

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

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**February is  
Potato Lovers Month!**

## In this issue:

Page 1 Potato Lovers Month  
Page 2 New County Extension Educator  
Page 3 Avian Bird Flu  
Page 4 Upcoming Events  
Page 5 Protecting Plants from Freeze Damage  
& We're Hiring!  
Page 6 Harvest of the Month / Search  
Page 7 In the News  
Page 8 In the News Continued  
Page 9 Office Closures, Contact & Search  
Answer

## FEBRUARY IS POTATO LOVERS MONTH!

### February Fun Facts:

- The name February comes from the Latin word "februum" which means purification.
- February is the only month where it's possible to go the entire time without a full moon.
- The odds of being born on the leap year date of Feb. 29th are about 1 in 1,461.
- January and February were the last months added to the Roman numeral calendar.

That's right! February is Potato Lovers Month which began in 1987 when it was officially declared. You can celebrate the month by taking a trip to a local potato farm, visit a farmers market or just do some research on growing and harvesting potatoes. Lets not forget about eating them and maybe trying a new recipe!

Potatoes can be enjoyed in countless ways from creamy mashed to crispy fries. Not only can you enjoy these tasty vegetables, but they also have nutritional benefits packed with essential vitamins and minerals. They even have vitamin C and potassium and add fiber to your diet.

Supporting local farmers is another reason for this celebration. Potato Lovers Month highlights the hard work and dedication of farmers and gardeners who grow this staple crop. Happy eating!

Source: *Days of the Year*

# >>> MEET GABRIELLE, OUR NEW COUNTY EXTENSION EDUCATOR FOR COMMUNITY & SCHOOL GARDENS

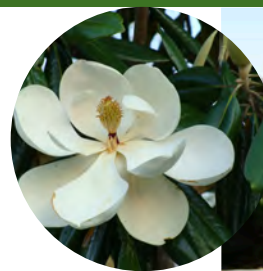


Gabrielle Butler was raised in Fort Bend County from the age of three and attended the Stafford Municipal School District (K-12), graduating as the Class of 2020 Salutatorian. She went on to become a Walker County Master Gardener (Class of 2021) while earning her Bachelor of Science in Plant and Soil Science with a minor in Entrepreneurship (Summa Cum Laude).

Gabrielle is passionate about educating her local community on the benefits of permaculture and urban homesteading—to promote holistic wellness and combat food insecurity.

Her experience as a therapeutic horticulture instructor at an inpatient hospital in the Houston area has prepared her to provide accessible and engaging horticultural experiences for community members of all ages, abilities, and lifestyles.

Gabrielle's favorite flower is the Saucer Magnolia, and propagating plants is her favorite horticultural task. You can always find Gabrielle picking up leaves, seed pods, and flower blossoms everywhere she goes—and in her free time, she repurposes common household items into botanical art and home decor.



## 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](mailto:Lorraine.Niemeyer@ag.tamu.edu)





# >>> AVIAN INFLUENZA

*With bird flu being in the news, we wanted to share a brief excerpt from an article taken from AGRILIFE TODAY Feb2023 by Maggie Berger*  
<https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2023/02/09/what-is-avian-influenza/>

## **What is avian influenza?**

It is a viral infection in the same class as human influenza and can present as a respiratory infection. Avian influenza has a high morbidity and mortality rate, approaching 100%. An infected bird will infect other birds very quickly, with death almost certain within 48 hours.

## **Where does avian influenza come from and how is it spread?**

The virus has been spread by the wild bird population. They serve as carriers and spread it as they migrate. Poultry and other birds can pick up the virus particles via respiratory exposure as well as through feces. Poultry can pick it up simply by being in the same space where an infected wild bird once stood. While avian influenza is of greater concern to commercial poultry producers, backyard flock owners can have birds become infected.

The virus thrives in cold weather. Previous outbreaks in the U.S. have subsided in summer months due to the heat, however, the most recent outbreak that began in 2021 did not. It diminished, but never completely went away, so it is no longer considered an exotic virus that can be eradicated. It is here to stay.

## **What symptoms should poultry owners look for in their flock?**

The first thing people will likely notice is dead birds. They may also notice birds that are lethargic, have ruffled feathers or look depressed. Essentially, what you would imagine when you think of a sick bird. If people happen to see an infected bird while still alive, it will very likely die within hours to a day.

## **What should you do if you suspect a bird in your flock has avian influenza?**

If producers suspect they have infected birds, the best thing to do is contact the Texas [Animal Health Commission](#) or [TVMDL](#). Those agencies can guide them through the appropriate next steps, which will include submitting samples to TVMDL for testing. A confirmed positive test triggers a series of regulatory processes that could eventually result in facility quarantine and depopulation.

## **What can producers do to protect their flocks against avian influenza?**

The most important thing for anyone raising poultry is to be vigilant and strict with their biosecurity measures. Prevention is really the only treatment for avian influenza. While it would be best not to let others on your poultry premise, if you must, make sure they follow all biosecurity protocols such as a change of clothes and shoes. It would also be best if producers didn't visit other poultry premises and follow strict biosecurity guidelines themselves.

The same general principles apply to backyard flock owners as well. It is also important not to let your poultry co-mingle with wild birds or in areas where wild birds have access, especially ponds that may attract ducks and geese. That is where some of the positive cases in Texas originated.

Additional information on avian influenza and biosecurity practices can be found here: [tx.ag.AlandBiosecurity](https://tx.ag.AlandBiosecurity).

Download the publication on Avian Influenza and Biosecurity Practices at <https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/s/product/avian-influenza-and-biosecurity-practices/01t4x000004OfsaAAC>

# >>> UPCOMING EVENTS

## AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE EVENTS:

Mark  
YOUR  
Calendar

4

- **February 6 - 40th Anniversary Annual Fort Bend Regional Vegetable Conference** Hurry! Late Registration ends February 4th. Location: Fort Bend County Fairgrounds <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/event/40th-annual-fort-bend-regional-vegetable-conference/>
- **February 8 - Rise and Shine Bingo Fundraiser** Visit: <https://fortbend.agrilife.org/event/14571/>
- **February 12 - 8 Hour Termite Category Training Course in Austin, TX**  
Visit: <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/ereg/index.php?eventid=821031&>
- **February 13 - Harris County - Watershed Steward Workshop**, 1:00-5:00 in Spring, TX, visit: <https://harris.agrilife.org/event/watershed-steward-workshop-february-13th/>
- **February 15 - Fort Bend Master Gardeners 2025 Fruit Tree Sale** (Open to the Public), 9am until noon or sold out, held at Fort Bend County Fairgrounds - Barn H, For more details, visit: <https://fbmg.org/events/fort-bend-master-gardeners-2025-fruit-tree-sale-open-to-the-public/>
- **February 19 - 8 Hour Structural Pest Control Technician Training Course in Austin TX**, visit <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/ereg/index.php?eventid=820947&>
- **February 26 - Brazoria County - Pasture Pals: Ruminant Care**, 6:30-8:30 pm. To register and get information, visit: <https://brazoria.agrilife.org/event/pasture-pals-ruminant-care-essentials/>
- **February 28 - Virtual - Landscape Success: Landscape Basics** <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/64811234567>
- **February 28 - Austin County - Small Farms & Vegetable Conference**  
<https://austin.agrilife.org/event/small-farms-vegetable-conference/>
- **March 1 - Grow Your Own: Setting Up a Raised Bed/Planter**  
<https://fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own-2/>
- **March 8 - Fort Bend Master Gardener Spring Vegetable & Herb Plant Sale** (Open to the Public) 9am-noon or sold out, held indoors at the Bud O'Shieles Community Center <https://fbmg.org/events/ft-bend-master-gardener-spring-vegetable-herb-plant-sale-open-to-the-public/>
- **March 28 - Virtual - Landscape Success: Flowering Plants for 4 Seasons**  
<https://fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success/>

## AGRILIFE EXTENSION YOUTH EVENTS - Fort Bend 4-H:

- **Submissions Accepted Through February 10 - Fort Bend County 4-H Photo Contest** is LIVE! The contest is open to all ages and is not limited to Fort Bend County residents. Enter and upload photos at <https://www.gogophotocontest.com/fortbend4-h>
- **March 10 - Home School STEM Labs, Spring Break Daily Workshops**  
<https://agrilife.org/ftbend4h/event/home-school-stem-labs-2/>
- **March 17 - Home School STEM Labs - CPR/AED/First Aid Certification**  
<https://agrilife.org/ftbend4h/event/home-school-stem-labs-2/>

*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>*



**All in fun....**  
**Who tells the best chicken jokes?**  
**Comedi-hens!** *HAHA*



# »»» HOW TO PROTECT PLANTS IN THE COLD

The groundhog saw its shadow predicting six more weeks of winter. Whether that is true or not, it is a good idea to know how to protect your plants. Frosts and freeze can damage or kill exposed plants, especially those in containers, said Lisa Whittlesey, AgriLife Extension program specialist and international coordinator of the Junior Master Gardener program, Bryan-College Station. Damage can vary greatly among plant varieties, and cold-sensitive plants will require more protection than hardier plants.

AgriLife Extension has comprehensive information on [protecting landscape plants and horticultural crops](#) from frost and freezes.

Watering plants and making sure they are not drought-stressed before freezing temperatures arrive can help, Whittlesey said. Watering just before the freeze can also help because water creates warmth and loses heat slowly.

“Drought-stressed plants are more susceptible to the cold,” she said. “And if you can’t bring a plant inside, the best option is to cover them, remember to place them in a location that gets ample sunlight and to water them.”

Plants in containers should be moved inside the home or garage — any space where temperatures will stay above freezing.

If container plants can’t be moved indoors, put them on the south side of the house, water them well and pile on mulch, leaves or hay to protect the roots and/or cover them with a frost blanket. Cold-sensitive landscape plants can also be covered with similar protection.

When covering plants, drape them with cardboard or cloth material to the ground and secure it, she said. The idea is to trap enough warmer air escaping from the soil to protect plants from a killing freeze.

Stringing holiday lights around sensitive plants and covering them with a tarp can provide protection from light freezes, she said.

See the full article at: <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2025/01/16/prepare-for-winter-weather/>



## »»» WE'RE HIRING!

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension-Fort Bend County is currently seeking a County Extension Agent - Agriculture Natural Resources.



This position will have a livestock / animal focus to assist our community with education, assist with 4-H animal validations, etc. Having training and/or practical experience with livestock and animals is preferred.

If your goal is the pursuit of excellence and your vision is to make a difference in this world, we invite you to explore our opportunities to discover what a career at Texas A&M AgriLife has to offer you.

**To see and apply for the job, go to:** [https://tamus.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/AgriLife\\_Extension\\_External/details/County-Extension-Agent---Agriculture-Natural-Resources--Fort-Bend-County- R-074284](https://tamus.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/AgriLife_Extension_External/details/County-Extension-Agent---Agriculture-Natural-Resources--Fort-Bend-County- R-074284)



# HARVEST OF THE MONTH <<<

## RED LEAF LETTUCE

Red leaf lettuce has large, open leaves and is a reddish-purple color. Lettuce is harvested by cutting the short stem underneath the leafy mass called the “head.”

Other varieties include romaine, green and butter. Red leaf lettuce is fat-free and offers more nutrients than green lettuce. As one of the world’s most popular salad vegetables, lettuce comes in many shapes, sizes and colors. It is usually served cold and fresh although it can be cooked or steamed for a culinary adventure.

Source: TDA, Squaremeals.org

Red leaf lettuce has a mild, crispy texture and is often used in salads. Its color is either red or reddish-purple. This vegetable comes in several varieties, including New Red Fire lettuce, Red Sails lettuce, Redina lettuce, Galactic lettuce and Benito lettuce.

### BENEFITS

Red leaf lettuce is low in sodium and calories, and generally healthier to eat than green lettuce, providing a lot of vitamin A, vitamin K and potassium. Talking to Students about Vitamin A Vitamin A has many functions, the most notable being its role in maintaining good vision.



### Now for some fun!

A beneficial insect to our garden, the dragonfly, has been flying around this newsletter and landed on one of the pages...see if you can spot it!

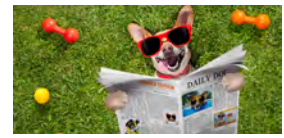
It looks like this:



Answer on the last page!



# >>> IN THE NEWS.....



7

## Proper Tree Planting for More 'Fruitful' Results



Larry Stein, Ph.D., professor and Regents Fellow in the Texas A&M Department of Horticultural Sciences and AgriLife Extension fruit specialist, Uvalde, said when it comes to fruit trees, plant in late December through February. The key is that trees be totally dormant at the time of planting. This helps them establish some root growth before they break dormancy in the spring which can make a big difference during the harsh summer conditions.

Read the full article at <https://www.morningagclips.com/proper-tree-planting-for-more-fruitful-results/> to get information on:

- Deciding what fruit tree to plant
- Where to plant fruit trees
- How to plant fruit trees
- Fertilizing and more!



## Summer Snowflake Named Newest Texas Superstar



Snowflakes (*Leucojum aestivum*) are long-lived perennial bulbs that emerge during the late winter, then produce numerous stalks of small, white, bell-shaped flowers above green foliage during early spring. The foliage then goes dormant for the summer.

## TPWD News - New World Screwworm Dec2024

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) asks hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts in South Texas to monitor for animals affected by New World Screwworm (NWS) after a recent detection in Mexico.

### What is New World Screwworm?

New World screwworms are larvae or maggots of the NWS fly (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*), that cause a painful condition known as NWS myiasis. NWS flies lay eggs in open wounds or orifices of live tissue such as nostrils, eyes or mouth. These eggs hatch into dangerous parasitic larvae, and the maggots burrow or screw into flesh with sharp mouth hooks. Wounds can become larger, and an infestation can often cause serious, deadly damage or death to the infected animal.

NWS primarily infests livestock but can also affect humans and wildlife including deer and birds.

Clinical signs of NWS myiasis may include:

- Irritated or depressed behavior
- Loss of appetite
- Head shaking
- Smell of decaying flesh
- Presence of fly larvae (maggots) in wounds
- Isolation from other animals or people

### How to Help

While in the field enjoying activities such as hunting, hiking or bird watching, hunters and outdoor enthusiasts are asked to report suspected signs of NWS. Any wildlife with suspicious clinical signs consistent with NWS should be immediately reported to a **local wildlife biologist**. Livestock reports should be made to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Additional information about NWS can be found on **TAHC**, **USDA** and the **Center for Disease Control** NWS webpages.

Source: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/newsmedia/releases/?req=20241230b>



## Texas A&M AgriLife Research Aims for Better Control of Widespread Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Texas A&M AgriLife Research scientists have received two grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Science Foundation to develop better control and understanding of tomato spotted wilt virus, one of the top 10 most economically important plant viruses in the world.

Kiran Gadhave, Ph.D., AgriLife Research scientist and assistant professor in the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Department of Entomology, Amarillo, will lead one grant and is a co-investigator on the other.

Read the full article which includes “Knowns and unknowns about the versatile virus” at <https://www.morningagclips.com/texas-am-agrilife-research-aims-for-better-control-of-widespread-tomato-spotted-wilt-virus/>



## 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/>



## Wildfire Preparedness Publication to Aid Texas Landowners



A new publication released by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service aims at helping landowners take preventive measures to mitigate the impact of wildfires.

Wildfire: Preparing the Ranch is an online educational resource debuting at Fire and Rangeland Management Symposiums in the Texas Panhandle. The first event was in Pampa on Jan. 21 and a second event will be in Canadian on Feb. 13. The resource is designed to equip Texas agricultural producers with educational information and tools to prepare for wildfires.

The publication includes information on identifying early or intense wildfire environments, risk management, infrastructure protection, livestock evacuation and a wildfire preparation checklist.

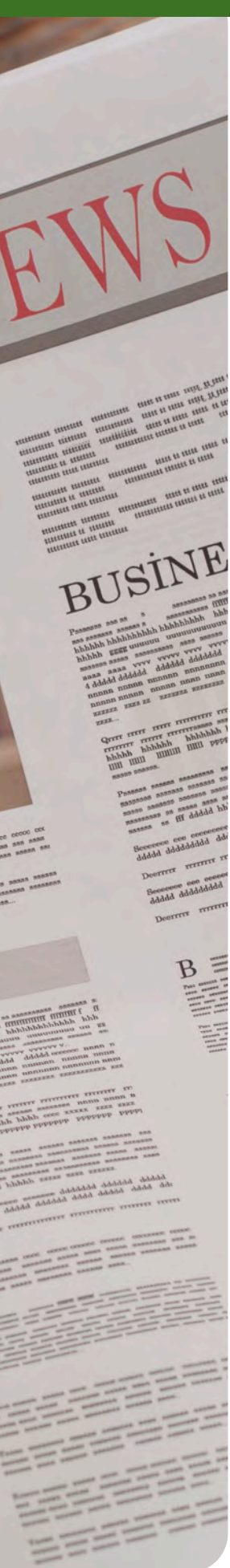
The publication draws on the expertise of AgriLife Extension specialists, the agency’s Disaster Assessment and Recovery agents, and the Texas A&M Forest Service – all part of The Texas A&M University System.

“Landowners and producers understand Mother Nature better than anyone else,” said Morgan Treadwell, Ph.D., lead author, AgriLife Extension range specialist, San Angelo, and professor in the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management.

“This publication was created to supplement existing producer knowledge and present science- and experience-based actionable, proactive steps and strategies,” Treadwell said. “This will serve as a one-stop shop in living and ranching with the reality of wildfire conditions.”

Read the full article here:

<https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2025/01/22/wildfire-preparedness-publication/>





# >>> OFFICE CLOSURES

9

## NOTICE OF UPCOMING OFFICE HOLIDAY CLOSURES\*

Sorry! we are  
**closed**

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 early the workday prior.)**

**Our offices will also be closed one or two days in April for off-site training. Be sure to see our April newsletter for more details.**



### Fort Bend County Extension Office

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

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension County Director: Dr. Amy Ressler

*Mailing & Physical Address:*  
1402 Band Road, Suite 100  
Rosenberg, TX 77471

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*Email:* [fort-bend-tx@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:fort-bend-tx@ag.tamu.edu)



QR CODE to Website

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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 dragonfly as mentioned on page six:

**The dragonfly is hovering on page 1 shown by the red arrow below**



Dragonflies eat many common garden pests such as mosquitoes, flies and gnats, which can help keep your garden naturally pest free!

*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](mailto: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.