

### **Spring Potatoes, February 7-13**

Potatoes are one of America's most popular vegetables and the average American consumes 125 pounds a year. Now is the time of the year to start planning for planting potatoes in your spring garden. Potatoes can be an easy crop to grow and can result in a bountiful harvest. However, potatoes are a cool season crop and if wanting to grow them in your spring garden you need to plant as soon as the threat of frost has passed. Potatoes grow best when the days are warm, and the nights are cool.

Two types of potatoes commonly planted here in Southeast Texas are red and white. The red type is the most popular and store longer than the white type, however the white type has better cooking qualities. Recommended red type varieties are Dark Red Norland, Norland, Red LaSoda, and Viking. Recommended white varieties are Atlantic, Gemchip, Kennebec, and Superior.

Potatoes need full sun and do best in loose, well drained, slightly acid soil. All debris should be removed from the soil before making beds. Soil should be worked into beds that are 10 to 12 inches high and 36 inches apart. Because potatoes need adequate fertilizer early in the season, apply most of the fertilizer just before planting. Use 2 to 3 pounds of complete fertilizer such as 10- 20-10 for each 30 feet of row in bands 2 inches to each side and 1 inch below the seed piece. Do not allow the fertilizer to touch the seed piece. Apply fertilizer by flattening the beds 6 to 8 inches high and 10 to 12 inches wide. Using the corner of a hoe or stick, open a trench about 4 inches deep on each side of the bed. Apply half of the fertilizer in each trench. The seed pieces will be planted in the row between the two bands of fertilizer.

Potatoes are grown from the buds or eyes that are present on potatoes. You should purchase good seed potatoes, do not buy potatoes from the grocery store for planting. One pound of seed potatoes will make 9 to 10 seed pieces. To create seed pieces, you should cut seed potatoes into about the size of a medium egg. Each seed piece needs at least one good bud. Seed pieces should be cut 6 days before planting and remain in a well-ventilated spot until planting, this action will help to prevent rotting after planting.

Potatoes should be planted when soil temperature 4 inches deep reaches 50 degrees F. For Waller County this typically occurs in mid to late February. Plant the seed pieces three inches deep and 12 inches apart. Cover the seed with soil and pack the soil with your hands or feet. Moisture stress followed by irrigation or rainfall can cause cracks in potatoes. To prevent this, keep soil moisture supply constant. Do not over water as this can cause rot or damage to the potatoes. Potatoes should be harvested when the tops begin to die, and the potato skin becomes firm. This typically occurs around 95 to 110 days after planting.

Potatoes are one of the most popular vegetables in America. By planning now for your spring garden, you can enjoy a bountiful potato harvest and can enjoy home grown French fries.

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**Texas Quail, February 14-20**

Bobwhite quail are one of those charismatic species that are beloved by everyone from avid birders to wildlife photographers to hunters. The iconic Bobwhite Quail call to the exhilarating sight of a flushing convey is a sight that is becoming uncommon to obsolete in many parts of the Bobwhite Quail range due to a variety of reasons including habitat change, development, predators, and parasites. Fortunately, in Texas, Bobwhite Quail are still common to abundant in certain regions of the state. But did you know Texas is home to more quail species than just Bobwhite? Texas is home to 4 species of quail, and each has unique characteristics and habitat requirements.

Even though most people have the visual of bobwhite quail as a grassland bird they can be found in a variety of habitats when the correct habitat structure is met. Bobwhite Quail will struggle in a pure grassland setting because they need brush or “edge” for cover and protection. Bobwhite Quail adaptability to a variety of habitats can be seen in its Texas range map. The species occurs across the state except for the far western Trans Pecos desert. This includes a variety of habitats and ecoregions such as brush country, cedar breaks, short grass prairie, tall grass prairie, South Texas shrub land, and pine forest. Bobwhite Quail are most abundant in the state in the north central rolling plains, south Texas brush country, caprock escarpments in the Panhandle, and to a lesser extent the coastal tallgrass prairie. Bobwhite Quail is the most abundant species of quail in Texas.

The next most widespread and common species of quail in Texas is the Scaled Quail. Scaled Quail, or cotton top as it is sometimes called, is found in the western parts of the state and are right at home in arid locations. Unlike Bobwhite Quail which typically flush, Scaled Quail tends to run from predators or hunters. Scaled Quail are a taller and lankier bird when

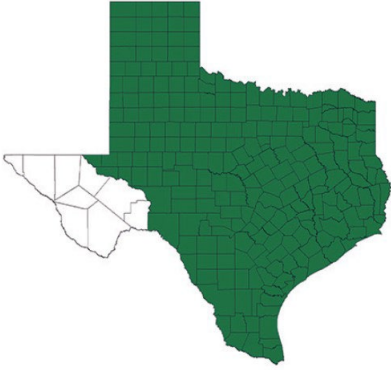
compared to Bobwhites. Additionally Scaled Quail can be found in large coveys upwards of 50-75 individuals where a large Bobwhite Quail covey may be 20-30 individuals at most.

The third most common species in Texas is the Gambel's Quail. Gambel's are restricted to the desert of far western Texas. They can be found in riparian areas and arroyos along the Rio Grande River and other watersheds. Arroyos are basically dried creek beds. Gambel's range map can be misleading because they are mostly restricted to the riparian areas of the Rio Grande River and some of the large arroyos heading north into the desert. Gambel's are known to roost in the thick brush found in arroyos and are the only species of quail in Texas to roost off the ground.

Up to this point all three species can be hunted in Texas. But our fourth and least common species of quail, the Montezuma is protected. However, you can hunt Montezuma in other southwestern states where populations are larger. Montezuma Quail is a high desert bird that can be found in the higher elevation pinyon and alpine pine forest found in the Mountains of West Texas. They are most common in the Chisos, Davis, and Guadalupe Mts. There is also a disjunct population found in the limestone hills of southwest Texas around the Rocksprings area. Historically Montezuma Quail were more common and most likely more widespread in the hills of central Texas and the mountain ranges in the west.

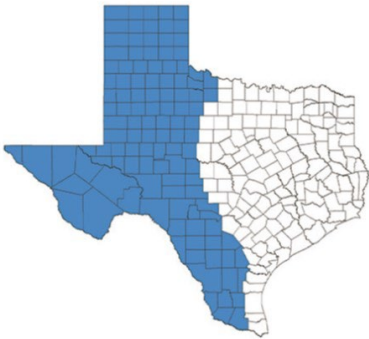
Texas has a variety of natural regions from the pine forest in the east to high desert in the west. Texas quail adapted to these variety of conditions and depending on the species, quail can be found in every county in the state.

## Bobwhite Quail (*Colinus virginianus*)



Male northern bobwhite. Source: Becky Ruzicka  
Female northern bobwhite. Source: Becky Ruzicka

## Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*)



Male and female scaled quail are difficult to distinguish in the field. Sources: Left, Becky Ruzicka; right, Greg Schechter–Flickr CC by 2.0

## Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*)

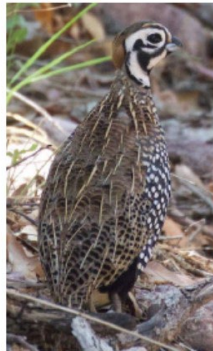


Male Gambel's quail.  
Source: JeffB-Flickr CC by 2.0



Female Gambel's quail.  
Source: Matt Tillett-Flickr CC by 2.0

## Montezuma Quail (*Cyrtonyx montezumae*)



Male Montezuma quail.  
Source: Bettina Arigoni-Flickr CC by 2.0



Female Montezuma quail.  
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**Killer Fungus of Hardwood Trees, February 21-27**

Hypoxylon canker is a fungus that causes cankers and death of oak and other hardwood trees. The disease is common in Waller County and all across the southern United States. Relatively healthy trees are not invaded by the fungus, but the hypoxylon fungus will readily infect the sapwood of a tree that has been damaged, stressed, or weakened. Natural and man-caused factors that can weaken a tree include defoliation by insects or leaf fungi, saturated soil, fill dirt, soil compaction, excavation in the root zone of the tree, removal of topsoil under the tree, disease, herbicide injury, drought, heat, nutrient deficiencies, competition or overcrowding, and other factors. The hypoxylon fungus is considered a weak pathogen in that it is not aggressive enough to invade healthy trees. In addition to the hypoxylon fungus, weakened and stressed trees may become susceptible to a host of other insect and disease pests.

Hypoxylon canker activity usually increases when prolonged drought occurs. When drought stresses trees, the fungus can take advantage of these weakened trees. The moisture content of living wood in live, healthy trees is typically 120% - 160%. It is difficult for hypoxylon canker to develop in wood that has a normal moisture content. However, any of the factors listed above could weaken or stress trees causing the moisture content of the wood to reach levels low enough for the hypoxylon fungus to develop. When this happens, the fungus becomes active in the tree and invades and decays the sapwood causing the tree to die. Once hypoxylon actively infects a tree, the tree will likely die.

An early indication that hypoxylon canker may be invading a tree is a noticeable thinning of the crown. Also, the crown may exhibit branch dieback. As the fungus develops, small sections of bark will slough from the trunk and branches and collect at the base of the tree. Where the bark has sloughed off, tan, olive green, or reddish-brown, powdery spores can be seen. Different tree species that are infected with hypoxylon canker will produce the different colors of spores. By the time the spores become visible, the tree is dead. In four to eight weeks, these tan areas will turn dark brown to black and become hard. They have the appearance of solidified tar. After several months, the areas will become a silver-gray color.

Once the fungus invades the tree, the sapwood begins to rapidly decay. Dark decay lines can be seen running through the wood. Trees that have died from hypoxylon canker and are in an area where they could fall on structures, roads, fences, powerlines, etc., should be removed as soon as possible. During removal, it is very dangerous to climb trees killed by hypoxylon canker. Because the fungus decays the wood so rapidly, the tree may not support the weight of a climber. Instead, use bucket trucks or other mechanical lift devices.

Probably all oak trees are susceptible to hypoxylon canker. In addition, elm, pecan, hickory, sycamore, maple, beech, and other trees may be infected. The fungus spreads by airborne spores that apparently infect trees of any age by colonizing the inner bark. The fungus is known to be present in many healthy trees and can survive for long periods of time in the inner bark without invading the sapwood. As mentioned earlier, when a tree is weakened or stressed, the fungus may then invade the sapwood and become one of several factors that ultimately cause the tree to die.

There is no known control for hypoxylon canker other than maintaining tree vigor. Apparently, the spores of this fungus are so common in most areas that removing trees infected with hypoxylon canker is of little value in controlling the spread of the disease. Also, infected firewood is not considered to be a source of inoculation. The fungus does not kill groups of trees by spreading from tree to tree. There is usually little that can be done to avoid naturally occurring stress factors, but many man-caused stress factors can be avoided. During drought periods, supplemental watering is recommended, if the tree is near a water source. Damage to tree roots around construction areas commonly predisposes a tree to infection by hypoxylon canker.



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**Beef Cattle Breeds, February 28-March 6**

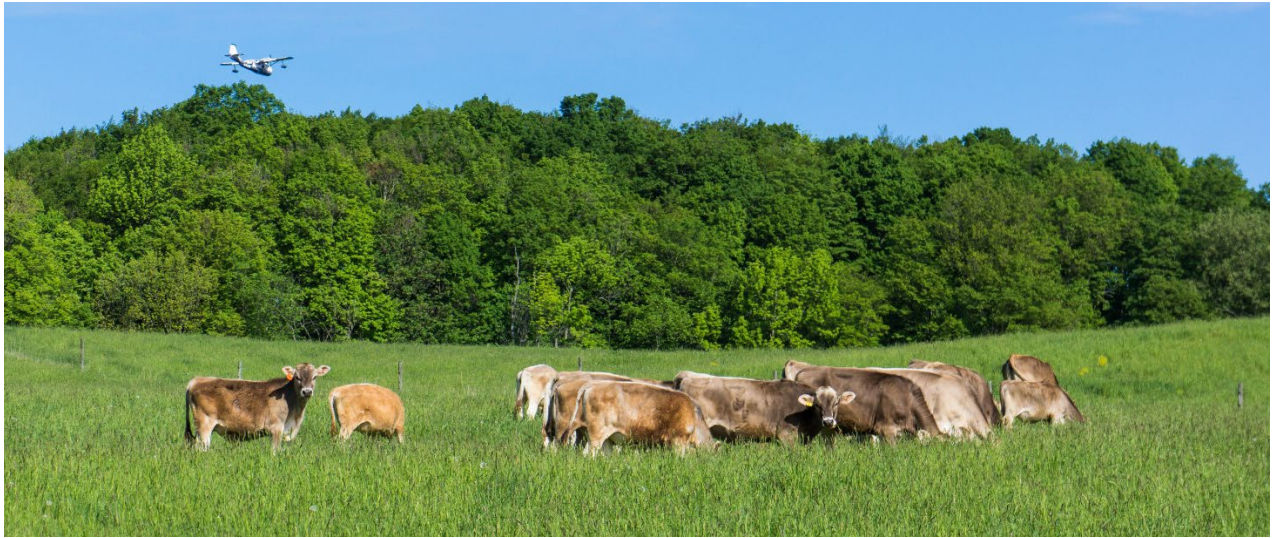
Texas heritage and ranching go hand in hand. As most people know the Texas Longhorn paved the foundation for the ranching industry in Texas going all the way back to the days when Texas was part of Mexico. Since that time numerous beef breeds are now raised in Texas, due to the introduction of new breeds, industry trends, and management techniques. Rather you are a new beef producer or are looking to expand your herd it can be quite a challenge to figure out which breed works for you. This is because there are over 250 recognized breeds in the U.S., with 80 of those being readily available to producers.

Most of the more common beef breeds originated in Europe and were brought to America. This includes Black Angus, Red Angus, Charolais, Devon, Braunvieh, Herford, Limousin, and Simmental. Black Angus are polled and can be traced to northeastern Scotland from the mid. 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Black Angus are known for carcass quality, maternal characteristics, calving ease, and moderate size. Red Angus can also trace their early development to Scotland but was not established as a registry in the U.S. until 1954. Red Angus has the same characteristics as Black Angus, but has additional traits of uniformity, good disposition, and an outstanding appetite. Charolais originated in France and are a large frame, white in color and are good producers of milk. Charolais were used in France for draft, milk, and meat. Charolais are very popular in the Texas cattle industry due to their large frame compared to other European cattle and ability to perform under a variety of environmental conditions. Devon originated in southwest England and originally bred as dual-purpose cattle for both meat and milk. Devon has a long history in North America, with the first individuals reaching the continent only 131 years after Columbus. Devon is red in color, may be polled and is known for fertility, calving ease, docility, hardiness, and ability to adapt to temperature extremes. Braunvieh were imported into the U.S. from Switzerland and are various shades of brown, polled, often have a light-colored dorsal stripe and have been selected for beef production and reproduction efficiency. The original Braunvieh in America were also used to establish the American Brown Swiss dairy cattle breed. The Herford breed was established in

England and has been a very popular beef breed in Texas. From the late 1800's to the 1950's, the Hereford was the dominant beef breed not only in Texas but the U.S. Hereford is known for two main traits, high yield of beef and efficiency of production. Limousin are golden-red cattle native to south central France and have been found in cave drawings in these areas estimated to be 20,000 years old. The first Limousin bulls were imported to the U.S. in 1971 and became popular in Oklahoma, Texas, and South Dakota. Limousin is popular among cattlemen due to tremendous carcass traits and feed efficiency. Simmental are the oldest and most widely distributed of all beef breeds in the world. They are red and white in color and are known for rapid growth development, outstanding production of milk, and large frame.

Brahman is a very popular beef breed of cattle, but unlike the above breeds originated from India from *Bos indicus* cattle. There are conflicting reports on how India cattle were introduced to the U.S., but Brahman are easily recognizable by the large hump over the shoulders, curved upwards horns, large ears, and excess skin. Brahman cattle are known for their heat tolerance and ability to thrive in adverse conditions. Because of this, Brahman have been bred with European breeds to create crossbreeds that can thrive in adverse conditions and retain carcass quality, fertility, and milk production characteristics of European breeds. Common crossbreeds found in Texas include Braford, Beefmaster, Black Brangus, Red Brangus, Santa Gertrudis, and Simbrah. One of the more unique crossbreeds developed in the U.S. is Beefalo which is 3/8 Bison and 5/8 Bovine.

Before you begin to build or expand your beef herd, you should do research on different cattle breeds. By doing so you will find a breed that best matches your growing conditions, management techniques, and production goals.



*Braunvieh Cattle were used to establish the American Brown Swiss dairy cattle breed*



*Herford Cattle were the most popular breed in Texas during the first half of 1900's*

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