

Keep Backyard Gardening Safe and Fun

According to the National Gardening Association, two out of three American households take part in some gardening activity each year. Chores vary but often include: raking leaves, transplanting trees and shrubs, planting spring-flowering bulbs and perennials, pruning trees, controlling weeds and mowing lawns. Whether you're a master gardener or budding amateur, keep these safety tips in mind.

AVOID OVEREXPOSURE TO SUN. Limit the time you spend working in direct sunlight by gardening during early



morning or late-afternoon hours. This way, you'll avoid the 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. time period when the sun's rays are strongest. Protect your skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, pants instead of shorts and a wide-brimmed hat. When skin is exposed, apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15. Heat stress can also be a risk. Keep water by your side and drink often to remain hydrated. Remember to take frequent breaks by going indoors and relaxing in front of a fan.

WARM UP. Injuries often occur when people overextend themselves on a job they tackle only once or twice a year. Stretch your muscles, especially those in your back, before heading outside. For large tasks, enlist help from friends or family, take frequent breaks, spread the job across several days or hire helpers. To prevent strains and sprains, consider the following:

- Keep your back erect when working at ground level and when using long-handled tools.
- Bend at your knees and hips to lift objects.
- Alternate or use both arms whenever possible.
- Keep your elbows bent.
- Don't rest your body weight on your elbows.
- Grip hand tools lightly.
- Work below shoulder level whenever possible. If you must work above shoulder level, perform the task for five minutes or less.

BE CAREFUL WITH POWER EQUIPMENT.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 400,000 people are treated in emergency rooms each year for injuries from lawn and garden tools. Consider the following when operating power tools:

- Know how to operate equipment. Read the manual and follow all instructions.
- Wear long pants, close-fitting clothes, sturdy shoes and safety glasses. Don't wear anything that could get caught in moving parts, such as loose jewelry. Tie back long hair.
- Handle fuel carefully. Fill up only when the engine is cold.
- If you use electrically powered equipment, check all cords and plugs for wear or cracked insulation. Avoid use in the rain or on wet grass.
- Clear the area of rocks, twigs, toys and anything else that could be thrown by mowing equipment.
- Keep children and pets away from the area. Never carry a child as a passenger on a riding mower.
- Keep your hands and feet away from moving parts. Never work on equipment when it's running.
- Don't point the blower nozzle of a leaf blower toward people or pets. Wear a dust mask, especially if you are kicking up clouds of dirt.
- Wear earplugs when using noisy equipment, such as leaf blowers or wood chippers.

IS YOUR AC READY?

Spring is near. That means that air-conditioning season in Texas cannot be far away. Are you ready? Here are some maintenance tips that will help keep your system in top shape.

■ Change your air filter regularly. Clogged, dirty filters block normal air flow and reduce a system's efficiency significantly. Keeping the filter clean can lower your air conditioner's energy consumption by 5 to 15 percent.

You should change the filter at least monthly during heavy use. You might want to check it more often if you have furry pets or if your house is dusty.

■ The air conditioner's evaporator coil and condenser coil collect dirt over the months, reducing efficiency. Check your evaporator coil and clean it as necessary.

■ Outdoor condenser coils can also become very dirty. You should minimize dirt and debris near the condenser unit. Your dryer vent, falling leaves and lawn mowing are all potential sources of dirt and debris. Cleaning the area around the coil, removing any debris and trimming foliage back at least 2 feet allow for adequate air flow around the condenser.

■ The aluminum fins on evaporator and condenser coils are easily bent and can block air flow through the coil. Air conditioning wholesalers sell a tool called a "fin comb" that will put these fins back into nearly original condition.

■ Occasionally pass a stiff wire through the unit's condensate drain channels. Clogged drain channels prevent a unit from reducing humidity, and the resulting excess moisture may discolor walls or carpet.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

LAMAR ELECTRIC CO-OP ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, May 9

Look for details in the next issue.



LAMAR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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For general information and outages after hours, call (903) 784-4303 local or 1-800-782-9010 toll-free

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YOUR "LOCAL PAGES"

This section of *Texas Co-op Power* magazine is produced by LEC each month to provide you with information about current events, safety, special programs and other activities of the cooperative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact the local office.

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- Level billing
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Farm Safety Around Power Lines

Every year, an average of 62 farm workers are electrocuted in the United States. You don't want to be one of them.

Imagine that you are driving a piece of farm equipment to the field through a back gate when things come to a screeching halt. You look back to see what's stopping you only to discover that you're tangled in an overhead power line! What do you do?



First, here's what you DON'T do: Don't climb out. Unless you're in immediate danger, stay where you are and call for help.

Most utility lines are uninsulated, bare wires. Do not let your body become a direct link between the power line and the ground. If you must leave the equipment, jump as far away as you can, making sure that no part of your body touches the machine and the ground at the same time.

Once you're off the machine, do not go back until your local electric co-op disconnects the power line.



A Free Think Child Safety Fair for Children Ages 0-12 & Their Parents
Fun Drug-Free Activities for the Whole Family

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Sparky and Pumper
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Free Hot Dogs & Coca-Cola
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Funded by individuals and businesses.

March 28, 2009

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Love Civic Center

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- ☺ Games and Activities
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■ 2030 Clarksville St. in Paris. Call (903) 785-2760.

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