



# HORTICULTURE

## Newsletter



Welcome to the first newsletter of 2026. As we begin a new year, we remain committed to providing research-based horticulture education, promoting environmentally sound practices, and supporting the needs of our community. We are excited to start the year with our February Landscape Conference, which will offer practical, science-based information for homeowners, landscape professionals, and horticulture enthusiasts. Additional details about the conference, including session topics and registration information, are available on pages 2-3. This newsletter will continue to share timely educational programs, seasonal horticulture tips, and AgriLife Extension resources to help landscapes across Nueces County thrive.

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— 27th Annual —  
**HOME &  
GARDEN  
SHOW**  
— CORPUS CHRISTI —

DIY fans and décor lovers, save the date! The 27th Annual Corpus Christi Home and Garden Show return to the Hilliard Center January 23rd to 25th! Explore fresh ideas for upgrades, outdoor living, and inspiration all in one place.

#### Event Hours:

- Friday: 2 PM to 6 PM
- Saturday: 10 AM to 6 PM
- Sunday: 11 AM to 5 PM

FREE Admission

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI LIFE**  
EXTENSION

# 2026 Coastal Bend Landscape Conference to Focus on Drought-Resilient Landscapes

*By: Daisy J. Castillo*

*County Extension Agent - Horticulture*

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service*

*Nueces County*

Corpus Christi, Texas — Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will host the 2026 Coastal Bend Landscape Conference on Wednesday, February 25, 2026, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:35 p.m. at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center, located at 10345 TX-44, Corpus Christi, Texas. The annual conference is designed for landscape professionals, pesticide applicators, horticulture enthusiasts, and homeowners seeking practical, research-based solutions for managing landscapes in drought-prone environments

The 2026 conference will emphasize water conservation, plant health, and sustainable landscape practices tailored specifically to South Texas conditions. Participants will receive 5 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), including 1 Laws and Regulations CEU, 3 General CEUs, and 1 Integrated Pest Management CEU, making the event valuable for licensed pesticide applicators and industry professionals

Educational sessions will cover a wide range of timely topics, including updates on pesticide rules and regulations, xeriscaping for Coastal Bend landscapes, smart watering strategies during drought, turfgrass health and pest management, keeping palms healthy during drought & heat events, rainwater harvesting for home and landscape use, and native plants for drought-resilient landscapes

Registration options include \$50 for in-person attendance, which includes lunch, and \$35 for virtual participation via Microsoft Teams. Advance registration is required and available online through Eventbrite.

For additional information or questions regarding registration, participants may contact the Nueces County Extension Office at 361-767-5223.

Individuals with disabilities who require auxiliary aids or services are encouraged to contact the Nueces County Extension Office at least eight days prior to the program to allow adequate time for accommodation.



# 2026 Coastal Bend Landscape Conference

Wednesday February 25<sup>th</sup> 2026  
8:00AM-3:35PM

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER  
10345 TX-44, CORPUS CHRISTI, TX 78406

*5 CEU's*

- 1 Laws and Regulations
- 3 General
- 1 Integrated Pest Management

*Cost:*

\$50 Attend in Person (lunch included)  
\$35 Attend online (Teams)

*Register at:*

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2026-landscape-conference-tickets-1976953513176?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl>



For more information contact the Nueces County  
Extension Office at 361-767-5223

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# Commissioner Miller Warns Texas as China Mystery Seed Package Deliveries

## TDA News

AUSTIN — Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller and the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) today urged Texans to remain vigilant as unsolicited packages containing unidentified seeds continue to arrive at their doorsteps. Since February 2025, TDA has collected seed deliveries at 109 locations across the Lone Star State, totaling 1,101 packs of unsolicited seeds. While small in appearance, these packages represent a serious and ongoing threat to the nation's agricultural biosecurity.

"At a glance, this might seem like a small problem, but this is serious business," said Commissioner Miller. "The possible introduction of an invasive species to the state via these seeds poses real risks to Texas families and the agriculture industry. We need everyone to report these packages when they arrive so the contents may be gathered and disposed of properly."

TDA first became aware of the issue in early February when a resident in Clute, Texas, received an unsolicited package sent from China, containing unidentified seeds and an unknown liquid. In response, TDA immediately warned Texans to exercise extreme caution if they receive packages of unknown origin.

Since that report, it has been discovered that the mystery seed resurgence was not limited to Texas. Similar examples surfaced across the country in 2025, including reports from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. The last unsolicited seed package collection in Texas was conducted on December 29, 2025. These echo similar nationwide incidents first observed in 2020 and underscore the continued risk posed by unsolicited foreign seed shipments, including brushing scams. A brushing scam occurs when sellers send unsolicited, low-value items to random people, who then post fake verified reviews to boost online sales. Due to the risk of introducing an invasive species or other concerns, these mystery seeds could pose a significant threat to agriculture and agricultural producers.

The Texas Department of Agriculture is working closely with federal partners to collect, test, and safely dispose of all unsolicited seed packages. These efforts are critical to protecting Texas farms, ranches, gardens, and natural ecosystems from invasive species and agricultural pests.

"Whether it's part of an ongoing scam or something more sinister, we are determined to protect Texans," said Commissioner Miller. "Unsolicited seeds coming into our country are a risk to American agriculture, our environment, and public safety. Texas isn't going to take chances when it comes to protecting our people and our food supply."

If you receive an unsolicited package, do not open its contents; instead, keep them sealed in their original packaging and contact the Texas Department of Agriculture immediately at 1-(800) TELL-TDA for guidance and safe collection.



# Protect livestock, plants, pipes and pets from winter weather

December 23, 2025 - by [Karn Dhingra](#)

## Prepare to protect livestock

Texas livestock owners face different winter challenges depending on their region, said [Eric Kneese, DVM](#), clinical associate professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

Texas Panhandle producers often face prolonged freezes and blizzards, while Central and East Texas operations cope with wet, cold conditions and wind chills. In South Texas, producers may deal with short but sharp temperature drops.

“Preparation looks different depending on location, but the principles are the same: reduce wind exposure, keep animals dry, ensure reliable water access and provide enough nutrition,” Kneese said. Producers should utilize windbreaks such as tree lines, brush, natural terrain features, barns or temporary barriers such as tarps or plywood on windward sides of shelters. In addition, rolling out hay can help provide dry, insulated ground for livestock to rest. Healthy cattle tolerate cold well when they are dry and shielded from wind. Horses benefit from run-in sheds, covered areas or barn aisles. Reliable water access becomes one of the biggest challenges during freezes. In the Panhandle, many producers rely on tank heaters to keep water from freezing during long cold spells. Farther south in Central Texas, owners may depend on insulated buckets or make twice-daily rounds to break ice by hand. In South Texas, where freezes are shorter but still damaging, producers focus on making sure automatic waterers continue flowing through sudden cold snaps.

Kneese encourages daily checks for frozen troughs and icy footing or declining body condition of livestock. Kneese said many owners underestimate the impact of brief cold snaps, especially when wind and wet conditions combine.

## Water plants and protect tender species

From the subtropical Rio Grande Valley to the cold Panhandle, winter plant protection varies by region as well, said [Mike Arnold, Ph.D.](#). However, watering thoroughly is always the first step. Arnold is a professor in the [Department of Horticultural Sciences](#) in the [Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences](#) and director of [The Gardens at Texas A&M University](#).

Well-watered plants survive freezes better than drought-stressed ones,” Arnold said. “Moist soil freezes more slowly, providing insulation during sudden temperature drops.”

Before a freeze, Arnold recommends homeowners:

- Drain irrigation systems, unhook hoses and cover hose bibs.
- Apply 2-to-3 inches of organic mulch to protect plant roots.
- Cover plants susceptible to damage from cold weather with frost cloths or blankets.
- Place old-style holiday lights beneath frost cloths for especially cold-sensitive plants such as citrus. Do not let the lights contact the frost cloths to avoid fire hazards.

Be sure to remove plant covers once temperatures rise above freezing to prevent overheating, Arnold said.

He also advises leaving dead growth on perennials, bananas, palms and many woody plants until late winter or early spring. Pruning too early can cause freeze damage.

“Be patient. [Learn to love ugly,](#)” he said.

### **Winterize pipes and wells ahead of the first freeze**

Pipe insulation is one of the most important — and often overlooked — winter tasks, said Joel Pigg, [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#) program specialist and [Texas Well Owner Network](#) coordinator, Bryan-College Station.

“It’s always cheaper to prepare and prevent than to fix things,” Pigg said.

He encourages Texans to buy insulation materials early because pipe wrap and heat tape often sell out once freeze warnings are issued.

Northern regions need earlier preparation, but South Texas should also plan for the rare — yet still damaging — deep freezes.

Homeowners should:

- Insulate well houses, wrap pipes and position safe heat sources before cold weather arrives.
- Especially be sure to protect vulnerable pipes in attics or exterior walls.
- Shield pipes from direct wind, which accelerates freezing.

Pigg warned that a single overlooked line can burst and cause major damage. He recommends preparing in October or November and maintaining protections through March or April, since most Texas freezes hit between late January and February.

### **Keep pets indoors and watch for cold-weather risks**

Texas A&M veterinary experts urge Texans to bring pets indoors during freezing weather.

When outdoor time is unavoidable, pets need well-insulated shelters just large enough to trap body heat, said Lori Teller, a clinical professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

Pet homes with rigid foam insulation and elevated floors — filled with deep straw bedding — help keep pets warm. Avoid using blankets and towels because they retain moisture.

Teller said pets most vulnerable to cold include those that are short-coated, small, underweight, elderly or very young. She recommends using sweaters or jackets to help thin-coated pets retain heat. These pets should spend minimal time outside during freezing temperatures.

Signs of hypothermia include shivering, pale gums, reluctance to walk and collapsing.

Salt and chemical deicers can irritate or poison pets. If pets are exposed to these products, owners should wash the paws with warm water and mild shampoo after outdoor exposure, Teller said. She recommends using paw balm and booties for added protection.

If multi-day freezes are forecast, owners should bring pets indoors, stock food and medications, and prepare warm bedding in case of power outages or burst pipes. Texans should also review state and local laws such as the [Safe Outdoor Dogs Act](#), which sets minimum shelter standards during extreme weather.

### **More winter preparation information and resources**

For more information on preparing for severe winter weather:

- Visit AgriLife Extension Disaster Assessment and Recovery’s [winter storms resources page](#).
- Contact your [AgriLife Extension county office](#) for region-specific tips and answers to questions.



**2026**  
**TURFGRASS**  
**SHORT COURSE**  
February 16-19

**Register**

**NOW**

<https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/scsc-ev-054>

**Location:**

**3100 F And B Rd, College Station, Tx 77845**

TEXAS A&M  
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AGGIE TURF

# TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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