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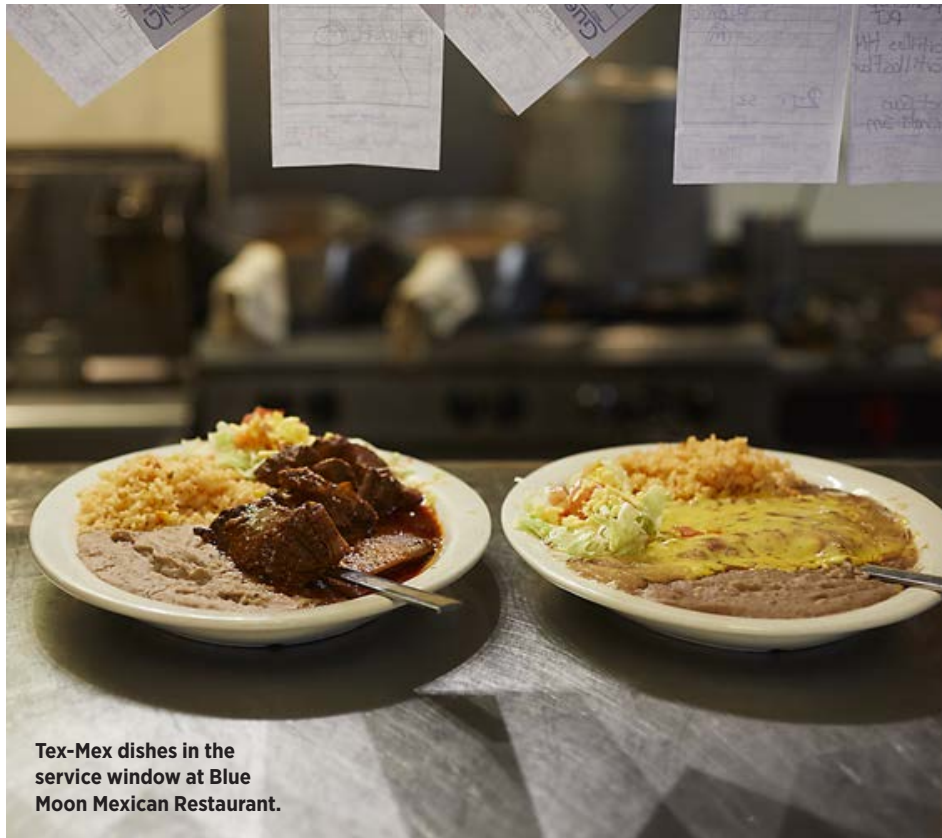
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Tex-Mex dishes in the service window at Blue Moon Mexican Restaurant.

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By Gene Fowler

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By Ken Roberts

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**Palo Duro Love Letters** Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings captured the Panhandle; her wistful writings brought it to life.



TEX-MEX: JODY HORTON. BRUSHES: SANJA | STOCK.ADOBE.COM



**ON THE COVER** Lunch at Blue Moon Mexican Restaurant: crispy pork cutlets and tender short ribs. Photo by Jody Horton

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## Love and Recoiling

I know this article [*A Snake To Love*, April 2020] is full of truth and facts, but I'm not reading it. I don't care what kind it is or how beneficial—my (somewhat) reasonable mind just hates them.

LISA FLOWERREE BIGON | VIA FACEBOOK

I hate snakes, but if they're moving away from me, I let them go.

JANE TALCOTT | VIA FACEBOOK

Last summer, one was in my kitchen a foot from where I was standing while I investigated the weird noise that sounded like water running or static. I finally glanced under the counter, screamed and ran. My husband put him in a trash can and released him far away.

SUZANNE ROTH FULTON | VIA FACEBOOK

I've learned to respect and give them their space. A rattler will warn you before it strikes out of self-defense. A human snake will strike without warning out of pure malice.

JON RANNELLS | VIA FACEBOOK

They will bite horses, cows, dogs, you name it. They are kind of like reptile land mines.

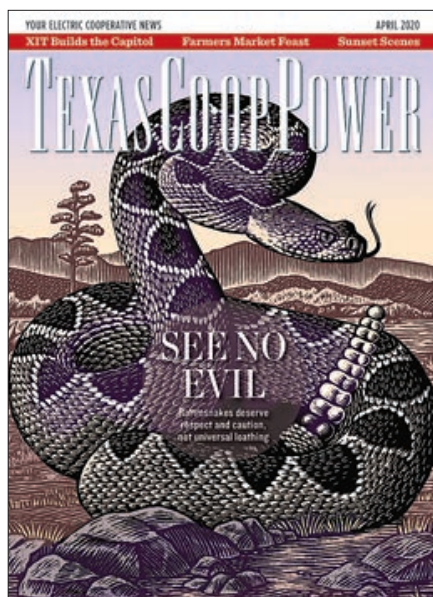
SAM YEATES | VIA FACEBOOK

The rattler is one of Mother Nature's mistakes. A rattler can kill creatures, including humans, that it cannot eat.

DONALD DIETZ | BOERNE

BANDERA EC

Growing up in Louisiana, in my youth I dispatched poisonous snakes, usually water moccasins. As I aged, I began to see my actions as those of a person ignorant of the ecosystem.



## Rattler Respect

When I laid eyes on the April cover, Mike Leggett immediately came to mind [*A Snake To Love*, April 2020]. I enjoyed his column so much in the *Austin American-Statesman*. Back in the day, I learned from him to appreciate rattlers, along with other snakes, and have always let them be because he made clear their importance in my own slice of the Hill Country ecosystem.

MELODIE GREIDER | DRIPPING SPRINGS | PEDERNALES EC

Now, I make amends for the sins of my youth by teaching my children (5 and 9) these lessons, without any animals being harmed.

You also might be pleased to know that your article has turned into a science lesson for my children while they home-school during the shelter-in-place policy of March and April.

LORNE DAVISON | CEDAR PARK  
PEDERNALES EC

Mike Leggett repeats a dangerous myth that I have heard all my life and have been guilty of spreading myself.

I am a physician and have been involved in the treatment of coral snake bites. The stories told me by the victims caused me to research the capabilities of these small reptiles beyond what is "common knowledge." These beautiful little guys, while shy and nonaggressive, can

bite you and envenomate you in less than a heartbeat. No chewing required.

BILL CLARK | GEORGETOWN  
BARTLETT EC

### Recipes to the Rescue

The Zucchini Taco Boats With Chicken was an excellent recipe [*Farmers Market*, April 2020]. It was easy to make and made a

lot. We had enough to share with our next-door neighbors.

I appreciate these easy recipes during the COVID-19 threat. We had everything we needed to make a delicious meal during these tough times.

AL MAGNESS | AUSTIN  
PEDERNALES EC



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## THE ARTS

# Heads of State

David Adickes, who created the 67-foot-tall Sam Houston statue in Huntsville, is donating 44 presidential busts that he sculpted, each 18–20 feet tall and weighing 11,000–20,000 pounds, to the **H.E.A.R.T.S. VETERANS MUSEUM OF TEXAS**. The museum, in **HUNTSVILLE**, is in the midst of a fundraising campaign to install a park and display the busts.

This is the third set of presidential busts Adickes has created. The other two were in parks in South Dakota and Virginia, though the parks have since gone, well, bust.

They are made of foam, layers of concrete and reinforced steel. Adickes, 93, has said Abraham Lincoln is his favorite and the easiest to create because his features are so distinct. Gerald R. Ford's facial features lacked sharp details, making him the hardest to depict.

**INFO** ► (936) 295-5959, [heartsmuseum.com](http://heartsmuseum.com)

## NATURE

# The Crape Crusader

**Our February feature** *Crape Murder* caught the eye of Neil Sperry, perhaps Texas' foremost expert on gardening and horticulture, who says there is hope for severely pruned crape myrtles.

**"I thought you might enjoy** seeing how a formerly topped crape myrtle can be restored," wrote Sperry, a member of Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative and resident of McKinney. "Cut it flush with the ground in the winter. Let the many new sprouts regrow the first season. Thin them to 10–12 [sprouts] the second spring. Leave the 3–5 best ones to become the new trunks going into the third year."

**Sperry, a board member** of the Crape Myrtle Trails of McKinney, included this photo of Beverly Cain's tree in Lubbock in its third summer, below.





## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

*To me, being a Texan means . . .*



► **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 city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our April prompt: **I never should have told my parents ...**

I know what I'm doing.  
VICTORIA LANGLEY | BRAZORIA | JACKSON EC

You can send me to college, but you can't make me think.  
VAL LOFTIN | CISCO | CECA

That I could fix the toilet, so there was no need to hire a plumber.  
ANGELA BRUCE | HUNTSVILLE | MIDSOUTH EC

About my job as a radio tower climber in Nacogdoches.  
ANTHONY PIWETZ | VICTORIA | NUECES EC

That a dachshund puppy "just followed me home." That was a lie!  
PATRICIA HEFTI | BRYAN | BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.

## HISTORY LESSON

### Mother of All Parks

**Mother Neff State Park**, one of Texas' first state parks, opened in 1937 near Temple. Check out the photos readers sent us from state parks in Focus on Texas, Page 34.

## ACADEMICS

### More Critter Care

**The Texas Higher Education** Coordinating Board in December paved the way for Texas Tech University to open the state's second veterinary school. The campus, in Amarillo, will open in 2021.

➡ *Did you know?*

**Texas A&M University** opened the state's first vet school in 1916.



BY THE NUMBERS

*June 3 is*  
**NATIONAL EGG DAY.**  
*Texas chickens*  
*produced more than*  
**6 billion**  
*eggs in 2018.\**

**\*6,108,500,000 to be eggsact.**



EXPERTS AROUND THE STATE  
ARE TRYING TO REVIVE  
POPULATIONS OF THE BELOVED  
AND THREATENED

# HORNY TOAD

## THE LIZARD BRIGADE

INCH BY INCH, wildlife biologist Jim Gallagher eyeballed the grassy turf around his boots. So far, several days of scouring the same plot at Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area had turned up nothing. Still, he kept up his search. Alert to any movement, Gallagher scanned dry patches of dirt, clumps of buffalo grass and trailing morning-glory vines.

Then a spiny critter no bigger than a quarter scuttled across the clay loam. “Oh, my God,” he exclaimed. “There’s a horned lizard!”

The tiny reptile was the first of several that Gallagher would count in April 2019. For the first time, Texas horned lizards—captive-bred at the Fort Worth Zoo in 2018 and released as hatchlings into the wild—had successfully hibernated through winter and survived into spring. Researchers celebrated the news.

“We were jazzed,” says Diane Barber, the zoo’s curator of ectotherms (coldblooded animals). “That meant more of the 132 that we released probably survived, too.” Since 2000, she and her team, in collaboration with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Christian University and other Texas zoos, have pioneered care and breeding techniques for wild-caught horned lizards. Together, the coalition is working to reverse the dwindling numbers of the threatened species, which are also called horned frogs and horned toads.

More than 40 years ago, “horny toads” thrived in Texas. Back

then, the fierce-looking mini dinosaurs ranged across the state. Countless youngsters caught them near their homes. Few people realized the lizards ate the red harvester ants that bulldozed bald spots in yards and landscapes.

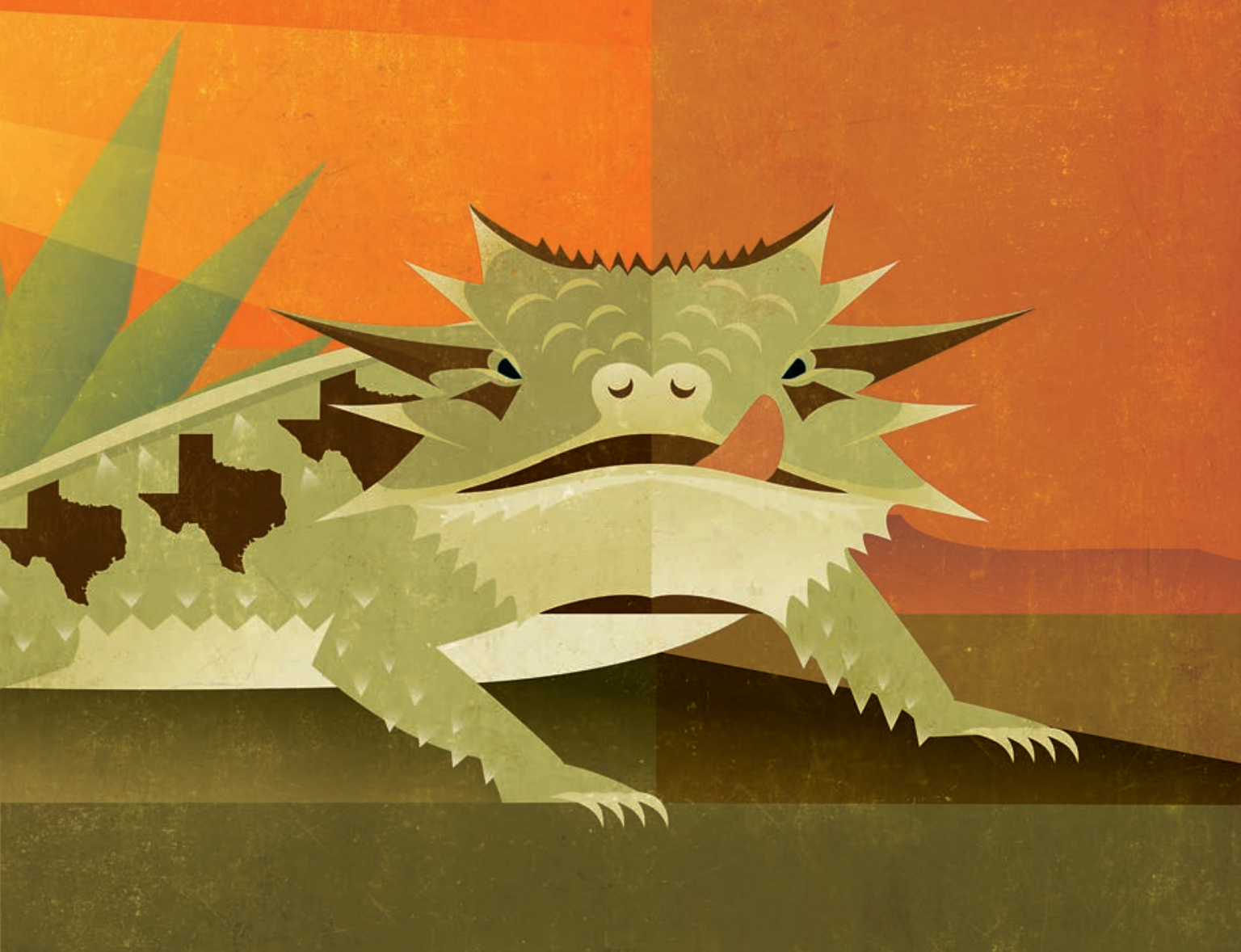
Enter pesticides, urbanization and fire ants, to name a few culprits. Horned lizards began to disappear. Today, they’re mostly gone east of a line that can be drawn from Fort Worth to Corpus Christi. “I believe loss of habitat is the biggest reason for their decline,” says Leslie Nossaman, president of the Horned Lizard Conservation Society. “Plus, people still kill harvester ants, which provide a lot of food for horned lizards.”

Since 1991, the conservation society has spread awareness of 17 North American species of horned lizards, found from southern Mexico into southern Canada. Most are protected. Texas claims three species. Best known is the Texas horned lizard, designated as the state reptile in 1993. Two other species live in far west regions: the greater short-horned and the roundtail horned.

“We have permitted handlers who rehabilitate injured lizards and relocate ones that get picked up,” Nossaman says. “People should never pick up horned lizards in the wild. They do not make good pets and will not survive if taken out of their environment. But if they’ve accidentally picked one up, we’ll help them relocate it to the right habitat.”

The conservation society also funds horned lizard research





and conservation projects. For example, one of six grants awarded in 2019 underwrote a pilot project that's training dogs to sniff out horned lizards in the field. "We plan to use these detection dogs to determine if a site already has an existing population of horned lizards," says Andy Gluesenkamp, director of conservation and research at the San Antonio Zoo. "They'll also help us find wild lizards for our breeding program and search for released lizards so we can monitor their success."

Conservation efforts at the zoo have focused on southern populations of horned lizards, while similar projects at the Fort Worth and Dallas zoos work with northern populations. The populations differ genetically, according to biology professor Dean Williams, who's mapped out lizard genetics across the state and leads TCU's Horny Toad Project.

**MEANWHILE,** Gluesenkamp aims to produce hundreds of hatchlings in the zoo's "lizard factory," a climate-controlled laboratory for breeding and rearing baby horned lizards. Females typically lay clutches of 12–30 eggs once a year. "Our plan is to release 100 young lizards per site per year for three years," he says. "Then we'll follow up with 25 hatchlings every other year." Sites must be 200–250 acres in size and encompass high-quality lizard habitat of native grasses, shrubs, harvester ants or desert

termites, and few or no fire ants. So far, two locations in Blanco County are being managed for horned lizard releases.

In 2019, San Miguel Electric Cooperative donated \$10,000 toward Gluesenkamp's research. "Since the 1980s, we have surveyed for horned lizards in areas we plan to mine," says Dave Burris, fuels manager with the San Miguel Lignite Mine in Atascosa and McMullen counties. "We perform relocations for potentially affected species and also make our sites available to horned lizard researchers at Texas Christian University."

So do folks who live in Kenedy, the horned lizard capital of Texas. Oodles of the reptiles once lived in town. Though their numbers have shrunk, local love for them hasn't. "Every summer, we host scientists from TCU who do DNA studies on horned toads here in Karnes County," says Wade Phelps, a dentist who oversees the Horned Toad Club of Kenedy. "We're also carving out a horned toad habitat demonstration site in our new Escondido Creek Parkway project."

The future looks brighter for the Texas horned lizard. "They're a keystone species," notes Nathan Rains, a wildlife diversity biologist with the TPWD. "The habitat they prefer benefits quail, turkey and songbirds, too. Since we all love horned lizards, it's a win-win for everyone."

**Sheryl Smith-Rodgers** of Blanco spent many hours as a child playing with horned lizards found around her Corpus Christi home.





# WE BRAKE FOR *Queso*

Story by Paula Disbrowe | Photos by Jody Horton

A belt-busting, cheese-topped tour of the best Tex-Mex dishes in San Antonio, ground zero for the beloved cuisine

**Spend any time away from the Lone Star State**, and chances are you'll begin to crave bubbling cheese-and-onion enchiladas, potent margaritas and spicy salsas. We're talking Tex-Mex, of course, the regional cuisine that was born in Texas and has become our most beloved comfort food. Although the cuisine's popularity has spread well beyond our borders, we love what we get at home.



## San Antonio is the epicenter of Tex-Mex

culture and cuisine. The hearty, homey recipes there were created in restaurants run by first- and second-generation Mexican immigrants during the first third of the 20th century.

“Tex-Mex is a glorious yet overlooked cuisine,” says Edmund Tijerina, contributor for *San Antonio Magazine* and former food editor for the *San Antonio Express-News*. “A lot of people look down on it because it’s not ‘authentic’ Mexican. Here’s the thing: It’s not Mexican. It’s Mexican American, and it reflects the history, geography and cultures of South Texas, San Antonio specifically.”

The cuisine’s influences are broad, Tijerina tells me, and range from the indigenous use of corn and beans and techniques of pit cooking to the processed foods of the 20th century. “There’s the home cooking of South Texas and northern Mexico,” he says, “simple dishes that many Mexican Americans like me grew up on, and there’s the Mexican-inspired restaurant cooking created by Anglo business owners a century ago of greasy enchiladas and queso dip.”

Until the early 1970s, the cuisine was generally referred to as “Mexican.” Then the term Tex-Mex emerged, stuck and gained national attention, bolstering the dishes with regional pride and a sense of place.

With the enviable charge of tracking down the best incarnations of eight iconic dishes in one day, photographer Jody Horton and I left Austin before dawn and headed toward breakfast in the Alamo City.

◀ An enchilada combination plate at Jacala.



*El Milagrito Cafe*

### HUEVOS RANCHEROS



**Years ago**, I asked my friend Elizabeth Fauerso, a San Antonio native, where locals go for the best huevos rancheros. She sent me to El Milagrito Cafe, and it’s been a favorite ever since. Since 1969, the casual, diner-style restaurant has been griddling homemade tortillas and serving breakfast and lunch plates to a loyal clientele. El Milagrito is best known for hefty breakfast plates like huevos rancheros (two eggs cooked to order, served on crispy corn tortillas and bathed in bright red sauce) served with additional tortillas (for scooping up everything else on the plate), smoky refried beans and the arguable star, *papas con chorizo*—potatoes fried with crumbled chorizo.

▲ Huevos rancheros at El Milagrito Cafe.

*Teka Molino*

### CRISPY TACOS



**Established in 1937**, Teka Molino is one of San Antonio’s oldest restaurants. The friendly counter service and tidy, welcoming space make it easy to see why friends gather in groups and solo diners settle in with laptops. Foodie friends urged us to have crispy tacos because the real star here is the masa. The restaurant has milled its own corn since it opened, so naturally it’s known for corn-centric specialties like guacamole and bean cups. The “cups” are corn tortillas shaped into a single-serving cup, fried until crisp and then filled eponymously. The crackly, flavorful shells are packed with moist, shredded chicken (or ground beef), crunchy lettuce, chopped fresh tomatoes and yellow cheese and served with stellar homemade green and red salsas.

◀ Crispy beef tacos at Teka Molino.

---

*Garcia's Mexican Food*

## CARNE GUISADA



**Co-owned by brothers** John and Andrew Garcia, Garcia's Mexican Food is a family affair and has been a San Antonio mainstay since it opened in 1962. We arrived midmorning to find the small space dense with cowboy hats at the counter, babies in car seats and friendly banter between staff and regulars. And, of course, wafting aromas of sizzling meat.

Top sellers on Garcia's comfort-driven menu include *carne guisada*. Loosely defined as a beef stew, guisada is typically made with meat that's simmered in a broth thickened with roux and flavored with chiles, spices and aromatics. Andrew's son, Joseph, served us plates of the warm, tender meat in a peppery gravy. Between bites scooped up with freshly made flour tortillas, John tells me his secret is keeping it simple—simmering the meat with their signature blend of spices for an hour and a half until it is as tender as a Sunday pot roast.

▼ Joseph Garcia serves carne guisada, a favorite at Garcia's Mexican Food.



---

*Jacala*

## ENCHILADAS



**Rudolph Quiñones** was a young GI when he and wife Adel opened Jacala in 1949. Its current location is a former grocery store that has been adorned with additional dining rooms, a patio and an outdoor courtyard. The restaurant is run by the couple's three daughters, Cynthia Klauss, Lucille Hooker and Yolanda Showalter. Jacala is as much about family memories as their award-winning enchiladas and combination plates.

"Four generations of our family have been regulars at Jacala, starting with my parents in the 1950s and continuing through today," says Therese McDevitt, a San Antonio native who worked much of her career in New York before returning home.

For McDevitt, no visit to San Antonio was complete without at least one dinner at Jacala featuring the No. 7 Ladies Special (cheese enchiladas with chili gravy and puffy tacos).

▲ The interior at Jacala; inset, co-owner Lucille Hooker.





### Ray's Drive Inn PUFFY TACOS



**Puffy tacos**—discs of masa that puff and balloon into delicate shells when fried—were born in San Antonio, though their exact origin is the stuff of local legend. The late Arturo Lopez claimed to have invented the deep-fried tacos at Ray's Drive Inn. His brother, Henry Lopez, claimed that he was the first, at Henry's Puffy Tacos.

I'm partial to Ray's because of the vintage Western setting. With its neon signage and stone- and wood-paneled walls, the restaurant looks much like it did when it was founded in 1956. To taste a textbook example of the perfect puffy, order a basket of beef or chicken, but try an avocado, too. Topped with fresh, creamy slices that balance the crunchy shell, the tacos, yellow Spanish rice, creamy pintos and pickled jalapeño create a bucket list meal.

▲ Puffy tacos at Ray's Drive Inn.



#### WEB EXTRAS

► Friends in Co-op Country recommend Tex-Mex favorites.

### Blue Moon Mexican Restaurant FIDEO (Y PLATOS DEL DÍA)



**We ran through** the rain to meet chef Johnny Hernandez at Blue Moon Mexican Restaurant, one of his favorite neighborhood haunts. Housed in a cheery yellow house on South Flores Street, the restaurant is known for its *fideo*, a South Texas dish of spiced vermicelli noodles and beef that's served here on Wednesdays. We followed Hernandez's lead and ordered the *platos del día*—the daily specials, crispy pork cutlets with beans and rice, cheese enchiladas with chili gravy and meltingly tender short ribs braised in guajillo chile sauce.

"Blue Moon café takes me back to my childhood days on the west side of San Antonio," Hernandez tells us. "The aroma of freshly rolled flour tortillas is heaven, and they happen to make my favorite menudo with pig's feet."

▲ Crispy pork cutlets, a daily special at Blue Moon Mexican Restaurant.



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## Lala's Gorditas

### GORDITAS



**Less common than tostadas** or tacos, gorditas are deep-fried pockets of cornmeal dough filled with savory ground beef or chicken and lettuce, tomato, and cheese.

Steven Pizzini, owner of Lala's Gorditas, has Tex-Mex in his DNA. His restaurant's namesake was his maternal grandmother and culinary muse. In 1938, Ernestine Pizzini Chapa, Steven's paternal aunt, founded the original Teka Molino and relied on her mother's recipes. After a successful run there, Steven's father, Herman Pizzini, and his Uncle Eddie opened the beloved Taco Hut in 1958, which served generations of San Antonians until it closed in 1998. The object that drew Steven back into the food business is the heart of Lala's operation—the original corn mill created by his Uncle Eddie in the 1930s.

These days, that mill gets a daily workout grinding nixtamalized corn (dry corn that's soaked in a mixture of water and lime) to create the fragrant masa used to make gordita shells. Pizzini's gorditas are packed with traditional fillings—beef or stewed chicken, lettuce, tomato, crema and a garnish of *curtido* (Salvadoran slaw).

▼ A gordita with cabbage slaw at Lala's Gorditas.



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## La Fogata

### CHILE CON QUESO



**Chile con queso** was our last stop and the holy grail of our tour.

With its pretty courtyard, massive wooden doors and festive atmosphere, La Fogata provides an instant holiday, no passport required. The restaurant serves authentic queso *flameado*, a dish from northern Mexico made with molten white cheese and roasted poblanos—as well as the classic Tex-Mex version made with tomatoes, green chiles and a Velveeta-like loaf of pasteurized cheese that melts into a silky smooth consistency.

One could argue the basic elements of queso are more or less the same in every restaurant, so memorable bowls are the result of the company, the setting and the flourish of a topping or two. What sets La Fogata's apart is a dollop of its smoky, fire-roasted salsa; a basket of warm, freshly fried chips; and its potent, made-to-order margaritas—each garnished with an orchid.

▲ Chile con queso at La Fogata.

**Paula Disbrowe** is the author of seven cookbooks, including her latest, *Thank You for Smoking*. She spent four years as a cowgirl chef on a ranch in the Texas Hill Country. She never met a flauta she didn't like.





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# Electric Co-ops Contribute to a Smarter Power Grid



MESSAGE FROM  
GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY

**IT'S A FAMILIAR SCENE: POLES AND WIRES STRETCHING INTO THE** distance alongside a rural highway. This image might appear no different now than it did many years ago. But there are changes.

Invisible to most of us is an overlay of new equipment—microchips, sensors and fiber-optic lines—linking remote distribution infrastructure to the utility's operations center using advanced communications technology.

Those familiar poles and wires are now part of a smart grid that can be operated using software and automation.

For electric cooperatives, digitization of electric infrastructure kicked into high gear in 2013, when the U.S. Department of Energy funded technology research at 23 co-ops across the country. That partnership has now evolved into a robust research program exploring everything from drones and smart solar inverters to cybersecurity training and carbon capture technology.

**Here are some of the ways co-op consumer-members are already benefiting from a smarter grid:**

**Fewer power outages.** In certain situations, smart feeder switching can reroute power around problems such as downed power lines, which reduces the number of people affected by an outage.

**Prepay programs.** Prepay billing programs no longer impose hefty reconnection fees because, thanks to advanced digital meters, the co-op doesn't need to send out a truck to physically reconnect the home.

**Savings from increased efficiency.** Many of the new technologies are improving the efficiency of co-op operations—from reducing the amount of electricity lost in transmission to reducing the need for sending out trucks. These savings are passed on to co-op members.

**Improved safety for co-op workers and members.** The data from smart technologies provides utility operators a more

detailed view of what is happening on the electric system. Co-ops have found that the data can help them identify electrical hazards more quickly.

So the next time you are driving down a long highway and you see poles and wires stretching far into the distance, know there's more to that system than meets the eye. While the electricity in your home powers the toaster just as it always did, that electricity is more efficient, more reliable and safer thanks to innovation made possible by cooperation.







DIMA SIDELNIKOV | ISTOCK.COM

# June Is National Safety Month

**WHILE CECA OFTEN FOCUSES ON ELECTRICAL SAFETY, THERE ARE MANY OTHER DANGERS** lurking out there. In recognition of National Safety Month, we're sharing the National Safety Council's list of the top causes of preventable injuries and death away from the workplace.

**1. Poisoning.** In 2011, poisonings overtook car crashes for the first time as the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for all ages combined. Poisoning deaths are caused by gases, chemicals and other substances, but prescription drug overdose is by far the leading cause.

**2. Vehicle crashes.** Crashes are the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death overall. Impaired driving, distracted driving, speeding and inexperience can cause a life to be cut short in the blink of an eye.

**3. Falls.** Falling is the third-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death over all age groups, but it's the No. 1 cause of death for those 65 and older.

**4. Choking and suffocation.** Choking on food or other objects is a primary cause. Suffocation and choking rank higher among the elderly and infants.

**5. Drowning.** It's the No. 1 cause of death for children ages 1–4, mostly due to children falling into pools or being left alone in bathtubs.

**6. Fires and burns.** Fires often start at night, when families are asleep and most vulnerable. A working smoke alarm will cut in half the chances of dying in a fire.

**7. Natural and environmental incidents.** Weather-related disasters claim hundreds of lives per year. You should learn all you can about emergency preparedness and always have an emergency kit on hand.



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**Early Office:** Monday, Wednesday and Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed from 1 to 2 p.m.

**Eastland Office:** Tuesday and Thursday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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## Report an Outage

CECA crews are available 24/7 in the event of a power quality issue by calling 800-915-2533.

## Contact Us

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# Use Generators Safely

*Our lineworkers' lives are on the line*

**NO SEASON IN TEXAS IS SAFE FROM SEVERE WEATHER.** AND when one of those destructive storms rolls through our area, lines can go down and members can lose power—sometimes for an extended period.

During an outage, some folks rely on portable generators while power is being restored. If you use a generator, do you know enough about it to operate it safely?

The safety of our members and our employees is a top priority at CECA, especially during dangerous times. When storms hit our area, we rush to restore power as soon as conditions allow.

Our line crews take necessary precautions before they work on downed power lines, taking care to ensure that a line is de-energized before working on it. But even after these measures, an improperly connected generator can put our workers' lives at risk.

CECA is proud of our outstanding safety record, but sometimes, no matter how many steps we take to keep everyone safe, the very people we are there to help unknowingly put our lives—and their own—in danger.

Portable generators can prove fatal to lineworkers when used improperly. A generator connected to a home's wiring or plugged into a regular household outlet can cause backfeeding along power lines and electrocute anyone who comes into contact with them—even if the lines seem dead.

CECA employees are not the only ones in danger when a portable generator is used improperly. Those who operate generators improperly risk being electrocuted, starting fires, damaging property or being poisoned by carbon monoxide. Portable generators can be very helpful during outages. **But it is imperative that you follow these safety guidelines when using one:**

- ▶ Never connect a generator directly to your home's wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use, which includes having a transfer switch installed by a qualified electrical contractor. The transfer switch can be used to disconnect your home from the power grid. Connecting



the generator to a house's wiring without such a switch can cause current to flow out of your home's circuitry and along power lines, putting at risk anyone who comes into contact with the lines.

- ▶ Always plug appliances directly into generators or use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords. Make sure extension cords are free of cuts or tears and the plug has three prongs. Overloaded cords can cause fires or equipment damage.
- ▶ Ensure your generator is properly grounded.
- ▶ Never overload a generator. A portable generator should only be used when necessary to power essential equipment or appliances.
- ▶ Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- ▶ Only operate a generator on a dry, covered surface outdoors, away from windows and doors.
- ▶ Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
- ▶ Never fuel a generator while it is operating.
- ▶ Read and adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for safe operation. Never cut corners when it comes to safety.

We encourage you to protect the well-being and safety of your family during outages and safeguard those who come to your aid during emergency situations. When we work together for safety and the good of our communities, we all benefit.



## JUNE HOLIDAYS

### Flag Day

Sunday, June 14


### Juneteenth

Friday, June 19

### Father's Day

Sunday, June 21





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**How to apply:** Apply at [ceca.coop](http://ceca.coop) under Youth Opportunities

# The Legend of Old Rip

Eastland horny toad was famous for allegedly living 31 years entombed in a courthouse cornerstone

BY GENE FOWLER

ONE MAY DAY IN 1928, PRESIDENT CALVIN Coolidge received a celebrated Texan in the White House. The visitor was 15 minutes late, but the president waited patiently. For this wasn't just any Texan—this was Old Rip, the horned lizard who'd slumbered for 31 years in the cornerstone of the Eastland County Courthouse.

Coolidge asked several questions of Will Wood, Rip's caretaker, and stroked the reptile's back with his horn-rimmed glasses. Wood telegraphed folks back in Eastland that Old Rip blinked at Silent Cal.

As Texas author Boyce House told and retold the tale, Will Wood had named the horned toad (or horny toad, as Texas horned lizards are often called) Blinky back in 1897, shortly before Will's father, county clerk Ernest Wood, had the boy's pet placed in the cornerstone of the Eastland County Courthouse that was under construction.

Then one February day in 1928, when the 1897 courthouse was being demolished for a new, modern people's temple, Ernest Wood asked House, then editor of the *Eastland Argus-Tribune*, if he'd heard of the West Texas folk belief that a horned toad could live for 100 years without food or water. When Wood told Boyce that the theory would soon be put to the test with the opening of the 1897 cornerstone, the editor produced a banner headline, "ALL READY FOR LIBERATION OF THE HORNED TOAD," and distributed the exciting news through wire services. Thus, on Saturday, February 18, 1928, when the cornerstone was opened, more than 1,000 people had reportedly gathered to witness the event.

Along with several ministers, county Judge Ed Pritchard was on hand to authenticate the proceedings. When the diminutive beast was held aloft for the crowd to behold, one of its legs suddenly twitched. "The durn thing's alive!" someone hollered as cheers filled the courthouse square.

Named for the storied slumberer Rip Van Winkle, Old Rip made national news. Unfortunately, entombment of his brethren became a fad. Prestigious scientists opined,



both pro and con, on the possibility of the lizard's survival. Thousands marveled at Rip on tour. Souvenir horned frogs were sold at the Democratic National Convention that summer in Houston. Eastland gas stations gave away the reptiles as premiums for fuel purchases. Featured in a Fox Movietone newsreel, Old Rip was a star.

Sid Sackett, a commercial breeder of horned lizards in Coleman, feared the





**Old Rip's remains are as well preserved as the horny toad's legacy in Eastland County.**

craze would create too much competition. Because the reptiles preyed on insects injurious to crops, agriculture authorities worried that their popularity as pets could decrease farm yields. But the mania subsided after Old Rip's death from pneumonia in early 1929. Today, the famed horned toad lies in state in a tiny casket at the Eastland County Courthouse. Local folks began celebrating Rip annually with a horned toad derby in 1949. The event continues today as Ripfest and includes a parade, 5K run and other fun. The famed lizard is also commemorated in displays at the Eastland County Museum and in the museum's Old Drip's Coffee Shoppe.

In his 1965 book, *The Story of Old Rip*, Eastlander H.V. O'Brien Jr., who admin-

isters the Old Rip Oath at chamber of commerce banquets, noted that several Eastland youngsters had spent the night at the partly demolished courthouse in 1928 in order to ensure that no "hanky-pank" transpired before the cornerstone was opened.

The youths' vigilance notwithstanding, some hanky-panky may well have been committed. In his 1993 book, *O Ye Legendary Horned Frog*, historian June Rayfield Welch unearthed a 1973 allegation by a self-described "perpetrator of the hoax which grew into 'the Legend of Old Rip.'"

The anonymous confessor claimed that five young men had conspired to place a living toad in the cornerstone in February 1928 and were surprised at the excitement generated by their prank.

For his part, O'Brien good-naturedly concludes, "Do you believe it or don't you?"

Arguing the point is not recommended in these parts."

Most Eastland folks embrace the horny toad yarn that brought so much attention to their town with a healthy attitude and a tender wink. "Old Rip still has a place of honor in the vestibule of the first floor of the Eastland County Courthouse," says county Judge Rex Fields. "He lies in state in a glass-topped casket wherein he is visible to people that have heard the story of his incarceration and release."

Fields gives a presentation about the history of the courthouse to second grade students each year. "Almost without fail," he says, "the highlight for the students is when I take the casket out of its locked enclosure and let them see Old Rip up close."

Writer and author Gene Fowler specializes in art and history.

# Another Culture

An author studied family histories and perspectives of the Hill Country community known as the cedar choppers

BY KEN ROBERTS

LET ME BEGIN WITH A STORY FROM 1963, when we were seniors at Austin High—two couples looking for something different to do on a summer night. We drove out U.S. 183 toward Burnet and came upon the Hilltop Inn, all lit up with lots of cars and trucks parked outside.

The people inside—the picture is etched in my mind—were dancing. There were couples, but there were also women with women and children with children. Some women were—I swear—wearing gingham dresses and bonnets.

A man inside stepped in front of us. He looked us up and down. We were wearing shorts, and not just any shorts but the newest rage, madras plaid shorts. He said, “You’re not welcome here,” and shut the door.

We had stepped into the world of the cedar choppers. Decades later, I would spend about five years researching the history of this community for my book, *The Cedar Choppers: Life on the Edge of Nothing*.

The cedar choppers were descendants of Scots-Irish immigrants who had migrated from the hills of Appalachia after the Civil War. They replicated their Appalachian way of life in the cedar brakes of the Texas Hill Country, where they raised large families in shabby housing without plumbing and survived by growing some corn, raising some stock, hunting, making moonshine and turning cedar into charcoal and posts.

When the agricultural economy of the South crashed during the Depression and farmers left in droves, this lifestyle enabled them to hang on. As late as 1941, an

Austinite could still marvel that “within sight of the Capitol dome live mountaineers who speak a dialect and get their water from springs,” according to a passage in the book *Texian Stomping Grounds*.

Mountain cedar (Ashe juniper) had always been valuable because it has a heart of dark, oil-permeated wood that lasts for decades. When farms were turned to pasture after World War II, the demand for cedar fence posts soared. With nothing but an old truck and an ax, a man could make as much money in two days cutting cedar as a week working in one of the local quarries.

Cedar choppers were some of the most independent laborers in America: They had no boss, no land to farm, and they could sell their cedar anywhere. They took orders from nobody, accepting the money society offered but rejecting its routines. Their defining characteristics became fierce independence and a combative directness in dealing with the outside world.

The emergence of Austin as a metropolitan area brought cedar choppers and their coarse ways into stark contrast with the genteel urban population. “Cedar chopper” became a pejorative term, like Okie in California. Strong as they were from cutting cedar with an ax, they didn’t hesitate to fight back. Frank Wilson, who knew cedar chopper families, said in a 1978 interview at the Austin History Center, “They were very independent and very proud people—and aggressive, very aggressive.” This clash of cultures became the story I wanted to tell.

My first interview was with Ronnie





**Earl and Leona Townsend and family, cedar choppers in Marble Falls.**

Hill, then a community southwest of Austin. He told me that his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been cedar choppers, living along Barton Creek, west of Austin. His dad owned a cedar yard outside Kerrville and was an upstanding citizen and a deacon of the church. But Ronnie's older brother died at 6 of a brain tumor, and things fell apart. His dad started drinking, and his mom committed suicide. In 1958, Ronnie and his three sisters moved in with their grandparents at the cedar yard.

I was stunned by his honesty and by the responsibility of telling his and other stories—not in generalities but as actual events in the lives of people whose parents, grandparents and great-grandparents had grown up in the hills, worked together,

Roberts, who as a kid had loaded cedar onto trucks at his grandparents' yard in Oak

intermarried and raised families. To have a chance of understanding them, I knew I had to know these connections. I had to create a big family tree. By the time I finished over a year later, it encompassed more than 2,500 related individuals and demonstrated that most of the cedar choppers in the Hill Country counties were kin to one another.

As I got to know them better, I became more direct as I gathered oral histories. I asked Alice Patterson, "Did y'all ever feel, when you went into Austin, that some of the people in Austin kind of looked down at you as country folk?"

She replied, "You know what? It didn't bother me. They do. They did."

"They did?"

"Yeah, they did. And I didn't know it."

I asked Don Simons, "How did you guys feel when you came into town and you saw these nice green lawns, and these guys walking around with their white golf shoes

on. What did you think about that?"

"Terrible," he replied. "When you didn't have no shoes. And the end of your toes were bloody because you stubbed them on the rocks. You felt terrible because people looked at you. They don't know how to deal with you. Very degrading."

They wanted to talk about their lives and share the uniqueness of their upbringing and what it was like to grow up working in the brakes. They were proud of their fortitude and far enough from some of the painful aspects that they could talk openly.

The heyday of the cedar choppers that began in the 1940s ended abruptly with the introduction of steel fence posts in the 1960s, but the story lives on.

**Ken Roberts**, a member of Pedernales EC, has lived on a ranch outside Liberty Hill for the past 45 years. He retired as a professor from Southwestern University, where he researched the effects of economic change on rural people in Mexico and China. Contact him at [thecedarchoppers.com](http://thecedarchoppers.com).



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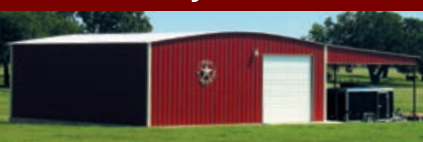
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Deadline: July 10

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# An Alternate Reality

John Howard Griffin darkened his skin to try to understand racial attitudes in the South

BY MELISSA GASKILL

WITHOUT BECOMING A BLACK MAN, author John Howard Griffin inquired in 1959, how could a white man hope to learn the truth about racial suppression? So, Griffin used medication to temporarily darken his skin and then traveled through the South as a black man for more than a month. His experiences formed the basis for *Black Like Me*, his 1960 book that has sold more than 10 million copies.

June 16 marks the 100th anniversary of Griffin's birth in Dallas. He was educated in France and spent time in an abbey contemplating a religious vocation, then served in the U.S. military 1942–1945, suffering a shrapnel injury that caused him to lose his sight.

He lived with his parents in Mansfield until he married Elizabeth Holland in 1952. Five years later, Griffin's sight returned, and he described the experience in the book *Scattered Shadows* and in stories for *The Dallas Times Herald*. He also wrote syndicated columns for the International News Service and King Features and became an accomplished photographer.

In an epilogue for a later printing of *Black Like Me*, Griffin wrote, "I learned within a very few hours that no one was judging me by my qualities as a human individual and everyone was judging me by my pigment." Motivated by that injustice, he gave hundreds of lectures and befriended civil rights leaders, in-



**John Howard Griffin, left, shares a meal at Sterling Williams' shoeshine stand.**

cluding Martin Luther King Jr. Griffin received death threats and was hanged in effigy in Texas, causing him to move his family to Mexico for nine months. He eventually cut back on his speaking, saying he found it absurd to presume to speak for black people when there were superlative black voices to do so.

Griffin developed diabetes and died in 1980 at age 60. His friend Robert Bonazzi, who later married Elizabeth, wrote several books based on Griffin's journals. "He felt like he had an effect with his efforts, certainly back then," Bonazzi says from his home in Austin. "Not too many white men would take on a black look and venture out into the world. It was brave and reckless, but he thought it was time for a white man to experience what a black man did, and there was only one way to do that."

Julie Hudson specializes in African American women's literature at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin. "I think the book is important," she says, "especially for a white audience, because it provides some insight into what it means to be black in America and into the issue of race and the implications of racism and hatred. There was so much anger in his community [in response to the book] because he was presenting the truth to people who didn't want to face it, or didn't care, or were embarrassed by it."

Of course, she adds, Griffin always knew that he could return to his white life, which likely informed his writing. And while his family did have to flee, the furor died down and they were able to return home.

"The book still resonates today," says Bonazzi. "He is much less known than he should be."

Read more about Melissa Gaskill's work at [melissagaskill.blogspot.com](http://melissagaskill.blogspot.com).

## WEB EXTRAS

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# Texas Wine Harvest

A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS LUCKY enough to go on a tour of Lubbock-area wineries. Because of the High Plains' semiarid climate, the region is ideal for viticulture and is now one of the top wine-producing areas in the country.

Mediterranean varietals love the Texas heat, so look for viognier, roussanne, marsanne, vermentino and trebbiano for white wines and tempranillo, tannat, mourvèdre, grenache and sangiovese, among others, for reds, says certified wine educator Denise Clarke. While these wines may not be as familiar or easy to pronounce, give them a try and see what Texas has to offer.

A great way to add wine to your table is with sangria, the ultimate summer drink that is endlessly customizable. Sangria is most often made with red wines, but here I've used a Texas rosé to pair with juicy summer fruits. Making it ahead of time ensures the flavors from the fruit and wine are well blended.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

## Rosé Sangria

- 1 bottle (750 milliliters) rosé wine
- 1 cup orange juice
- ¼ cup vodka
- 1 cup quartered strawberries
- 2 peaches, sliced
- ½ cup raspberries

1. Combine all ingredients in a large pitcher and stir well. Cover and chill at least 2 hours or until ready to serve.
2. To serve, stir sangria to recombine any settled juices. Fill glasses halfway with ice, then pour in sangria. Use a ladle or serving spoon to add an extra scoop of fruit from the pitcher into each glass and serve. ▶ Serves 6.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com), where she features a recipe for Lemon Sage Mustard.

MEGAN MYERS

# Recipes

## Texas Wine Harvest



### THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

MELODY YUHN | CENTRAL TEXAS EC

This succulent lamb stew is even better the next day, so don't worry about any leftovers going to waste. Yuhn recommends using a sangiovese or tempranillo in the stew and to pair with the final dish.

### Lamb Stew

- 4 ounces bacon, chopped into ¼-inch strips
- 2 pounds boneless leg of lamb or lamb shoulder, trimmed of excess fat, cut into 1½-inch pieces
- 2½ teaspoons sea salt, divided use
- 1½ teaspoons ground black pepper, divided use
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ cups Texas red wine
- 1 pound button mushrooms, thickly sliced
- 4 cups beef broth or stock
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1½ pounds small yellow potatoes, halved or quartered into 1-inch pieces
- 4 medium carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- ¼ cup finely chopped parsley, for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a 5-quart Dutch oven over medium heat, sauté bacon until browned and fat is released. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to a large plate. Do not wipe out pot.
2. While bacon cooks, season lamb pieces with 1½ teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper. Sprinkle with flour and toss to coat.
3. Cook lamb in two batches in hot bacon grease over medium heat until browned (3–4 minutes per side) then transfer to the plate with bacon. Add diced onion to the pot and sauté 2 minutes. Add garlic and cook another minute, stirring constantly. Add wine, scraping the bottom of the pan to deglaze. Add sliced mushrooms, bring to simmer, then cook uncovered 10 minutes.
4. Return bacon and lamb to pot and add broth, tomato paste, 1 teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, dried thyme and bay leaves. Stir in potatoes and carrots, making sure potatoes are mostly submerged in liquid, and bring to a boil.
5. Cover, carefully transfer to oven and cook 1 hour 45 minutes. Garnish with parsley when serving. ▶ Serves 8.

**COOK'S TIP** Prepare this recipe in a pressure cooker to save time. Use the sauté setting for the first few steps and set for 40 minutes at high pressure with a natural pressure release.



### \$500 Recipe Contest

The holidays are a perfect time for a **Cookie Swap**. Share your go-to swap recipe with our readers. Enter our November contest by **June 10**. Featured recipes will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests); MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

## Plum Sorbet With Wine

BARBARA REISS | PEDERNALES EC

Taste the plums before making this; their sweetness will determine the amount of sugar to use.

- ¾–1 cup sugar, depending on the sweetness of plums
- 1 pinch kosher salt
- ¾ cup water
- 3 cups peeled, pitted and chopped red plums (about 3–4 large plums)
- 2 tablespoons orange juice
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup chilled dry white wine, such as sauvignon blanc

1. In a large saucepan over medium heat, dissolve sugar and salt in water, then bring syrup to a boil.
2. Stir in plums and cook, stirring frequently, while mashing plums with a potato masher until the mixture is the consistency of very thick honey, about 5–10 minutes.
3. Let cool, then purée using a standard or immersion blender. Pour mixture into a bowl that has a pour spout and refrigerate 2–3 hours or overnight.
4. Once chilled, add juice, zest, vanilla and cinnamon to mixture. Whisk to blend well.
5. Transfer mixture to an ice cream maker and process according to manufacturer's instructions. After about 15 minutes (when mixture is beginning to freeze), pour wine into mixture slowly. Process until entire mixture is frozen. Serve immediately, or transfer to another container to freeze. ▶ Makes 2 pints.

## Chicken Breast With Sun-Dried Tomato Cream Sauce

LAMONT PETERSEN | NAVARRO COUNTY EC

Petersen recommends pairing with McPherson Cellars albariño, a white wine that is perfect for chicken dishes.

- 1 pound skin-on chicken breasts or thighs, fat trimmed on thighs
- ¼ teaspoon salt, divided use
- ¼ teaspoon pepper, divided use
- 2 tablespoons oil from jar of sun-dried tomatoes



- ½ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and sliced
- ½ cup finely chopped shallots
- ½ cup dry white wine
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1. Sprinkle chicken with half the salt and pepper and set aside.
2. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add chicken skin-side down to skillet and cook until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Turn chicken and cook another 15–20 minutes, until it reaches 165 degrees in the thickest part. Transfer to a plate and cover to keep warm.
3. Add sun-dried tomatoes and shallots to the pan. Cook, stirring, 1–2 minutes.
4. Add wine to pan and scrape up any browned bits to deglaze. Continue to cook until the liquid has mostly evaporated, about 2 minutes.
5. Reduce heat and stir in cream, any accumulated juices from the resting chicken and the remaining salt and pepper. Simmer about 2 minutes, until

slightly thickened.

6. Serve chicken over pasta or rice with the pan sauce and top with parsley. ▶ Serves 4.

**COOK'S TIP** You can use onion in place of the shallots. If you do, add a finely chopped clove of garlic.

## Gary's Wino Burgers

GARY HEATHCOTT | SAN PATRICIO EC

While the recipe calls for zinfandel or cabernet sauvignon, Heathcott recommends serving the burgers with a pinot noir.

- 1½ cups red wine, such as zinfandel or cabernet sauvignon
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped sweet onion
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter
- 2 teaspoons chopped rosemary
- 1½ teaspoons brown sugar
- 1½ tablespoons olive oil
- 4 ounces portobello mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ pounds lean ground beef
- 1 teaspoon salt

- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ cup blue cheese crumbles
- 4 large sesame buns
- 4 lettuce leaves
- 1 tomato, sliced

1. In a medium saucepan, bring wine, onion, butter, rosemary and brown sugar to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer about 30 minutes, until liquid is reduced to ½ cup. Remove from heat.
  2. In a small skillet, heat oil. When shimmering, add mushrooms and sauté until tender. Stir in the garlic and sauté for another minute or until fragrant. Set aside.
  3. Place ground beef in a medium bowl and mix with salt, pepper and wine sauce. Form into 4 patties and place on a hot grill. Cook burgers to about 145 degrees. Place a spoonful of blue cheese on top of each burger and continue to cook to about 155 degrees for medium-well doneness.
  4. Dress burgers on toasted buns with mushrooms, lettuce and tomato.
- ▶ Serves 4.

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**WEB EXTRAS** ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **APRIL COKER**, Wood County EC: Coker's 1962 Scotsman Scotty "Miss Millie" all decked out for the holidays at Tyler State Park.

◀ **CHARLES BAXTER**, CoServ: "Capitol Mesa and moon in Palo Duro Canyon State Park."



▲ **STEVE COYLE**, Pedernales EC: "Anyone who says Texas doesn't have nice fall colors just hasn't looked in the right place. Although the fall colors were past their prime in many parts of Martin Dies Jr. State Park during our visit, there were still a few pockets."

▶ **ELLEN BEAR**, Concho Valley EC: "I was at San Angelo State Park when these javelinas appeared to snack on the birdseed."





**AROUND TEXAS ▶** TCP's monthly list of local events has been suspended due to COVID-19 cancellations. Always call or check an event's website for scheduling details.



◀ **TRAVIS LACOSS**, Pedernales EC: "Hiking to Big Cave at Palo Duro Canyon State Park."



▲ **CAROLINA BURGOS-CALDERON**, Bluebonnet EC: "McKinney Falls State Park was magical with fall color and snow and crystal accents."



▲ **VALERIE JOHNSON**, Pedernales EC: "Quiet and shade on Caddo Lake."

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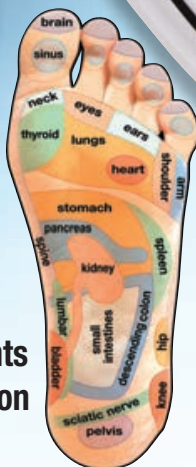
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# Orange Inspiration

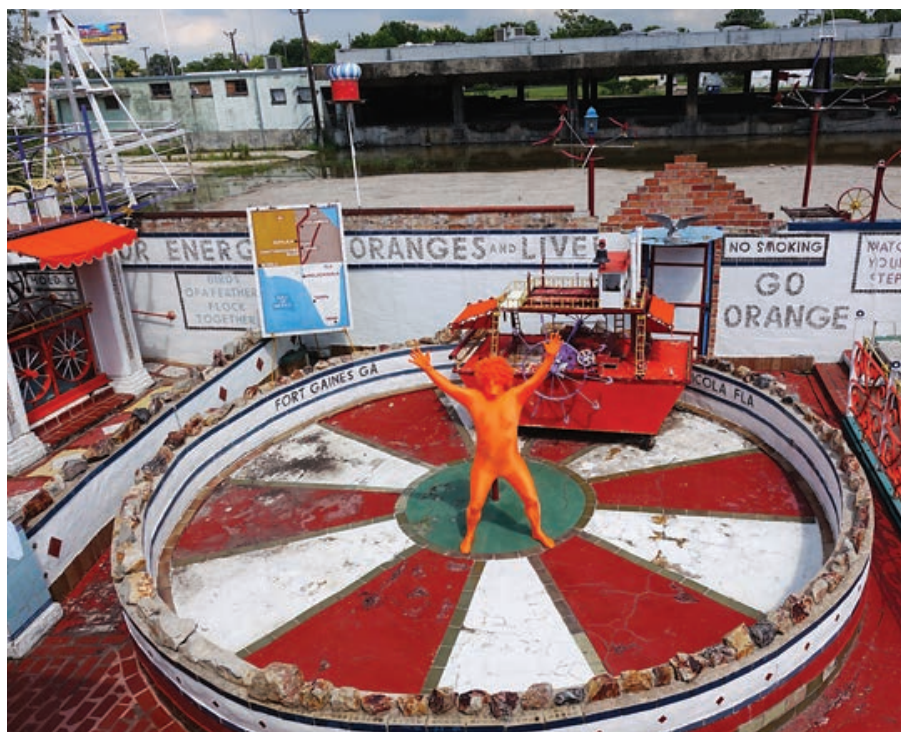
Houston folk art installation is a mashup devoted to its creator's favorite fruit

AS SOMEONE WHO GREW UP IN Southeast Texas, I know the heat and humidity can drive a person to the brink of insanity. I believe it can also fuel an intense creativity and artistic vision. Mix this inspiration with lots of vitamin C, and you have the formula for one of the strangest art installations in the world: the Orange Show.

After navigating Houston's urban maze, I turned into a neighborhood near the University of Houston, searching for a building-sized work of art. Even though I could see only modest midcentury houses, my phone assured me I was headed in the right direction. Then I found it: one of the state's preeminent folk art installations. From the street, its colorful wrought-iron railings and white stucco walls made it resemble an abandoned carnival attraction. I imagined circus music as I stepped inside the Orange Show, but what I experienced was beauty and intrigue.

The installation began to take shape in 1956, when postal worker Jeff McKissack decided that the world needed to know about the health benefits of his favorite fruit and how hard work and good nutrition were the secret to a long and productive life. Even though he had no formal training in the arts, McKissack picked up scraps of lumber from trash piles and shopped flea markets and, piece by piece, created a maze of staircases, doorways and stages. It's an orange-themed fantasy world.

Past the front gate, every turn revealed diagrams of orange-promoting propaganda. Phrases like "Go Orange. Be Strong" and "Love Me Orange" were inscribed in mosaics across the walls. Dioramas housed a half-dozen mannequins dressed in seemingly



**Orange is the new Chet at Houston's Orange Show.**

unrelated clothing: One with a hook for a hand stood near a clown who had found happiness by drinking cold, fresh orange juice. Another was Santa's son, in full Christmastime regalia, hoping to plant oranges for everyone. Each display balanced between charmingly whimsical and downright creepy.

Outside, I climbed strange staircases and discovered two open-air stages surrounded by 80 metal tractor seats. Above the stages fluttered 45 metal birds and 10 waving Texas flags. The largest arena was a "pond" that didn't hold water but did hold a stationary boat. What baffled me more than the art was the fact that McKissack had welded, paved and painted the entire experience by himself.


McKissack lived next door to his creation and worked tirelessly on the project until his death in 1980. Soon after, Houston's art community formed a trust to steward the property. Today, the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art makes the

art experience—and visionary art—accessible to the public. Nearby is the foundation's newest project, Smither Park, with meandering paths and bright, mosaic-covered walls created to honor McKissack.

Some folks might wonder why this mashup of materials should be considered art, but that's what makes folk art so amazing. It's usually created by artists without formal training. Did McKissack know that he was creating art? Maybe not. But there's no doubt he loved building it and sharing both his talents and love for citrus with the world.

Walking through the Orange Show is a stroll through the creative process. It's weird. It's wonderful. And it's confusing. I left not really knowing what I had just experienced, and I was thirsty for a big, cold glass of orange juice.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

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