned by different means – the pull of gravity on water at a hydroelectric dam; the rising heat from burning coal or natural gas at a fossil fuel station; atomic energy at a nuclear power plant; or wind turning the blades of a wind turbine. One exception is solar energy, which uses materials that produce electricity when they're activated by sunlight.

Every one of those power plants is incredibly complicated – think about what you would do if you were handed a lump of coal and were told to make it run your refrigerator.

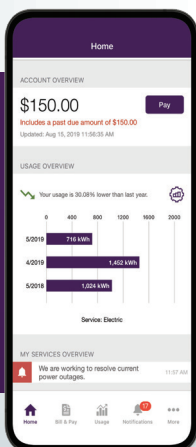
Most industrial sized generating plants need large banks of transformers to boost the voltage



of electricity for the trip of hundreds of miles through wires held up by tall transmission towers. As it nears your neighborhood, the voltage is reduced at one of those fenced in complexes of wires and transformers called a substation. Lower voltage makes the electricity appropriate for home energy use. As the electricity gets closer to your home or business, the voltage is reduced again with smaller transformers, which you can typically see mounted on a nearby utility pole or inside a ground-level green box.

Beyond these basics, all that flowing electricity needs to be coordinated so it gets to the right house just as it's needed. That's where Farmers Electric Cooperative comes in. Our line crews take care of our distribution lines that bring the power to your home. This highly trained team performs routine maintenance to keep the lines in good order and responds quickly to restore power when storms or other factors cause an outage.

When you think about it, that's a lot of power in the simple flip of a switch!

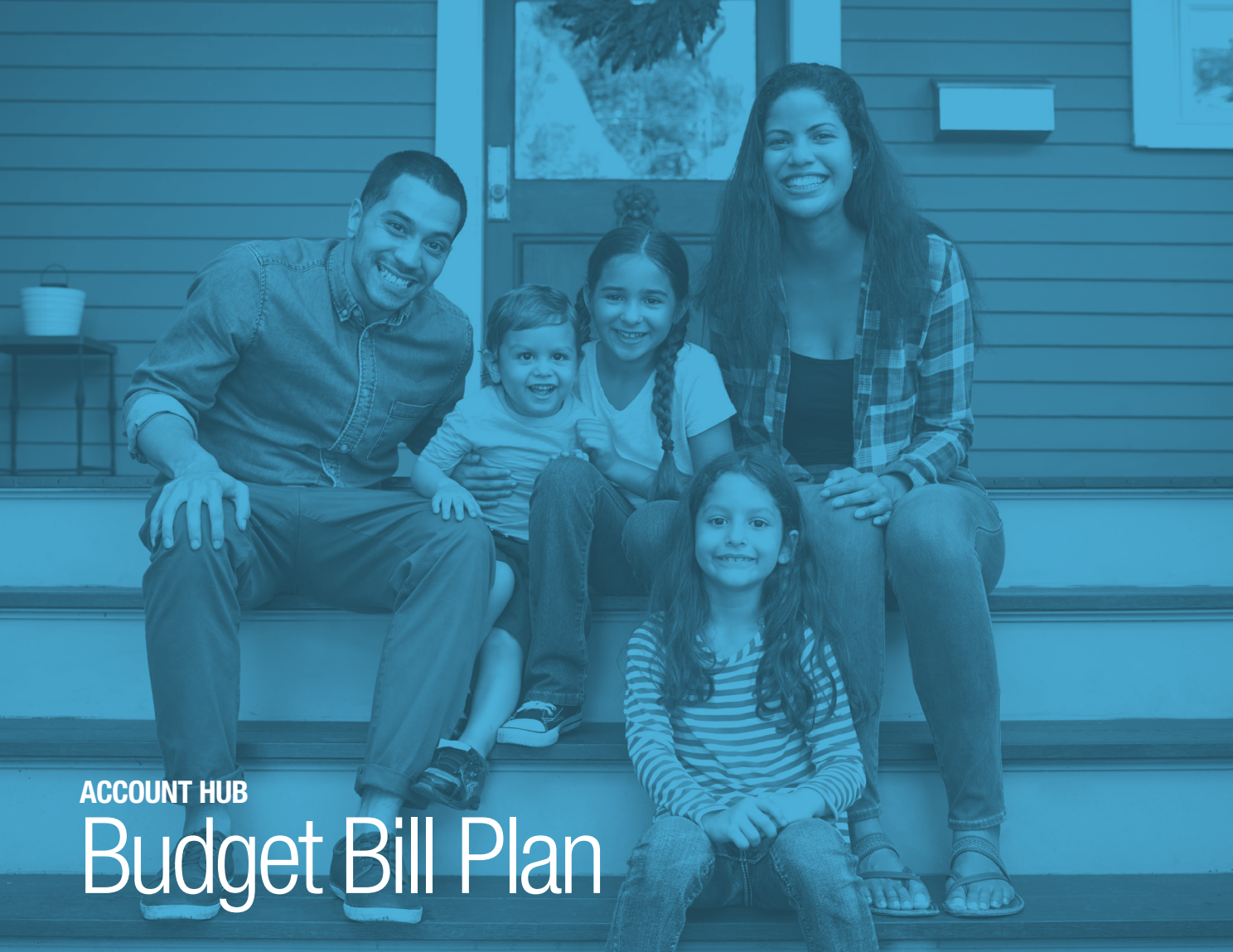


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ACCOUNT HUB

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**YOU'RE IN POWER.**



## Five Home Energy Hogs

If you've compared your electric bill with a neighbor's and found your bill to be noticeably higher, even though your homes are similar in size, you might be wondering why—and how you can lower your bill.

Here are five energy hogs that may increase your energy use.

### 1 Old Fridge or Freezer in the Garage

That second fridge or freezer may be costing more than you think. If the model was produced prior to 1990, it's likely using twice as much energy (or more!) than a newer Energy Star rated model. If it's located in the garage, it may run constantly in the summer, which could lead to higher electric bills. It might be time to rethink that spare fridge that's out there holding beverages; instead, bring those drinks into the kitchen refrigerator and retire the spare.

### 2 Cooling or Heating an Uninsulated Area

Cooling or heating an uninsulated workshop or garage can be expensive. For example, if a homeowner heated an uninsulated shed to keep several half-empty buckets of paint from freezing, they're paying more to keep paint warm than the paint was even worth. Pet owners have been known to heat and cool an uninsulated garage to keep pets comfortable, not realizing that this might be costing more than heating their actual home. If you really want to heat or cool these types of spaces, they need to be well insulated and heated and cooled efficiently, perhaps with a ductless minisplit system.

### 3 Hot Tub

The average operating cost of a hot tub is \$250 per year. But that amount may be higher if your hot tub is an older, less efficient model or if you live in a colder climate. A smaller hot tub with better insulation, a cover and a pump that runs on a lower voltage will use less energy than other models. In the long run, getting a "good deal" on a used hot tub may cost more in energy bills than a newer, more efficient model.

### 4 Swimming Pool

If you have a swimming pool, consider installing a smaller, more efficient pump and reducing how often it runs. Putting it on a timer can be a convenient way to reduce operating time. You can also look at installing a larger filter and maximizing the flow of water through the pipes by making them larger and reducing how sharply the corners turn. These measures could cut your electric use for the pool pump by as much as 75 percent. Consult with a pool installation specialist to find the most efficient setup that will keep your pool clean.

### 5 Pumps

If you live on acreage or a farm, you probably have several pumps, including irrigation, well, septic and sump. If you're like most of us, you use those pumps until they break down. Consider replacing the oldest and most used pumps over time with new, more efficient ones that are sized correctly for their task. Also, make sure you're eliminating leaks in the water lines.



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IN THE EFFICIENCY HUB AT: [FarmersElectric.coop/Energy-Tips](https://FarmersElectric.coop/Energy-Tips)**





# ODDS & ENDS

## Power Tip

If you aren't using it, unplug it. From your computer to your toaster, all electronics generate heat and many draw electricity even when they are off.

## Safety Tip

### Cool Tips for Hot Weather

It's another hot Texas summer – time to enjoy all the outdoors has to offer. While in the heat, pay attention to your body so you can enjoy each day. Follow these tips to keep your cool:

- Take frequent cooling-off breaks in the shade or air conditioning.
- Drink plenty of water before starting any outdoor activity and avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-colored clothes.
- Kids, cars, and heat make a deadly combination. Never leave a child – or pet – in a vehicle, even for just a few minutes.
- If someone exhibits symptoms of a heatstroke, act rapidly: Remove excess clothing and lower the person's temperature with wet sheets or a cool bath. Take them to the nearest hospital.

# Don't Touch That Dial

It's so tempting to turn the thermostat down to freezing cold when you walk into a warm house on a hot day. Don't do it.

Setting the thermostat at a very low temperature won't cool your house any faster than setting it to the temperature that you regularly use to feel comfortable.

In fact, lowering the thermostat beyond the temperature you desire only makes your air conditioner run longer, not faster. You could end up paying more money for an uncomfortably chilly house.

### Here are a few other energy-saving tips for summer:

Install a smart thermostat. It will "learn" your family's habits and adjust temperatures, accordingly, setting the temperature higher for hours when the house is empty and lower during your at-home hours. It takes less energy to cool your home when you return than it does to keep it cool while you're gone.

Set the thermostat to 78 degrees. You'll save about 15 percent on your cooling bill versus 72-degree setting.

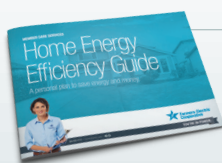
Use ceiling fans (rotating counterclockwise) to provide additional comfort, but only run them when the room is occupied. Fans cool people, not rooms.

Change or clean your heating, ventilating and air conditioning system's filter. Changing your air filter keeps the air in your home cleaner, improves cooling performance and lengthens the life of your HVAC system. Filters should be cleaned or replaced at least every three months (or more often, depending on system requirements). HEPA filters will yield the best results.

Keep lamps and other heat-emitting devices—like TVs and large electronics— away from the thermostat. Most appliances heat up when you use them, so they can trick the thermostat into "thinking" the air is warmer than it really is, causing your HVAC system to keep running when the house is already cool.

If you let the morning sunlight into your bedroom to help you wake up naturally, it could add to your energy bills if you leave the blinds open for too long. Before you leave the house, close your curtains and window shades to keep the sun's heat out.

If you use room air conditioners, fit them snugly into window frames.



**TAKE CHARGE. REQUEST YOUR FREE HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY GUIDE AT: [FarmersElectric.coop](http://FarmersElectric.coop)**

## Did You Know?

Benjamin Franklin didn't discover electricity, but he did prove that lightning is a form of electrical energy.

# I'm thinking more today about how to protect the money I've earned.

I've learned a lot of things over the years, talking to all sorts of experts in all sorts of fields. But one of the most important lessons I learned was from two former Directors of the U.S. Mint, who taught me everything I needed to know about the importance of protecting my savings with physical gold and silver.

In 25 years of working dirty jobs, the thought of a diversified portfolio really didn't cross my mind—but the more I learn, the better I feel about buying gold and silver from U.S. Money Reserve.

Is gold right for you? That's not for me to say. You've got to do your own due diligence. All I know is that today, it's not enough to simply work hard—you also have to save smart. So, call the number below. The folks at U.S. Money Reserve are standing by to help.



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# August 2024



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## 06 Open Roads, Open Eyes

Over five decades of crisscrossing Texas, a photographer learns to slow down to really see.

*Photo essay by Wyatt McSpadden*

## In the Beginning

Few recall when electric co-ops lit up the countryside; Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work.

*Story by Tom Widlowski  
Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun*

ON THE COVER  
On the way north to Amarillo, just after crossing the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River.  
*Photo by Wyatt McSpadden*

ABOVE  
Katie Phillips enjoys quilting—and air conditioning, ample lighting and watching TV.  
*Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun*

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# Rural Showcase

**OVER THE NEXT YEAR**, seven Texas cities will host a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition that examines the evolution of small towns as the American population moved into urban areas over the past 125 years.

*Crossroads: Change in Rural America* debuts August 24 in San Augustine. After six weeks in deep East Texas, the exhibition will move on to weekslong stays in Clifton, Brenham, Rockport, Buffalo Gap and San Elizario. The tour through Texas will end in Bandera on August 2, 2025.

To learn more, visit [museumonmainstreet.org](http://museumonmainstreet.org).



## August 20 World Mosquito Day

Don't forget to celebrate  
World Mosquito Day. Wait,  
maybe not. Scratch that.



### TCP Contests and More

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Young Photographers

#### RECOMMENDED READING

True or false: People used to believe you could dynamite rain out of the sky. They sure did, as we explained in *Rain, You Blasted Sky!* from August 2013.

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I can't wait to learn ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our June prompt: **The next book you should read is ...**

*The Time It Never Rained* by Elmer Kelton.  
You will laugh. You will also cry.

JANIS HAGAN  
NAVARRO COUNTY EC  
CORNICANA

*The Madstone* by Elizabeth Crook.  
An amazing historical novel based in Texas just after the Civil War.

SUSAN ERVIN  
PEDERNALES EC  
GEORGETOWN

*The Women* by Kristin Hannah. An eye-opening book about the women of Vietnam.

DANI MACNEIL  
BANDERA EC  
PIPE CREEK

Visit our website to see more responses.



JUNE 2024 We Brake for Steak

“Chet Garner needs to go back to the Leona General Store on Thursday nights, when it’s just some of the best catfish anywhere.”

DARRELL HUTTO  
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC  
JEWETT



COURTESY CHET GARNER

### Traveling South, Traveling East

I loved the idea of emotional healing by traveling to every state park [Trailblazer, June 2024]. I was a little disappointed that no South Texas parks were mentioned.

My favorite story in the issue was *Renewal in Blue*. I traveled to East Texas with the young girl and loved the ending with the bluebonnets.

Penny Brown  
Magic Valley EC  
Rio Hondo

### Multiplying at the Sixes

As an avid fan of the *Yellowstone* TV series, it was captivating to learn about the Burnett family and how the Four Sixes Ranch began and grew into one of the 10 largest ranches in the state [Sixes on the Small Screen, May 2024].

Sarah Brown  
Bluebonnet EC  
Cedar Creek



B.J. HINKLE

### Avenging Uncle

James Franklin Norfleet was my great-uncle [Payback Time, May 2024]. I remember when we would visit the Norfleets at their home in Hale County in the 1950s, and Aunt Eliza would regale us with stories of earlier days.

Uncle Frank awed us kids as he would always strap on his pistol belt before going outside. For kids growing up listening to *The Lone Ranger*, we were quite impressed.

Jim K. Hudgins  
San Bernard EC  
Bellville

### Roadside Attractions

It seems to me that Michael Ford has discovered and perfected a new art form on the Texas landscape [Overpass Easels, May 2024]. His work is extremely expressive of Texas and unique in each example.

Mary E. Specia  
GVEC  
McQueeney

### TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

 Texas Co-op Power

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# Open Roads, Open Eyes

Over five decades  
of crisscrossing Texas,  
a photographer learns  
to slow down to really see







PHOTO ESSAY BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

When I was younger and living in Amarillo, it always seemed important to get where I was going and back as soon as possible.

For a few years after a divorce, my two boys and their mom lived in San Marcos. And so a couple of times a month, I'd make that 500-plus mile drive as fast as I could.

When I abandoned the Panhandle and moved to Austin, my freelance photography business kicked into a higher gear. The jobs were in every direction, in and around my new city.

I never griped about the mileage, but as I matured, I did start listening to my eyes. I made it a rule that if I saw something that caught my attention at 70 mph and I couldn't get it out of my mind after a couple miles, I'd go back to get a picture—or at least to visit and decide if what I saw was worth a return trip at a particular time of day.

The drives are much more mellow these days after 50 years as a professional photographer, and I navigate using a spiral-bound detail map of Texas counties. Driving seems to be the second-most important skill in my line of work.

Of course, skill No. 1 is making a good picture upon reaching my destination. Most often the job involves capturing a portrait of someone who has accomplished something a magazine editor thinks is worthy of a story. But sometimes it's capturing the feel, the presence of a place.

I'm pretty sure I've driven a million miles in Texas, but now I do it a mile at a time. That's how the pictures in these pages were made, driving slow(ish), with eyes wide open. ■

I know my way around the Amarillo area, having lived there until I was 40. I was joyriding and admiring the late-day clouds when the lonely little tree appeared on the horizon.





Early morning on the road between Earth and Dimmit, in the Panhandle, familiar territory from my early years making a living shooting for seed and cattle operations. I hadn't seen such a tall silage mound, and the man with his pitchfork caught my eye.







I was passing through Hico on my way to the Metroplex when I spotted this little house. It took some coaxing for the woman to pose.









ABOVE I have a collection of barbed wire, plastic and wind pictures. Artsy pictures of trash.

LEFT A blue Dodge seems to have a permanent parking spot between Sandy Fork and Luling.

OPPOSITE A classic farmhouse, newly plowed field and epic sky near Granger, in Williamson County. Irresistible.



# In the Beginning

**Few recall when electric cooperatives lit up the countryside;  
Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work**

**K**atie Phillips is old enough to remember the dark ages—when nightfall at her family's farm outside Coleman meant navigating by the shadowy illumination offered by carbide and coal-oil lamps and lanterns. When much of the work on her dad's dairy farm—milking, separating and bottling—happened before sunrise and without the benefit of electricity.

"It's a hard life," says Katie, who turns 97 next month. For her and her brother and two sisters growing up in the 1930s, there wasn't much free time for fun, and before electricity, there was no reading or playing games at night.

Milking started every day at 3 a.m., and a few hours later, Katie's dad, Charlie Pitts, was making the first of his twice-

daily deliveries of Oak Grove Dairy Farm milk to homes, stores and cafés around Coleman, south of Abilene, on the western Central Texas plains.

It never escaped Pitts' notice that just 4½ miles east, in town, folks had the luxury of electricity.

Back then in rural America, those 4½ miles might as well have been a million. Electricity stopped where the profits did, and in 1936, fewer than 3% of Texas farms had electricity.

But before long, farmers, ranchers and their neighbors

Katie Phillips' dad helped create Coleman County Electric Cooperative. She saw the co-op's first light bulb flicker on in 1937.



## **Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home.**

pooled their money and worked together to build the electric cooperatives that lit up the countryside and brought a better quality of life.

Katie Phillips is among few living Americans who witnessed that important history. She had a front-row seat.

Katie turned 9 in 1936, the year her dad became a local leader in the cooperative movement that was in its early stages.

In those days, the town of Coleman had not only electricity but phone service too, and Pitts realized he needed that to keep up with milk orders. To get it, he paid to have a line strung from Coleman, across a creek, to the farm. Katie remembers their party line phone number: 4-0-0.

“I always wanted something better,” Pitts told the family. Getting electricity to the farm was another matter.

Pitts traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn about the Rural Electrification Administration, which provided loans for the creation of cooperatives. He then visited neighboring farms, asking folks to contribute \$5 to help start a co-op.

Finally, in April 1937, the first Coleman County Electric Cooperative light bulb flickered on in the Pitts farmhouse—an honor befitting the co-op’s first board president.

“It was a great day for everybody because it was a completion of a long journey for Daddy,” Katie says. The Pitts kids had better lighting for their schoolwork, and Dad had a perfect place to read the Fort Worth newspaper he always had in the house.

Soon lines brought power to the dairy barn, where milking machines freed up farmhands.

Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home. “I just know that it was one of the most wonderful feelings there was when we could go to that refrigerator and open both doors and look in there and see what was in it,” Katie says.

Decades later, Katie spends a lot of her days knitting under a lamp in a corner of her living room in a 100-year-old farmhouse 6 miles east of Coleman. Electricity is too commonplace to warrant much thought. It powers her iPhone, tablet, two TVs and brand-new Singer sewing machine.

She’s known around Coleman County EC for being there at the dawn of the co-op. When the co-op held its 85th annual meeting in July 2023, she was there, and it was her 85th annual meeting too. She has attended every last one.

“The first light bulb was the beginning of an amazing future for all of us,” says Synda Smith, the co-op’s CEO and

general manager. “There are few businesses that have a past connection like this. It feels so good to know that Katie still feels like we are doing what our earlier leaders wanted us to do by continuing to uphold the co-op business model.”

Katie has farmed most of her life around Coleman, except for two years in high school at Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio. She dated Harold Phillips for a little less than a year—sometimes on horseback—and they married in 1948 when she was 21.

Together they farmed for 66 years, until he died in 2014. Harold was one of the first farmers in the area to grow sunflowers and to use parallel terracing. They had five children, four of whom are still living—all within five miles of Katie. Two of the sons are farmers.

By her 50th wedding anniversary, Katie figured she was ready to give up farming, and she broke that news to Harold.

“I told him, ‘I think I’ve done enough now,’ ” Katie says. “And he said, ‘What would encourage you to do a little more?’

“I said, ‘You buy me an air-conditioned, four-wheel-drive tractor.’ ”

And that’s how she ended up the proud owner of a John Deere tractor that’s still in the family.

Katie, who says she needed no prescriptions until she turned 90, has other family heirlooms that she holds dear: A six-leaf table brought by covered wagon from Louisiana by Katie’s great-grandparents in the mid-1800s graces her dining room, and there’s a couple of glider-style chairs that her mother bought in New York and the chair her dad used to rock her to sleep.

But the greatest treasure might be Charlie Pitts’ old desk chair, the very one where he worked out the wrinkles and legal details of creating the electric utility that gave his kids—and his community—a brighter future.

And Katie still has a direct connection to the co-op office in town. One of her six grandchildren, Kathreyn Portis, is a member services representative at Coleman County EC, where she has worked almost four years.

“My family’s legacy in this county is a big one, so to get to be able to continue that means a lot to me,” Portis says. “Family isn’t just blood relatives. It’s these people,” she says of her three dozen colleagues at the co-op.

They all follow in the footsteps of a dairy farmer who wanted to leave the dark ages behind.

As Katie knits or quilts or watches her beloved Dallas Cowboys, she joins nearly 5,000 fellow co-op members in her community living a better life because of co-op power.

But she alone remembers that day in 1937 when her dad helped that first light bulb come on.

“It was magical,” Katie says. “It’s just the greatest thing in the world. When he found out that you could get electricity, he said, ‘We’re going to do it.’ ” ■



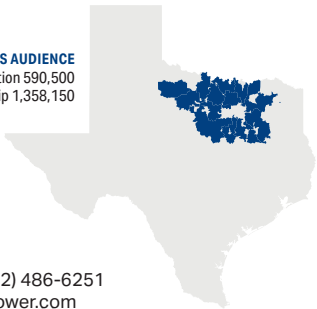
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The stainless steel blade, bolster and pommel are exquisitely etched and would have looked great with a less ambitious handle. But the results of overachieving are stunning here. The turquoise-blue colored handle is ablaze with assorted stones like jasper, marble, sunstone, and coral that have been hand cut and inlaid in a Southwestern motif.

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## Is Your Home Protected From Power Surges?

**HIGH-TECH GADGETS**, entertainment equipment and appliances are investments that contribute to making your house a fully functional home. We're talking fridges, freezers, ovens, dishwashers, washing machines and dryers, computers, TVs, game consoles, thermostats, air conditioners, and components of your home's electrical system.

That's why it's important for homeowners to realize that all these items can be sensitive to power surges. But there are measures you can and should take to protect your valuable electronics.

### What Is a Power Surge?

Power surges occur when the flow of electricity is interrupted and then started again or when something sends a boost in the electrical charge through wires.

Surges can range from just a few volts when you turn on a hair dryer to thousands of volts if lightning hits a transformer. They can even be caused by faulty wiring behind a home's walls or by overloading an electrical circuit, such as plugging an iron into the same circuit that feeds a computer or home theater.

So what are some ways you can protect your stuff from getting sizzled by surges?

### Point-of-Use Protection

Power strip surge protectors with multiple outlets and wall-mount devices for tight spaces, like behind a refrigerator, provide point-of-use protection.

Put one on anything that's expensive to replace and has sensitive electronic microprocessors—especially home theater and computer systems. There are specialized devices for these that include Ethernet ports and TV connections.

Since communication and data cables can also carry surges, it's important to protect everything that's wired together. They provide the best protection when used in conjunction with whole-home surge protection.

### Whole-Home Protection

These devices are installed by an electrician and can reduce the risk of a surge damaging your appliances and other valuable electrical equipment by limiting the amount of electricity coming into your home or preventing the surge from entering altogether. This makes it the most effective protection.

These devices are wired directly to your home's main electrical panel. By prohibiting surges from entering your home, they help protect your electrical wiring, sockets and circuits as well as your appliances and electrical equipment. Whole-home surge protection can also help reduce the risk of electrical fires due to power surges originating from outside the home.

### Other Things to Know

Power strips and point-of-use surge protectors aren't interchangeable. A true surge protector includes internal components that will divert or suppress the extra spike from surges. A power strip only provides more outlets for an electrical circuit.

If an interruption in power will pose a problem such as losing valuable information on your computer, look for a surge protector with an uninterruptible power supply. If the connecting surge protector disconnects electrical usage, it'll provide backup battery power for a short period so you can save your work.

Replace any surge protectors that are discolored, overheat, look melted or have an indicator light that doesn't work. ■



# Hacks To Beat the Summer Heat

**AS SUMMER TEMPERATURES** stay hot, there's no need to let the heat get you down. There are several ways you can keep cool this summer—without wreaking havoc on your home's air conditioner. Use these simple life hacks to beat the summer heat.

**Make aloe vera cubes.** Whether you're nursing a sunburn or just wanting to cool off, aloe vera cubes can offer some relief. Simply fill an ice tray with aloe vera gel, freeze it, then place the cubes on your body's pulse points, like the neck and wrists, for a quick cooling sensation.

**Try a cooling pillow.** If you're willing to spend a little, a cooling pillow can help you feel more comfortable on those muggy summer nights. These typically run \$20–\$180.

**Just add mint.** Menthol makes our bodies feel cool, so by adding spearmint essential oil to products like body wash and lotion, you can get an instant cooling effect. Essential oils can be purchased at most drugstores or online.

**Spend a few bucks on a handheld fan mister.** Sure, you may feel a little silly carrying around a tiny fan, but you'll be more comfortable than everyone else—and they'll probably ask to borrow it. You can typically find these at big-box stores or online.

**Here are some additional ways to keep you and your home cool this summer:**

- ▶ Close blinds and curtains during the day, and open them during the evening when temperatures are cooler.
- ▶ Use ceiling fans to stay comfortable indoors. But remember, fans cool people, not rooms, so turn them off when you leave the room.
- ▶ Only use appliances that put out heat, like clothes dryers and dishwashers, during the evening, to minimize indoor heat during the day, when temperatures are higher. ■



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## Driving Deserves Our Full Attention

**DISTRACTED DRIVING IS** a major problem and takes many forms. In 2023, nearly 1 in 6 crashes on Texas roads were caused by a distracted driver, resulting in 399 deaths and 2,793 serious injuries.

All distractions—whether texting, eating, grooming or having a conversation—can be dangerous.

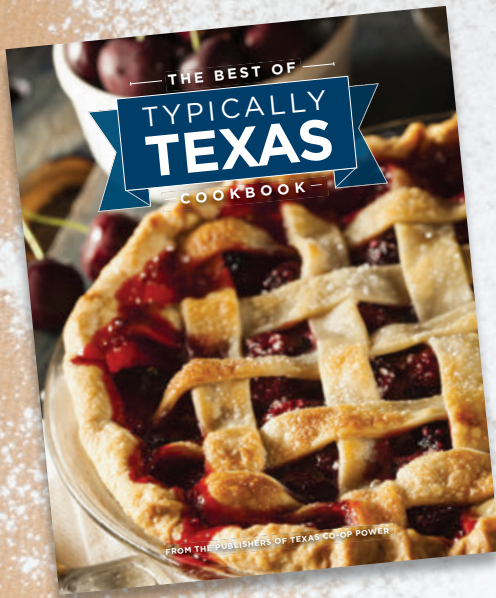
Research shows that whether you use a voice-to-text program, hands-free device or a handheld one, the distraction will affect your driving. It can also cost you: Violators in Texas caught texting and driving can face a fine of up to \$200.

These tips can help prevent distracted driving that can lead to a ticket—or much worse—a crash:

- ▶ Pull off the road entirely and come to a complete stop before you talk or text.
- ▶ Turn your phone off or use an app or setting to block texts and calls or send auto reply texts while you're driving.
- ▶ Tell friends, family and co-workers you won't respond to calls or texts when you're behind the wheel.
- ▶ Remember that all distractions are dangerous. Even if you feel that a task will be minor or quick, accidents can happen in a split second. ■



# Give friends and family the Best of Texas.



*Texas Co-op Power* presents a collection of best-loved recipes from two of our most popular cookbooks ever, the *Typically Texas Cookbook* and *The Second Typically Texas Cookbook*.

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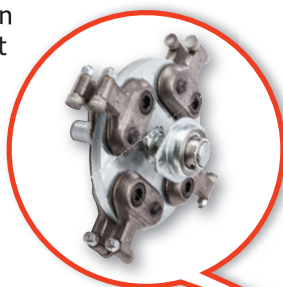
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# Catch a Wampus Cat

Irreverent Texans imported a mythical creature created in Appalachia

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR CALLERY

**CHEROKEE LEGEND** tells of a young woman named Running Deer who once defeated an evil spirit, called Ew'ah, that she believed was responsible for driving her husband insane. Running Deer drew strength from the spirit of a mythical mountain cat but was afterward relegated to the deep woods and remote mountain passes of North Carolina, where she terrorized and drove insane anyone unfortunate enough to glimpse her.

Another legend has Running Deer as a young shape-shifter who slayed a catlike demon and became her tribe's spirit protector.

This is likely how the wampus cat of lore was born in the Appalachian Mountains, probably in East Tennessee or western North Carolina. And that's why all wampus cats—including those on the gridiron in Texas—have a Cherokee lineage.

Appalachian settlers took the story from there and anglicized Ew'ah into a wampus cat, which likely derives from the 1840s slang term "catawampus" or, as some prefer, "cattywampus."

If something was cattywampus, it was peculiar or frightening (likely influenced by the term "cata-mount," another word for a cougar), and the wampus cat of lore can be as peculiar as a storyteller wants it to be. In some accounts, it has six legs (two for walking, four for fighting), walks upright and swims like a mink.

It didn't take long for the wampus cat to become the subject of stories designed to scare children into doing as they were told.

"Parents are telling us that they are experiencing less trouble keeping their children in after dark since the report gained circulation that the Wampus had been seen here," *The Greeneville Daily Sun* in Tennessee reported in 1918.

The wampus cat began showing up in Texas newspapers in the early 1900s, most notably as the subject of a series of stories by frontier journalist and historian Don Hampton Biggers in a satirical Rotan newspaper called *Billy Goat Always Buttin' In*. Biggers had come to the small town northwest of Abilene in 1907 to establish a respectable weekly paper, but he published satire on the side as "a journal of such things as the editor takes a notion to write."

When he needed to fill space in the paper, Biggers spun a series of yarns about the wampus cat, which

he called "a cross between a wildcat, badger and a lobo wolf, with fangs 2 inches long and claws that could peel the bark off of a mesquite tree."

The locals knew it was a hoax, but visitors to the region often left Rotan dreading an encounter with the wampus cat of Biggers' imagination.

Biggers' son, Earl Biggers, in a 1961 interview with historian and scholar Seymour V. Connor, said his father came up with most of the wampus cat tales at the Rotan barber shop, where he and his pals would concoct outlandish stories.

In 1908, the same year Biggers was chronicling the creature's depredations in Fisher County, *The Houston Post* chronicled the game-by-game results of a local baseball team called the Wampus Cats. Since then, a number of schools have chosen the wampus cat as a mascot, including Itasca High School here in Texas.

As with descriptions of the cat itself, there is more than one story about how Itasca, which is between Fort Worth and Waco, chose the beast as its mascot.

A 1996 newspaper story quoted lifelong Itasca Nancy Bowman, who ran the school's special services, as saying that in the 1920s the high school team was having trouble finding a nickname. During a raucous postgame locker room celebration, a player shouted, "Wow, we were really wampus cats tonight!" Itasca had its mascot.

A Dallas radio station has called the wampus cat "the most quintessential Texas high school football mascot," but it's not uniquely Texan. Schools in Conway, Arkansas; Atoka, Oklahoma; Leesville, Louisiana; and as far north as Clark Fork, Idaho, have also adopted the mythical creature as a mascot.

In 2003, a collegiate wood-bat baseball team in Albemarle, North Carolina, brought the creature closer to home. The Uwharrie Wampus Cats square off against the likes of the Carolina Disco Turkeys and the Boone Bigfoots.

Biggers and the other Rotan barbershop regulars would be delighted to know the creature they helped create has come full circle. ■







# SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you

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



When Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller were campaigning to win their party's nomination for president in 1964, LBJ heard that both men were "cutting way back on their visits to California." Johnson said, "Reminds me of a case in Texas where a man wanted to run for sheriff against an unpopular incumbent named Uncle Johnny.

"Man asked his friend Dave if he thought he had a chance. Dave said, 'Well, I guess it depends on who meets the most people.' 'Yeah, that's what I was thinking,' said the man. Dave explained further, 'If he meets the most people, you'll win, and if you meet the most people, he'll win.'"

LBJ also told of a "boy in Texas who was very poor and tired of seeing his mama struggling so much to feed her family. So he sent a letter to God asking for \$100 for his mama. The letter got forwarded eventually to the postmaster general in Washington, D.C.

"He took pity on the boy and put \$20 in an envelope and mailed it to him. Two weeks later, the postmaster got a letter back from the boy that said, 'Dear God, thank you for sending the money, but next time don't send it through Washington cuz they took 80% of it.'"

Goodwin said she was happy to see that LBJ is getting long-deserved credit for the laws and policies he passed in his time, like the Voting Rights Act, as well as the institutions he helped found, like NASA and the Public Broadcasting Service.

If only he could have known how much progress his work would bring. He certainly would have smiled—and had a story ready. ■

# Sense and Humor

LBJ's unique penchant for storytelling helped him navigate politics

BY W.F. STRONG

**WHEN MOST PEOPLE** think of Lyndon B. Johnson, they don't necessarily envision a man with a great sense of humor. After all, he was president during turbulent times.

"When the burdens of the presidency seem unusually heavy," he once joked, "I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a mayor."

Though he didn't have the public eloquence of Kennedy or King, he was charismatic. He was a wonderful storyteller.

Writer and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin worked closely with the president for seven years, and because of her professional relationship with him, I would argue that her biography—out of all the biographies about the 36th presi-

dent—is the most humanizing.

No writer knew him better.

Goodwin told me she never tired of listening to him, though eventually she came to realize that his stories were not all completely true. Some were apocryphal, she said, and like Abraham Lincoln, LBJ used stories to animate his points, skewer his adversaries, and amuse and entertain.

He learned his storytelling, Goodwin said, from his father and grandfather, growing up in the Hill Country. Johnson would listen at night as they talked politics on the porch with local power brokers.

My own father, a great admirer of the president, shared a couple of LBJ stories with me long ago.

# Party Drinks

Find fruity refreshments—and a guide for mocktail options

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Spending every summer in Mexico growing up, nothing made me happier than sipping on a tall glass of *agua de sandía* (watermelon water) sold by local street vendors. It's a bright and refreshing drink made from watermelon, water, lime juice and sugar. August is peak watermelon season in Texas, so I'm excited to share this beloved drink from my childhood.

## Agua de Sandía

**8 cups diced watermelon**

**4 cups cold water**

**¼ cup sugar**

**Juice of 1 lime**

**Tajín, for the rim**

**Lime wedge, for the rim**

**1.** Blend watermelon and water until smooth. Depending on the size of your blender, you may need to divide this into batches, blending half the watermelon and half the water at a time.

**2.** Strain into a pitcher. Stir in sugar and lime juice.

**3.** Spread Tajín on a plate. Run lime wedge around the rim of each glass and dip into Tajín. Serve over ice in Tajín-rimmed glasses.

**SERVES 8**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](https://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Hibiscus Mint Tequila Punch.







## Lemon Pucker Martini

DEBI OROZCO  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

I love a lightly sweet but bold-flavored cocktail, and that's exactly what this Lemon Pucker Martini recipe offers. It's a perfect balance between tart and sweet and proves incredibly refreshing.

**2 tablespoons sugar, for the rim**  
**1 lemon wedge, for the rim**  
**2 ounces vodka**  
**1 ounce fresh lemon juice**  
**½ ounce limoncello**  
**½ ounce orange-flavored liqueur**  
**1 teaspoon agave**  
**Lemon slice, for garnish**

1. Spread sugar on a plate. Run lemon wedge around the rim of a cocktail glass and dip into sugar. Place glass in the freezer until ready to serve.
2. Add vodka, lemon juice, limoncello, orange-flavored liqueur and agave to a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously.
3. Strain into chilled, sugar-rimmed cocktail glass. Garnish with lemon slice.

**SERVES 1**



**\$500 WINNER**

## Summer Beer

CINDY JARROTT  
BLUEBONNET EC



Pour, stir, serve and sip!  
A beer-based cocktail fit for a crowd, this simple summer beer is a fresh and smooth beverage that's designed for batching in bulk.

**SERVES 6**

**1 can frozen pink lemonade (12 ounces)**  
**12 ounces vodka**  
**4 cans light beer (12 ounces each)**  
**Frozen mixed berries, for garnish**

1. Add frozen lemonade and vodka to a pitcher. (You can use the lemonade can to measure 12 ounces of vodka.) Stir until lemonade is dissolved.
2. Add beer and stir to combine.
3. Pour into ice-filled glasses and top with frozen berries.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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# Texas Bluebonnet

CAROL BRADY  
NUECES EC

It's time to pop open the bubbly and celebrate the waning days of summer. The addition of sparkling wine to this cocktail makes it feel a bit elegant, which is always a plus, but this festive drink can easily be whipped up for four or doubled for a crowd.

½ cup blue Curaçao liqueur  
1½ cups lemonade  
2 cups sparkling wine  
Juice of 1 lemon  
Orange slices, for garnish  
Lemon slices, for garnish  
Maraschino cherries, for garnish

1. Fill a pitcher with ice. Add blue Curaçao liqueur, lemonade, sparkling wine and lemon juice. Stir.
2. Serve over ice, garnished with fruit on skewers.

SERVES 4

**TCP** Vianney Rodriguez features many more cocktail recipes on [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com) and in *Latin Twist: Traditional and Modern Cocktails*, the book she co-authored with Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack.

# From Cocktail to Mocktail

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Nonalcoholic cocktails don't have to be bland. Here are a few tips and tricks to keep your party hopping:

Replace sparkling wine with soda water for a guilt-free bubbly effect.

A mix of cranberry and grape juice produces a delicious sangrialike option.

Ginger beer punches up the flavor and adds a warm kick to a mocktail.

Nonalcoholic spirits are becoming more common in stores. From vodka to mezcal and nonalcoholic beer and wine, options are hitting shelves, ready to help you shake up a mocktail.



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What makes them iconic? The Morgan Silver Dollar is the legendary coin that built the Wild West. It exemplifies the American spirit like few other coins, and was created using silver mined from the famous Comstock Lode in Nevada. In fact, when travelers approached the mountains around the boomtown of Virginia City, Nevada in the 1850s, they were startled to see the hills shining in the sunlight like a mirror. A mirage caused by weary eyes?

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## A Jaw-Dropping Journey

Brazos Bend State Park has acres and acres of alligators

BY CHET GARNER

**I LIKE ZOOS.** The cages and fences offer comfort when staring into the eyes of an apex predator. But there's something exhilarating about stepping into a natural habitat and encountering a wild creature in its element.

And that's the draw of Brazos Bend State Park, which comprises nearly 5,000 acres of wetland marsh and coastal prairie in Fort Bend County. Visit on a sunny day and you're almost guaranteed to have an encounter with its most famous residents—American alligators.

Driving into the park felt like visiting a movie set, amid oak trees dripping with Spanish moss that create a canopy over the road. It's hard to believe that I was only 40 miles from downtown Houston. I stopped into the visitor center and asked where to find the gators. They simply pointed me toward the park's 37 miles of trails and said, "That way."

It turns out hundreds of alligators inhabit the park, and it's not uncommon to see 40–50 on a good day, in addition to the park's other reptiles, amphibians and 300-plus species of birds.

I set off on the trail surrounding 40-Acre Lake, and it wasn't long before I came face-to-face with a living, breathing dinosaur. It was at least 7 feet long and sunning on the edge of the trail. I cautiously passed by, giving it a Texas nod on my way. Twenty feet down the trail was another and then another.

A ranger assured me that in the park's 40 years, no one has been injured, much less killed, by an alligator. They're fairly docile creatures and prefer flight over fight when it comes to humans. Even so, I didn't want to tempt fate and was more than happy enjoying them all from a very safe distance. ■

ABOVE Chet keeps a safe distance from one of the hundreds of gators that roam freely.

**TCP** From the safety of your screen, join Chet as he wanders among the gators. Watch the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

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

## AUGUST

8

**McKinney Thomas Craig**, (214) 769-0645, [thecomedyarena.com](http://thecomedyarena.com)

9

**Alpine [9–10] Big Bend Ranch Rodeo**, (432) 294-1640, [bigbendranchrodeo.com](http://bigbendranchrodeo.com)

10

**Chappell Hill Wine and Cheese Stroll**, (979) 337-9910, [chappellhilltx.com](http://chappellhilltx.com)

14

**Brady [14–17] Heart of Texas Honky Tonk Festival**, (325) 597-1895, [heartoftexascountry.com](http://heartoftexascountry.com)

**Corsicana [14–17] Red**, (903) 872-5421, [thewlac.com](http://thewlac.com)

17

**Brenham Peter, Paul and Mary Alive**; (979) 337-7240; [thebarnhillcenter.com](http://thebarnhillcenter.com)

**Santo Southwest Open Chili Championship**, (940) 733-6086, [casichili.net](http://casichili.net)

22

**Fredericksburg [22–25] Gillespie County Fair**, (830) 997-2359, [gillespiefair.com](http://gillespiefair.com)

23

**Decatur [23–24] Wise County Guild Quilt Show**, (817) 991-3407, [wisecountyquiltguild.org](http://wisecountyquiltguild.org)

24

**Lubbock Book Festival**, (806) 775-3634, [lubbockbookfest.com](http://lubbockbookfest.com)



**Castroville [24-25]**  
**St. Louis Day Celebration,**  
(830) 931-2826,  
saintlouisday.com

27

**Stonewall Commemoration  
of Lyndon Johnson's  
Birthday,** (830) 868-7128,  
nps.gov/lyjo

29

**Uvalde [29-Sept. 1]**  
**Palomino Fest & Pro Rodeo,**  
palominofest.com

30

**Fredericksburg [30-31]**  
**Vereins Quilt Show,**  
vereinsquiltguild.org

**Marfa [30-Sept. 1] Lights  
Festival,** (432) 217-6777,  
marfachamberofcommerce.org

**Granbury [30-Sept. 2]**  
**Labor Day Weekend  
Festival,** (682) 936-4550,  
granburysquare.com

31

**Sunrise Beach Village  
Sip & Stroll,** (713) 299-1728,  
sunrisebeachtx.gov

SEPTEMBER

7

**Luling Luling Foundation  
Youth Grill-Off,** (830) 875-  
2438, lulingfoundation.org

**McKinney Jurassic Night  
Out at the Heard,** (972) 562-  
5566, heardmuseum.org

**New Braunfels Donny  
Edwards: Tribute to the King,**  
(830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

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

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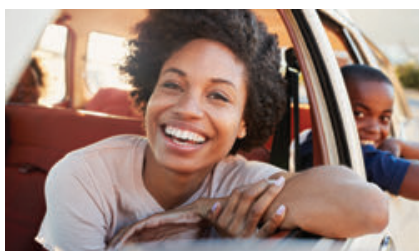
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# Textures

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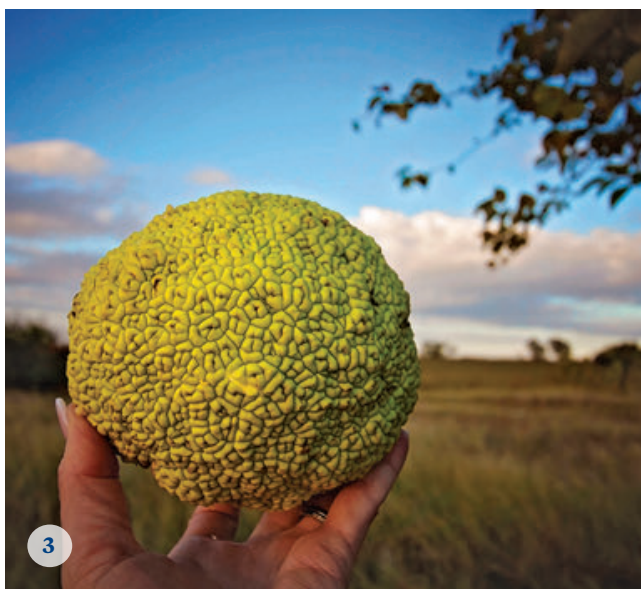
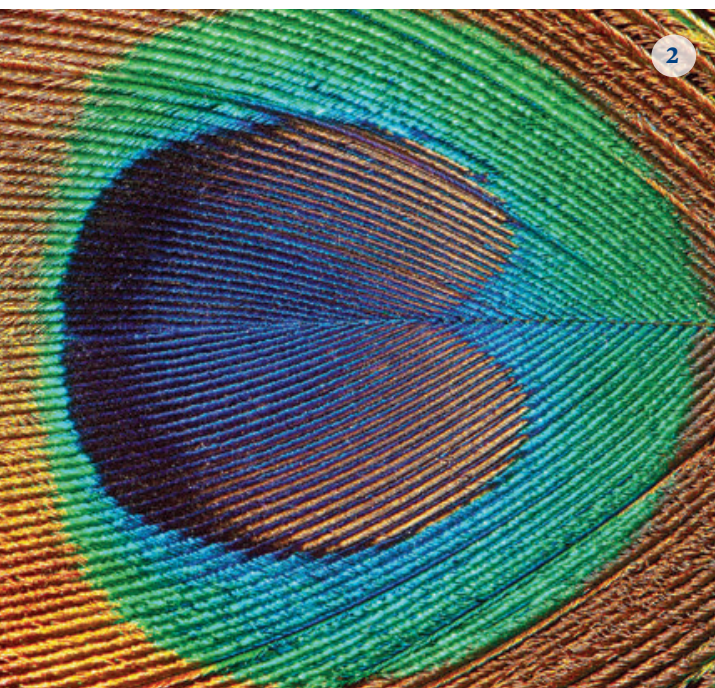
"Peacocks achieve their stunning plumage display through structural coloration called iridescence."

**3 CARLY LATHAM**  
HEART OF TEXAS EC

"I love looking at the skin of a Texas horse apple."

**4 DORA CAFFEY**  
TAYLOR EC

"A Rio Grande turkey shown in his finest ruffles."



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**DUE AUG 10** Young Photographers

**DUE SEP 10** Parks

**DUE OCT 10** I Love



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

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Textures photos from readers.





## Friends in High Places

He was known for saving windmills, but one day he saved a whole lot more

BY SAM W. YOUNG  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
KEVIN HOWDESHELL

**DAD CAME HOME** from work one day with his left hand in a big bandage. He had driven himself to a hospital, where his fingers were repaired by a surgeon. One finger was almost severed but was put back together and ultimately saved.

When I was young, he worked for West Texas Lumber Co. in San Angelo, the local Aermotor Windmill dealer. Later he worked on his own. Ranch owners for miles around knew he was the man to call if a windmill needed repairs or replacement from the 1930s into the '80s. The cattle and sheep had to have water.

My brother and I are firmly convinced that no one man installed more windmills than our father. He was still climbing the contraptions after his 80th birthday and after he sold his business.

Working on these machines was dan-

gerous, even for a professional. Windmillers free-climbed and stood with a helper on a platform—untethered—as they made their repairs.

Aermotor windmills pivot on a vertical mast, with all the weight sitting on a washer inside a small cavity just under the motor. The motor has to be lifted a few inches to replace that washer.

To lift the windmill, with all the weight of the mill and the sucker rods, a chain is tied to the push rod and the tower and then a helper has to turn the wheel by hand and hold it.

Dad always had to have a helper, of course, and I was usually his helper in the summertime and over Christmas breaks.

There were days when we would load the pickup in San Angelo with the parts of a new windmill, the rods and pipe, sand, gravel, cement—everything needed for installation. I remember once when we drove to a new well on King Mountain, south of Odessa, assembled the tower and mill, raised it up with the pickup, dug the anchors by hand, and had it pumping water before sundown.

But I wasn't Dad's helper that fateful day south of San Angelo.

On that day, the chain must have slipped, allowing the weight of the rotor assembly to smash his fingers. He didn't say so, but what else could it have been?

There was something else he didn't mention until a few days later.

His helper had reacted to the sight of the blood and started to pass out. Dad reached out and grabbed the man with his right hand to keep him from falling off the windmill platform.

I don't know just how the issue was resolved from that point, but I do know this: While Dad's left hand was trapped, he saved a man's life that day with his right hand—the day he came home with the big bandage. ■



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— J. Fitzgerald, VA



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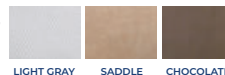
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