

>>> **Fort Bend AgNR / Horticulture** <<<
Newsletter

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**April is National
Garden Month!**

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APRIL IS NATIONAL GARDEN MONTH!**April Fun Facts:**

- April is famous for its showers, leading to the saying "April showers bring May flowers."
- Many believe rain in April is a sign of good fortune for farmers and gardeners.
- April's birthstone is diamond and birth flowers are sweet peas and daisies.
- April is a great month for meteor showers such as the Lyrids shower which is April 16-26 each year and Eta Aquariids on April 21.

With April being National Garden Month, be sure to explore the beauty of gardens, or get some dirt on your hands, whether planting something in pots by a window or a larger expanse of your own.

Other ways you can celebrate National Garden Month are to visit a botanical garden, or come to our office location and check out the Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens! You can also start a compost area, or perhaps create a small or large garden. Gardens do not have to be large so even those living on a small plot of land or even an apartment can grow a piece of gardening paradise in a small raised bed or even in pots on a patio. You can even have your own herb garden or flower garden on your windowsill.

Gardens can be anywhere and just about anyone can be a gardener!
Embrace the love of growing something!

Source: Days of the Year

>>> LIGHTING GUIDELINES - SEASONAL BIRD MIGRATION

A message from Jeffrey W. Savell, Vice Chancellor and Dean, Texas A&M Agriculture and Life Sciences:

This spring, nearly two billion birds will journey through Texas in one of the world's greatest wildlife events: seasonal migration. About one in three birds migrating through North America this spring will pass through our state, with most guiding their travels by the starry night sky. When passing through cities, nocturnally migrating birds are often distracted and disoriented by artificial lights.

At Texas A&M AgriLife, part of our mission is to restore connections among people, agriculture, food, science, economies and the environment. Therefore, our organization is taking part in the statewide Lights Out, Texas! campaign to help provide safer passage for migrating wildlife. Turning off nonessential lights from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. can help darken the night sky and keep migrating birds flying high.

Please adhere to the following Lights Out guidelines and share this information through your departments to promote maximum participation this spring, March 1 to June 15, and fall, August 15 to November 30.

Lighting guidelines for everyone:

- Turn off non-essential lights from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. during the spring and fall.
- Fully close blinds and curtains at night and partially close them during the day.
- Substitute overhead lighting for desk lamps or task lighting.
- Sign up for BirdCast Migration Alerts for high migration nights.

Lighting guidelines for building/facility managers:

- Extinguish or dim interior lights in lobbies, atriums, commons and perimeter rooms.
- Extinguish or dim exterior spotlights, floodlights, logos/signs and other decorative lights.
- Avoid illuminating indoor planters or fountains that may intrigue birds.
- Avoid landscape lighting in trees or gardens where birds may be resting.

Guidelines for essential (safety and security) lighting:

- Aim essential lights downwards.
- Use lighting shields to direct light towards the ground and not the sky or trees.
- Use motion detector sensors so lights are only on when you need them.
- Use warm lighting (under 3000 Kelvin) and avoid blue-white lighting (over 3000 Kelvin).

Thank you for doing your part to provide our birds safer passage through the Texas night sky.



>>> UPCOMING EVENTS



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AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE EVENTS:

- **April 5, 2025 - Grow Your Own: Warm Season Vegetable & Herbs** - Fort Bend County - For details and to register, visit: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own-2/>
- **April 11, 2025 - Feathers, Furs and Farming** - Austin County AgriLife Extension, held at the Weimar Civic Center. Topics: Aquatic Vegetation Management & Pond Stocking Strategies. 1 General CEU, For details and registration, visit: <https://austin.agrilife.org/event/feathers-furs-and-farming-all-about-pollinators/>
- **April 17, 2025 - Vector Management CEU Program** - Rosenberg Civic Center visit: <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/ereg/newreg.php?eventid=822058&language=eng>
- **April 22-23, 2025 - Urban Partnership Synergy Symposium** - Team up with AgriLife to form educationally focused partnerships. See more at: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/event/urban-partnerships-synergy-symposium/>
- **April 24, 2025 - Pecan Tree Grafting Clinic** - Fort Bend County - For details and to register visit <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/event/pecan-tree-grafting-clinic/>
- **April 25, 2025 - Landscape Success: Using Irrigation Wisely** - Fort Bend County - For details and to register, visit: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success/>
- **April 29, 2025 - 2025 South Texas Agriculture Symposium** - Meet-and-greet breakfast with our Horticulture agent and a half day of short, impactful sessions lived streamed to our location. To register and find out more visit: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/event/2025-south-texas-agriculture-symposium/>
- **May 3, 2025 - Butterfly Celebration 9am- 12 noon** - Learn about butterflies and other insects while visiting the demonstration gardens. Free family event! Face painting, insect fun facts, free seed packets, crafts for kids and more! See more information at: <https://fbmg.org/events/butterfly-celebration/>
- **May 9, 2025 - Private Applicator Licenses Training** - Austin County AgriLife Extension - This training is for those seeking to obtain their license. For details and to register, visit: <https://austin.agrilife.org/event/pesticide-applicator-training-6/>
- **May 10, 2025 - Grow Your Own: Vegetable Pest and Disease Management** - Fort Bend County - For details and to register, visit: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own-2/>
- **May 23, 2025 - Landscape Success: Shade Gardening Ideas and Tip** - Fort Bend County - For details and to register, visit: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success/>

AGRILIFE EXTENSION YOUTH EVENTS - Fort Bend 4-H:

- **April 12, 2025 - D-9 Horse Judging Contest** - Open to D9 4-H Youth only for those that registered in March. <https://agrilife.org/ftbend4h/event/2025-d9-4-h-horse-judging-contest/>
- **April 24-26, 2025 - Big Time in D9 - Roundup 2025** - various events happening! Visit this site for details: <https://d94-h.tamu.edu/eventsandcontests/bigtime/> (Our office could use volunteers for the events! Call our office at 281-342-3034 and mention volunteering for 4-H Big Time in D9!)
- **May 30-31, 2025 - 2nd Annual Archery Summer Shoot Out** - <https://agrilife.org/ftbend4h/event/2nd-archery-summer-shoot-out/>

If you have any suggestions or recommendations for programs in the future, please feel free to reach out to us! See all our events at: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/events>

>>> RAISING BACKYARD CHICKENS

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Condensed from the "Five Things to Know About Raising Back Yard Chickens" article published March 25, 2025 at: <https://www.morningagclips.com/five-things-to-know-about-raising-backyard-chickens/>

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — With the rising cost of eggs, more people may be considering raising backyard chickens for fresh, homegrown eggs. However, caring for a flock requires more than just setting up a coop.

Greg Archer, Ph.D., [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#) poultry specialist and associate professor in the [Texas A&M Department of Poultry Science](#), Bryan-College Station, shares what aspiring backyard chicken owners should know before getting started.

1. Raising chickens requires a significant investment of time and money - Between feed, coop materials, bedding and potential medical costs, raising chickens can add up. The idea of saving money on eggs can be appealing. However, buying eggs at the store may be a more cost-effective option for many. If you're serious about raising your own backyard brood, take a look at AgriLife Extension's [online resources](#) to help you get started.

2. Choosing the right chicken breeds and caring for chicks - Backyard flocks often start with baby chicks, which require special care in their first few weeks. Archer suggested starting them out in a warm, draft-free brooding area, especially during the winter. Be sure to select chickens that are well suited to your location. (Not all can take Texas heat.)

3. Proper coop setup and care for adults - Backyard chickens need a safe, spacious and well-ventilated coop. A good rule of thumb is approximately 2 to 4 square feet per bird, at a minimum. They'll also need a roosting area with an elevated perch in a chicken coop. Perches should ideally be around 18 inches high, where chickens naturally prefer to sleep. Once set up, good coop maintenance practices include:

- Clean bedding: Replace shavings weekly and keep the coop dry.
- Daily cleaning: Shovel waste and refresh food and water.
- Fresh feed: Buy feed one bag at a time to maintain freshness.



4. Chicken safety and protection from predators and disease - Both backyard chickens and their eggs attract nearby predators who eat one or both, such as raccoons, foxes and even household pets. A secure coop and run help deter unwanted visitors.

5. Have fun and be responsible with your backyard flock - Archer's final parting thought is while, yes, backyard flocks are often a lot more work than people may realize when they first start, they can be incredibly rewarding.

See the full article at: <https://www.morningagclips.com/five-things-to-know-about-raising-backyard-chickens/>



What is the AgriStress Helpline?

The AgriStress Helpline® is a free and confidential crisis and support line that you can call or text 24/7. The helpline is answered by trained professionals who can offer support and help you find mental health and agriculture-related resources in your area.

<https://www.agrisafe.org/agristress-helpline/>

>>> All in fun....

What did the farmer get when he crossed a chili pepper, a shovel and a terrier?

He got a hot-diggity-dog!



SCHOOL & COMMUNITY GARDENS <<<

At the Sienna HOA annual spring landscaping seminar (March 15, 2025), Gabrielle Butler, County Extension Educator for School and Community Gardens, discussed how 'Nature Play' and consistent participation in community gardens impacts the social, physical, psychological, and environmental health of youth and families, in a presentation titled "Increasing Nature Connectedness in Urban Communities."

Future programming will focus supporting the managers and volunteers of local school and community gardens, while educating youth, families, and community members on their purpose and benefits. By facilitating opportunities for local garden managers to involve and engage the public, a network of Fort Bend County's active CSGs to combat plant blindness, foster deeper connections with nature, and support family & community health is being developed.



>>> TEN STEPS TO VEGETABLE GARDENING SUCCESS



1. Begin with a plan
2. Choose the site
3. Prepare the site
4. Choose the vegetables
5. Plant the garden
6. Take care of the plants
7. Clean up the garden
8. Plan rotations
9. Keep learning
10. Have fun and keep gardening

Modern vegetable gardens:

- Provide a way to relax and alleviate job stress
- Produce the flavor and nutrition of fresh, home-grown vegetables
- Can be enjoyed by people of all ages
- Offer a hands-on way for children to learn where food comes from and what is required to produce it
- Teach children the values of responsibility and reward
- Give adults and children opportunities to be more physically active
- Offer the enjoyment of literally "eating the fruits of your labors"

Download the full publication from AgriLife Learn at:
<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/s/product/10-steps-to-vegetable-garden-success/01t4x000004OfiBAAS>

>>> MITIGATING THE IMPACTS OF INVASIVE SPECIES IN TEXAS

Trees, pests and diseases to track and manage

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Invasive pests, plants and diseases cause many negative impacts to the Texas landscape, from the displacement of native trees to the killing of native species. Because of the widespread impact of invasives, Texas A&M Forest Service goes to great lengths to help mitigate impacts and highlight those efforts. The agency also partners with other research organizations to track the spread of invasive pests, diseases and tree species.

Invasive species have two main characteristics: They are non-native to an ecosystem and their introduction is likely to cause harm to the economy, environment or human health. Non-native species do not naturally originate in the area or region where they are found.

“Human activity is often responsible for introducing non-native and invasive species into new ecosystems,” said Demian Gomez, Texas A&M Forest Service regional forest health coordinator, Austin. “This includes planting ornamental trees and plants or accidentally transporting insects in wood packaging material, firewood or other goods.”

Invasive species currently posing a significant risk to Texas ecosystems include:

Emerald ash borer

Native to eastern Asia, the emerald ash borer, EAB, is a destructive, invasive wood-boring pest that has killed millions of ash trees in the U.S. and Texas. EAB was first detected in the U.S. in 2002 and reported in Texas in 2016 in Harrison County. Since then, EAB has been detected in 27 Texas counties. Adult EAB lay eggs in the bark of ash trees in the spring and early summer, and the larvae burrow into the bark. The larvae feed on the phloem and cambium, disrupting the flow of nutrients within the tree and leading to its death. EAB emerges from the tree as adults, leaving D-shaped holes in the bark. Texas A&M Forest Service works with communities to develop, communicate and implement local EAB preparedness plans. And while the agency assists with planning, trapping and monitoring, the Texas Department of Agriculture is ultimately responsible for EAB management and coordination in Texas.

Salt cedar

Salt cedar trees dominate rangelands and ranches, especially in the Texas Panhandle, exacerbated by the loss of cottonwood and willow trees to wildfires. They were first introduced in the U.S. as ornamental trees in the 1800s but escaped cultivation in the 1870s. Salt cedars are aggressive invasive trees that can consume nearly 200 gallons of water in a day, and their leaves and stems secrete high concentrations of salt into the ground around them. These factors diminish nutrients for native species. Additionally, salt cedars lack desirable nutrients for foraging wildlife. Salt cedars are highly resistant to control, including mechanical management. The best removal method is spraying imazapyr or an imazapyr-glyphosate mix onto the tree.

Brazilian peppertree

Brazilian peppertree has invaded thousands of acres in coastal habitats since its introduction to Texas in the 1950s. This invasion has caused the shading and killing of native vegetation and allergic reactions in some people. Since 2014, Texas A&M Forest Service has worked with the Texas Gulf Region Cooperative Weed Management Area in Port Aransas to address Brazilian peppertree through eradication and education. The agency has also collaborated on a project led by the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center to reduce the impacts of Brazilian peppertree in the Texas Gulf Coast since 2023. The study aims to integrate tiny insects called thrips, or biocontrol, with ongoing mechanical and herbicide management of the Brazilian peppertree.

(Continued on the next page)



MITIGATING THE IMPACTS OF INVASIVE SPECIES IN TEXAS CONTINUED



Laurel wilt and the red bay ambrosia beetle

Laurel wilt is a vascular fungal pathogen spread by the red ambrosia beetle. The pathogen was first reported in Texas in 2015 and has spread eastward, killing more than half a billion trees in the Lauraceae family. This loss has severely impacted red bay and sassafras trees as well as the avocado industry in the southeastern U.S. This vascular fungal pathogen, transported and cultivated by the beetle to be used as a food source for larvae, can kill trees in less than a month. Texas A&M Forest Service is working with public and private partners to study the spread and distribution of the disease/insect complex.

Silktree/Mimosa

Mimosa trees are widely used in landscaping due to their fragrant purple flowers and silky petals that bloom in the spring. This Asian native tree was introduced to Texas in 1745. Mimosas adapt to various soils, and their seed coat is impermeable, allowing years-long dormancy. Because of their large spanning canopy, mimosa trees can severely reduce sunlight and nutrients for native species. Mimosa trees resprout with vigor when trimmed or wounded. Mimosas should be cut down to the stump and then immediately thoroughly sprayed with herbicides to ensure the tree is killed down to the roots. Larger mimosa trees can be injected with Imazapyr or Triclopyr herbicides as a safer alternative to cutting the tree down.

Texans can do their part

Since human activity often introduces invasive species, Texas A&M Forest Service recommends mindful tree planting and activities. Moving firewood can be a culprit in transporting pests and diseases, so it should be burned near where it is purchased or cut down. Additionally, landowners can help prevent the spread of these invasive tree species and diseases by diversifying the native tree species on their land, creating a naturally competitive ecosystem.

Learn more about planting the right tree in the right place at <https://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/>.

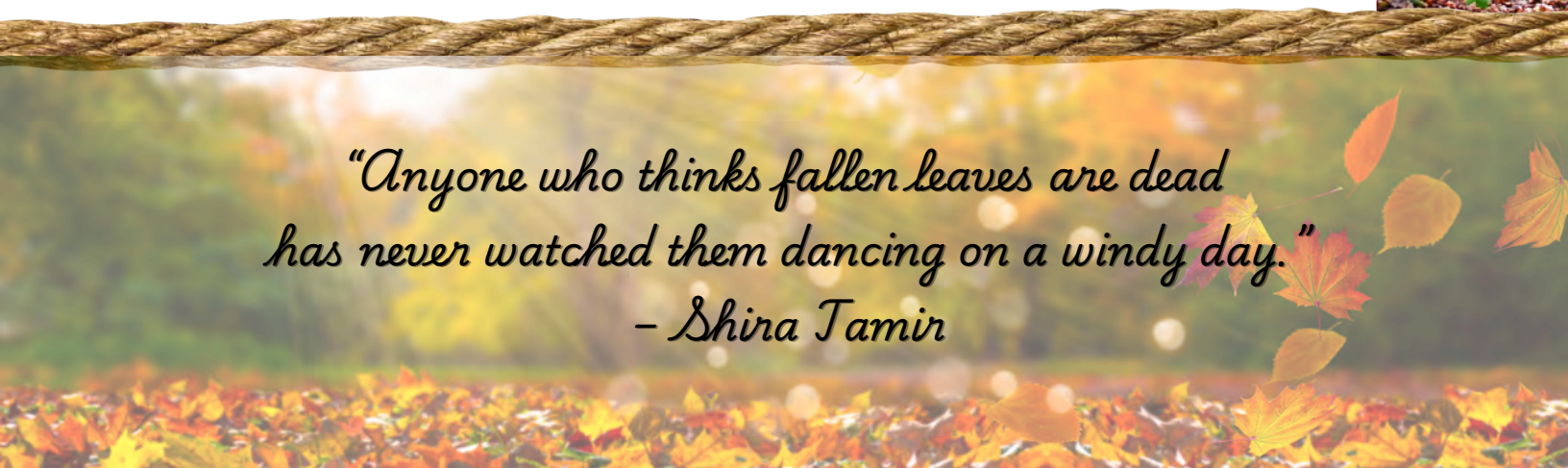
— Article by Jonathan Stuckey
Texas A&M AgriLife Communications

Published in Morning AgClips <https://www.morningagclips.com/mitigating-the-impacts-of-invasive-species-in-texas/>



*"Anyone who thinks fallen leaves are dead
has never watched them dancing on a windy day."*

— Shira Tamir



PREVENT NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH SNAKES THIS SPRING <<<

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Springtime in Texas brings warmer temperatures, blooming wildflowers and more active snakes.



As these reptiles emerge from brumation — a state similar to hibernation in mammals — the chances of encountering them increase. However, understanding snake behaviors and basic safety tips can help prevent unnecessary fear and reduce the risk of a bite. Experts from [Texas A&M AgriLife](https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu) share essential tips to help Texans stay safe while enjoying the outdoors.

Tip 1: Stay aware of your surroundings - Snakes typically begin to appear in search of food and shelter during February to March as temperatures warm. Wearing closed-toe shoes and carrying a flashlight when walking outside at night to avoid a surprise encounter and to provide protection from bites.

Tip 2: Learn how to identify snakes in your area - Out of the roughly 75 species native to Texas, only about a dozen are venomous.

Tip 3: Make the area around your home less inviting to snakes - Keep grass short and trim overgrown vegetation, remove woodpiles, debris or clutter where they could hide and control rodents and insects as they attract snakes looking for food.

Tip 4: Don't let snake myths lead to fear and learn to appreciate their benefits - Snakes are not naturally aggressive and prefer to avoid humans when possible. Snakes play an important role in Texas' ecosystems by controlling insects and small mammal populations, and recognizing their benefits may ease common fears.

Tip 5: Understand snake behavior to prevent dangerous encounters for you and your pets - Take precautions to reduce the chance of a pet encountering a snake, such as having them on a leash during walks. Copperheads blend into leaf litter and can be found in a range of environments, including woodlands and grasslands. Cottonmouths prefer to be near water, including creeks, ponds and springs.

See the full article at <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2025/03/12/five-ways-to-prevent-negative-encounters-with-snakes-this-spring/>

We'd like to hear from you!

Do you have news you could share with our readers about being a producer? Raising livestock? Or, perhaps you have some great advice on gardening, resources or tips?

Do you have a generational story of gardening or farming that would be a great feature story?

We'd love to hear from you!

Send in your news, suggestions or tips to:
Lorraine.Niemeyer@ag.tamu.edu



HARVEST OF THE MONTH <<<



TOMATOES

Tomatoes are the most popular garden vegetable crop in Texas. They are a good source of vitamin A and fair source of vitamin C.

Fresh tomatoes are popular in salads, on sandwiches and sliced.

Tomatoes grow well in most Texas areas if planted in soil that drains well. They need at least 6 hours of sunlight each day. Buy healthy, green plants that are 6 to 8 inches tall. Do not set out tomato plants until all danger of frost has passed.

Source: Aggie-Horticulture.tamu.edu

WATERING

Water the tomato plants slowly and deeply to help them develop a strong root system. Do not let the tomatoes wilt severely, or yields and fruit quality will be low.

CAGING

You can cage taller tomatoes to give them support placing them over younger plants.

HARVESTING

For best quality, pick tomatoes at full color. If you pick them when they are pink, let them ripen at room temperature. They may be stored in the refrigerator after they reach full color



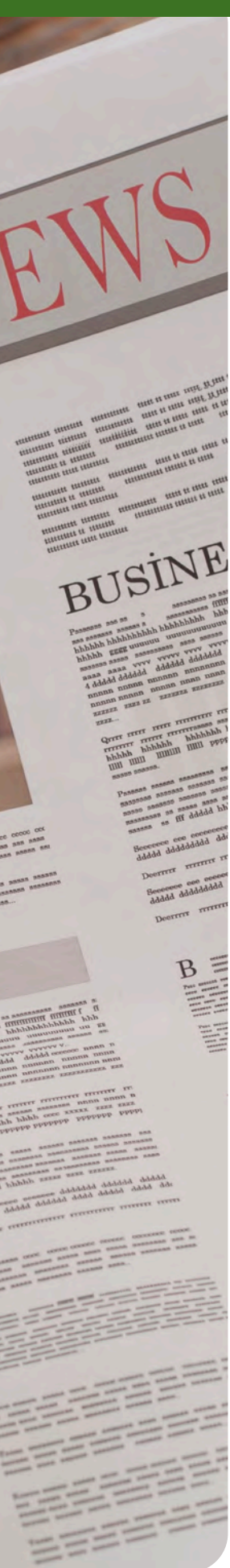
Now for some fun!

Find the beneficial honey bee buzzing around this newsletter. See if you can spot it!

It looks like this:



Answer on the last page!



IN THE NEWS



Agriculture Affects Everyone, Every Day

National Ag Day was March 18, with the theme, “Together We Grow.” As the world population soars, there is even greater demand for the food, fiber, and renewable resources produced in the United States.

Agriculture provides almost everything we eat, use, and wear daily, and is increasingly contributing to fuel and other bio-products.

Read the full article at: <https://www.morningagclips.com/agriculture-affects-everyone-every-day/>

Analyzing Genetic 'Signatures' May Give Insight Into What Stresses Wild Bees

A new method of examining gene expression patterns called landscape transcriptomics may help pinpoint what causes bumble bees stress and could eventually give insight into why bee populations are declining overall, according to a study led by researchers at Penn State. The team published their findings in the journal Molecular Ecology.

Read the article at: <https://www.morningagclips.com/analyzing-genetic-signatures-may-give-insight-into-what-stresses-wild-bees/>

Egg Prices Continue to Climb

Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza, HPAI, continue to drive egg prices to record highs across the U.S., said Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts. Read the full article at: <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2025/01/22/egg-prices-continue-to-climb/>



Texas A&M AgriLife Fills Critical Knowledge Gaps on Javelina

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Researchers with Texas A&M AgriLife are laying the foundation for the science-based management and conservation of javelinas, or collared peccary. Until recently, this native species seemed overshadowed by other Texas wildlife and plagued by misconceptions.

The Javelina is often mistaken as a feral hog, but the two are not related. Javelinas are native to Texas and are not considered a nuisance animal, as is the non-native feral hog.

Researchers also hope to address misconceptions and develop a greater appreciation for javelinas among Texans.

See the full article at: <https://www.morningagclips.com/texas-am-agrilife-fills-critical-knowledge-gaps-on-javelina/>



NOTICE OF UPCOMING OFFICE HOLIDAY CLOSURES*



The next holiday closure for our offices will be:
Friday, April 18, 2025 for the Good Friday Holiday

*(Please note the office will also close at 3:30 pm on Thursday, April 17th)

Our offices will also be closed April 22, 2025 for our Urban
Partnership Synergy Symposium with some staff also out April 23,
2025 for day two of the Symposium.



Fort Bend County Extension Office

Office Hours: Monday-Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
(Except for Holidays)

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>>> Making a Difference....

The Fort Bend County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Cooperative Extension Program (CEP) educates Texans in all areas of agriculture, youth & adult life skills, human capital & leadership, and community economic development.

Extension offers the knowledge resources of both Texas A&M and Prairie View A&M Universities to educate Texans for self-improvement, individual action, and community problem solving. We are part of a statewide educational network and a member of the Texas A&M University System linked in a unique partnership with the nationwide Cooperative Extension System and Fort Bend County Commissioners' Court.

ANSWER to the hidden honey bee as mentioned on page six:

The honey bee is buzzing on page 7
shown by the red arrow below

PREVENT NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH SNAKES THIS SPRING

Springtime in Texas brings warmer temperatures, blooming wildflowers and more active snakes.

As these reptiles emerge from brumation — a state similar to hibernation in mammals — the chances of encountering them increase. However, understanding snake behaviors and basic safety tips can help prevent unnecessary fear and reduce the risk of a bite. Experts from Texas A&M AgriLife share essential tips to help Texans stay safe while enjoying the outdoors.

Tip 1: Stay aware of your surroundings - Snakes typically begin to appear in search of food and shelter during February to March as temperatures warm. Wearing closed-toe shoes and carrying a flashlight when walking outside at night to avoid a surprise encounter and to provide protection from bites.



Bees provide high-quality food such as honey, royal jelly and pollen and produce products such as beeswax, and propolis.

We hope you enjoyed this issue of our Ag Newsletter!

Our newsletter is produced every other month:

(February, April, June, August, October, December)

If you have agriculture photos, topics, clean humor, or other ideas you would like to see included, submit your ideas to lorraine.niemeyer@ag.tamu.edu

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating. Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in any Extension activities, are encouraged to contact the Fort Bend County Extension Office at 281-342-3034 for assistance five working days prior to activity.