

# The Caddie



April 2012

Volume 6, Issue 4

Official Publication of the Forest Creek Homeowners Association



Happy  
Spring!

## Are Solar Panels Right For You?

*(by a fellow homeowner)*

The answer is "it depends". It seems like such a waste to have all that solar energy hitting the roof (up to 300 kilowatts per house) and not being able to capitalize on it. This article is based on my personal experience and discussions with others who have installed solar panels.

There are many factors that effect the solar energy question, particularly when it comes to installing some on your home. With rebates and tax incentives (while they last), the return on investment can begin to look attractive. I found that while hot water collectors are clearly the most efficient solar energy collectors, the thousands of dollars for installation vs. the cost of natural gas to heat my household water made them difficult to justify for my small family, but it could work for a larger family. Solar electricity from photovoltaic panels is more attractive to me because of our large cooling needs here. Even though today's panels are only 13%-18% efficient, if you have enough roof space, you can still make enough electricity to satisfy some or most of your electricity needs.

**How is it used?** Solar energy must be used in real-time, with any excess power generated either lost or sold back to the grid. For example, when the sun is shining high and producing lots of energy, the air conditioner

*(Continued on Page 7)*

## Announcements, Accomplishments, & Accolades!

### ANNOUNCEMENT:

There is now an extended version of the Caddie available on the Forest Creek website! Yes, the rumors are true ... we here in the nether clouds of our little neighborhood rag lovingly called "The Caddie" are proud to announce the beginning of our ascent into cyberspace and the shedding of the shackles of page limitation! Simply go to [www.forestcreek.org](http://www.forestcreek.org), log in, click on Caddie Newsletter and then on Online Edition to get a glimpse of what is to come!

The Caddie is gearing up to grow and become a larger voice in our community and in order to accomplish that endeavor in a meaningful way, I invite you all to shoot me an e-mail ([myenergyangel@aol.com](mailto:myenergyangel@aol.com)) expressing your opinion about the Caddie's role in our community and how it can be improved upon to better serve all who read it.

We will need volunteer writers, young and old, to write monthly articles and columns about the people and events here in Forest Creek and some aspiring photographers to submit photos of them! We will also be offering sponsorships to Resident owned Businesses in an effort to highlight and promote community based commerce. For more info about how you can get involved our new extended version go to [www.forestcreek.org](http://www.forestcreek.org)!

### CONGRATULATIONS:

To the Cedar Ridge High School DECA Students who won the State Competition! Ryan Pauley, Ashley Rowe, Karina Schmitt and Daniela Ricardo are now eligible for the DECA International Competition in Salt Lake City, Utah on April 28.

### CONGRATULATIONS:

To Cedar Ridge students, Israel, Taylor, Ryan, and Riley for being accepted for the 2012 Boys State Program!

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Angel Donato ..... [myenergyangel@aol.com](mailto:myenergyangel@aol.com)

### PROPERTY MANAGEMENT CONTACT

Kerri Hebert

CenTex Association Management

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[kh@centexmanagement.com](mailto:kh@centexmanagement.com)

## NEWSLETTER INFO

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Angel Donato ..... [myenergyangel@aol.com](mailto:myenergyangel@aol.com)

### NEWSLETTER PUBLISHER

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### Do's and Don'ts of Fencecrete Fencing

The fencing adjacent to Forest Creek Drive and Harvey Penick Drive is made of durable concrete; however there are a number of things that can degrade the integrity of the fencing, causing it to start falling apart.

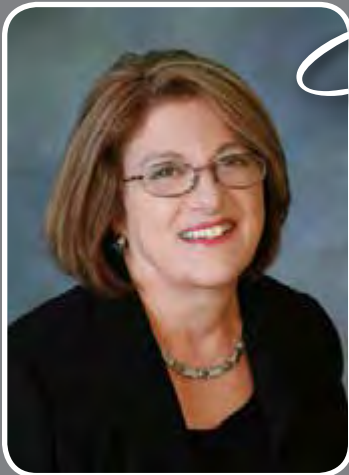
According to the CC&R's, those homeowners whose property is bounded by the fence are responsible for insuring that the integrity of the fence is maintained. This means, simply, that if a section fails, and has to be replaced, the HOA will look into the root cause of the failure, and if the failure is attributable to either a direct action of the homeowner, or to neglect by the homeowner to properly maintain their side of the fence, they will be charged for the cost of replacement.

It is of vital importance that each homeowner insure that no vines, tall grasses, weeds, or other plant life be

left in contact with the Fencecrete. This also applies to low-hanging branches from trees. While English Ivy does a beautiful job of hanging on a wall, the roots of the ivy (and other climbing plants) wedge deeply into the fissures of the Fencecrete and begin breaking it apart.

Although the fence posts are anchored deep in the ground with a large amount of cement footing, they too are in danger, especially from overwatering in the areas around the post. Oftentimes, this watering allows the footing to slip in one direction or another, eventually causing the post to lean or separate from the section, allowing horizontal slats to fall out.

Please make sure that you pay close attention to the fencing, and take care of it! Replacement is costly and time-consuming, aside from ruining the look along the roadway!



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## OAK WILT DISEASE - Identification and Management

By Emsud Horozovic, City of Round Rock Forestry Manager

Recently I received several requests for assistance from residents suspecting they have oak wilt present in their trees. This article is an attempt to clarify the facts about the disease and therefore is written not for a scientific journal but rather to explain to Round Rock residents what to look for. Although we are fortunate that we do not have a lot of oak wilt in our city, it is a big problem in surrounding communities, particularly in Austin, where I use to work for years on oak wilt suppression. In Round Rock we do not have live oak lined streets. Therefore, it did not spread like an epidemic. We do have about five locations with oak wilt in town and that should not cause alarm but rather be considered a lack of a problem, so far.

Austin is losing one of its most important assets - the live oaks and red oaks that form a shady, green canopy over the city. These oak trees are being threatened by a contagious disease called oak wilt. Over the past twenty years, Austin has lost more than 10,000 high valued, residential trees to oak wilt. For both the home owner and the city as a whole, this loss is felt by increased utility bills, reduced property values, and a sense of devastation.

Oak wilt is caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum* that clogs the water-conducting tissues of oak trees. The trees become dehydrated and in most cases die. Live oaks (*Q. fusiformis* and *Q. virginiana*) and Texas red oaks, particularly Spanish oaks (*Q. texana*) and Blackjack oaks (*Q. marilandica*), are especially vulnerable to oak wilt. White oaks, such as Bur oak (*Q. macrocarpa*), Chinkapin oak (*Q. muehlenbergii*), and Post oak (*Q. stellata*), are much less susceptible and mostly do not get oak wilt.

In the early 1940s, oak wilt was confirmed in Wisconsin. In Texas, cases of dying oaks were reported as early as the 1930s, but oak wilt was not considered responsible. It was believed that the fungus could not survive Texas' high summer temperatures. Oak mortality in Texas was misdiagnosed, leading to years of improper treatment. Oak wilt was officially diagnosed in the 1960s, and has now been documented in fifty-six Texas counties. Twenty-two states have reported cases of oak wilt. Austin is probably the most heavily infected city in the nation.

### SYMPTOMS AND SPREAD

There are three means of oak wilt spread: By beetles that feed on fungal mats from infected red

oaks and carry oak wilt spores; through the roots, mostly on live oaks; and from diseased firewood.

Oak wilt on live oaks can be identified by a distinctive yellowing or browning along the veins of the leaf. Soon after these symptoms appear, the trees defoliate. Once the fungus enters the tree, most live oaks die between three months to a year.

Red oaks do not survive oak wilt infection. The initial symptoms of oak wilt on red oaks include the leaves turning pale green and then brown while remaining on the tree. Red oaks die between two weeks and several months after infection.

In the late fall and early spring, oak wilt fungal mats or masses of oak wilt spores are produced beneath the bark of diseased red oaks. The mats are sweet smelling and attract the sap-feeding nitidulid beetles. Oak wilt spores adhere to the insects' bodies as they feed. These beetles are also attracted to the sap oozing from broken limbs or pruning cuts on healthy trees. While feeding on these trees, the beetles deposit the spores from the fungal mats and new infection centers are formed.

Oak wilt also spreads underground from live oak to live oak through common root systems. Root sprouting and root grafting are characteristic traits of live oaks. Several live oaks are capable of sharing one common root system. When one live oak becomes infected, all live oaks sharing the same root system have the potential for contracting oak wilt. The disease spreads through these communal roots systems at a rate of about 100 feet per year.

### PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION

Currently, there is no cure for oak wilt. The only measures against this fungus are prevention and suppression.

The first precaution to be taken is to remove diseased red oaks before fungal mats can form. Another measure is to avoid pruning when the fungal mats are forming and the nitidulid beetles are the most active, during the fall and spring. If pruning cannot be avoided, it is important to immediately paint all wounds on all oak species at all times of the year. Pruning saws should be disinfected when pruning between different work sites. When pruning adjacent to oak wilt infested areas, disinfect tools between trees. After 48 hours, painting is not effective because the

wounds are no longer attractive to the insects.

Infected red oak trees cut for firewood can also spread oak wilt. Diseased red oak logs can harbor the fungal mats full of oak wilt spores. Precautions to take regarding firewood include using wood other than red oak, burning only dry, seasoned wood, and keeping the wood pile securely covered with a clear, plastic tarp.

A fungicide called propiconazole (Alamo) has given some relief to homeowners who have infected trees or who are in the immediate path of infection. The chemical is injected into the base of the tree, and is most effective as a preventative treatment. Although the fungicide can be used to save individual trees, it does not kill the fungus in the roots, and therefore, does not keep the disease from spreading from tree to tree.

A commonly used method of suppressing the spread of oak wilt is trenching. Trenching involves severing the common root systems of live oak trees with a rocksaw to a depth of three to four feet. Trenches are placed at least 100 feet from the front of the disease in order to prevent further underground spread of oak wilt. This method of control has proven to be 70% effective state-wide.

Very often people ask if they can plant new oak species on the site where oak trees died. Young trees, including oaks, can be planted on infected sites because the possibility of them getting root-grafted to old, infected roots is minimal to none.

For further detail information on Oak wilt please check out following web sites:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/oakwilt/> ; <http://txforests-service.tamu.edu/forest/oakwilt/> ; <http://dallas.tamu.edu/oakwilt/> ; <http://www.texasoakwilt.org>

For Oak wilt assistance outside of Round Rock city limits please contact Texas Forest Service office in Austin at 512/451-2178.

And for the end just a reminder that live oaks are not true evergreen trees. They do recycle/drop their leaves every spring in March and April and then I get lots of phone calls from residents thinking they get Oak wilt. Keep a watchful eye on the foliar symptoms and let me know if I can help.

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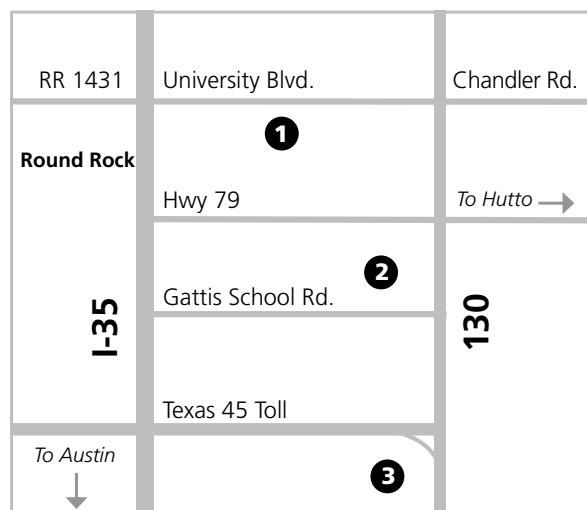
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## Solar Panels - (Continued from Page Cover)

cycles on and off. When it is on, it gets most of its energy from the solar system with the balance coming from the grid, but when it cycles off, the solar panels are still capable of producing lots of power, but the household demand for power is low. I found that about 1/3 of the energy produced is used live. Selling to the grid allows me to "bank" my surplus solar energy and get it back at night or during peak demands. Without selling the other 2/3rds back to the grid I would lose all that energy production, thus tripling my payback period for the system. But, selling it back to the grid is not as easy as it seems. Perhaps future laws will fix that. For now, the best offer I found is from a "green" energy supplier. They buy up to 500 KWH per month at full retail and anything over that at 1/2 retail. But, they charge a little more for their "green energy" than the bargain electric providers, so you have to run the numbers for yourself from each provider.

**Reliability:** Systems put in over 30 years ago are still running. Today's name brand panels are

guaranteed for 20+ years and some of them are even made in America. I have had one warranty repair, but the system has been running fine for over two years now.

**What does it cost?** The sellers usually try to give you a "price per watt". Typical home systems range from 4,000 watts to 10,000 watts. Contractors don't like to build smaller and rebates won't fund larger. Last year systems were running \$4.00-\$5.00 per watt installed, depending on the system size and bells and whistles. But, you subtract from this the Onco rebate offer (\$2.00/watt in 2011) then the 30% federal income tax credit and that cost drops to \$1.40-\$2.10/watt. Based on local conditions, each watt of solar panel will generate about 1.25 kilowatt-hours (KWH) of household power per year. At \$0.12/KWH that takes 10-14 years to get your money back from electric savings alone. For example: a 4 KW system costing \$20,000 could have a rebate of \$8,000 and a federal tax credit of \$3,600 resulting in a final cost of \$8,400. That seems like a long payback

period, but that calculation changes significantly if energy rates climb or if the rebates and tax incentives go away. For those who might sell your home before recapturing the cost of the system, solar panels increase the value of your home, and while that increase may or may not match the cost, it certainly factors into the cost-benefit analysis, substantially reducing the payback period. In Texas, the added home value from solar is exempt from property taxes, but it is still a good idea to increase your property insurance to cover this addition. Some installers are leasing or offering payment plans to encourage purchasing it now and rebates have become limited with a line forming for the next offering.

**Motivation:** Some I have spoken to installed the solar panels to save money, some wanted to be more "green", still others wanted to have some power in the event the grid goes down. For this third group, there is a catch. Most grid-tied systems automatically shut down when

(Continued on Page 8)

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# The Caddie

## Solar Panels - (Continued from Page 7)

the grid power is off as a safety precaution. For substantially more money some systems support a battery back-up option that can be wired into critical circuits in the home, giving you limited power when the grid goes down. Considering how reliable our grid has been, this is an expensive and more complex option, but some people may choose it for emergency preparedness and peace of mind.

**Conclusion:** Every situation is different. Do you have enough clear, unshaded roof space facing south, east or west? Do you plan to live in the house a long time? What is your motivation? Are the rebates and tax breaks still available? What is the future cost of solar panels? Does our future hold inflation or energy shortages? Should I jump now, delay, or just forget it? Only you can decide if and how much solar energy is right for you. I paid plenty for my system, but my total electric bill for the past 12 months was only \$350, in spite of the record breaking summer heat, so I am one happy solar energy consumer.

## Forest Creek Social Media

Forest Creek, Round Rock Tx. now has a Facebook page. It has proven to provide a wealth of information for and about the community and provides a venue for people to comment, to be informed and help guide what they feel is needed in the community. Forest Creek, Round Rock Tx is a closed group intended for the members of the community. Please feel free to invite other members of the community to join. This page will not be moderated and the only posts that will be removed will be those that violate the terms and conditions of Facebook. All that's asked is that you use your real name and be respectful of others. Only members of the community will be able to see your posts.

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**Comment From The Editor** - There is also another Facebook page exclusively for Forest Creek residents called Forest Creek Friends, which tends to be less contentious for those who wish to avoid controversy, and a Forest Creek Yahoo group that is moderated. All 3 groups can be very informative and I personally encourage all residents to join 1 or more of them to keep abreast of things happening here in our community. None of these Social Media Sites are affiliated with, promoted by or sponsored by The Forest Creek Board of Directors, The Forest Creek Homeowners Association or Centex Management Company.



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# The Caddie

## DROUGHT-UPDATE AND HOW IT AFFECTS YOU

By Lynn Banks, HOA Board Member

Many residents have questions regarding the drought and how it affects their landscaping, for example: What stage of drought are we in? How often can I water my lawn? When can I water my lawn? Can I purchase new landscaping and if I do how often am I allowed to water it? For this reason, I have written this article, which I hope, will save residents' of Forest Creek time and energy by researching this information and bringing the answers to you.

What Stage of Drought are we currently in? On November 14, 2011, the City of Round Rock adopted an Amendment to the Drought Management Plan stating new Stage II (b) restrictions limiting residential households to once-a-week water schedule. The details of that is on the City's webpage: <http://www.roundrocktexas.gov/home/index.asp?page=10&recordid=2528>

What days can I water using a sprinkler system? Residential customers with odd-numbered addresses should water on Saturday, even-

numbered on Sunday. Note: Hand watering with a hose is permitted any day, at any time.

What time of day should I water with a sprinkler system? Watering hours are between midnight and 10 a.m. and between 7 p.m. and midnight on the designated watering day.

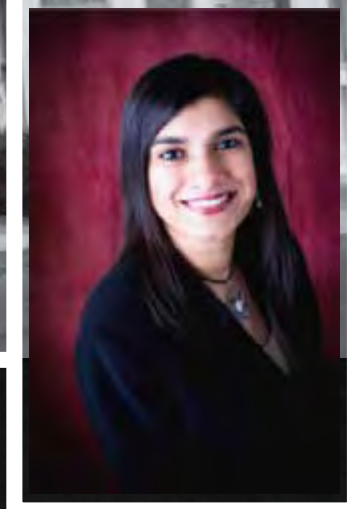
Can I plant new landscaping and if so what are the procedures I must following? Can I water new landscaping more than once a week? Under stage II(b) new plants and trees are allowed to be planted. Two different procedures must be followed for new plantings:

if the new planting are going to be planted on your front yard or will be visible from the street then you must submit your plan to the Architectural Review Community (ARC) in Forest Creek for approval prior to planting; failure to submit plans and gain approval from ARC prior to planting will result in a fine from our HOA. To submit your plans to ARC contact Kerri Herbert

with Centex at 512-759-3734 or [kh@centexmanagement.com](mailto:kh@centexmanagement.com).

If you are going to be replacing significant portions of your landscape, larger than a seasonal color beds, a tree or two, or anything that can be managed by hand-watering, and you plan to use a sprinkler system to water your newly planted landscaping then contact Jessica Woods at 671-2872 or [jwoods@round-rock.tx.us](mailto:jwoods@round-rock.tx.us) at the City of Round Rock and request a 30-day Variance granting you permission to water your new planting more than once a week until they are firmly established. The variance is as follows: first 10 days can water everyday (not between 10am – 7pm); second 10 days can water every other day (not 10am – 7pm); third 10 days can water every three days (not 10am – 7pm); then must adhere to restrictions. Of course you don't have to use the full 30-days!

(Continued on Page 11)



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## Solar Panels - (Continued from Page 10)

It should be noted that a violation of the Stage II (b) restrictions is a Class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine not to exceed \$2,000. Therefore, it is important to take the time to obtain a variance from the City before watering more than once a week using a sprinkler system.

Should I Xeriscape to save water? Xeriscape landscaping is not permitted in yards visible from public areas. Xeriscape landscaping refers to gardening in such a way as to reduce or eliminate the need for supplemental water from irrigation. Generally, it includes rock ground cover and arid varieties of plants. The ARC may grant a variance to allow xeriscape as an accent to yard landscaping, however xeriscape shall not exceed 20% of the total landscaped area of the yard (gardens and turf). Xeriscape is not allowed in the road right-of-way part of the property (the first 10' from the curb).

The Devil Strip: This urban dictionary term refers to the strip of land between the sidewalk and the street curb. Xeriscape is not permitted

in this strip. Texas State law now requires that any (new landscaping) strip of land less than 48" wide be irrigated by drip (including the devil strip). This section of the yard shall be turf grass unless a parcel-specific variance is approved by the ARC. Variances may be granted by the ARC for a planting bed that, when mature, does not grow higher than 24 inches, does not encroach on the sidewalk or the street curb, and does not have the appearance of a hedge. Planted beds in the devil strip must be maintained free of weeds and debris and the exposed ground must be covered with mulch or dark colored rock.

Remember, the appearance of the yards in Forest Creek affects everyone's property value. Because of this, the HOA requires that everyone maintain their yard in good condition. Drought tolerant grasses are encouraged. Browning of grass (it goes dormant) is allowed during a declared water restrictions, but it is not permissible to allow the landscaping to die. Keeping it alive with some water and localized hand watering prevents having to replace the landscaping when water availability improves.

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### EASTER EGG STUFFING PARTY

Wednesday, April 4th, 7 p.m.

- Come help us stuff eggs for the annual Egg Hunt. We will also hold our monthly Events Planning Committee (EPC) meeting at this time, a great way to have some fun and see what EPC is all about! If your middle/high school child needs community service hours, please feel free to bring them as well.

Information: Leslie - lsterzinger@gmail.com.

### EASTER EGG HUNT

Saturday, April 7th, 2-4 p.m.

- Bring your Easter baskets and camera for pictures with Peter Cottontail!

Information: Kate - walbee@sbcglobal.net.




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