

HOME *on the* RANCH



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Overlook • Parkside • Reserve • Waters Edge • Westchester



October 2012

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AVERY RANCH HOA

Volume 6, Issue 10

HOA BOARD *Election Results*

The Avery Ranch Home Owners Association annual meeting held on August 20th brought about the election and re-election of several board members. Please welcome to the board: Robert Betts, Robert Cummings, Steven Pierce, Pat Wimberly, April Aguren and of course our D.R. Horton board member, Tom Moody.

THE 2012-13 HOA BOARD OFFICERS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Steve Roebuck, President
Marc Boucher, Vice President
Steven Pierce, Treasurer
Khristi Mire, Secretary

As always, if you wish to contact ANY board member, their information is on the second page of our newsletter, Home on the Ranch.

HARVEST HAYRIDE & COSTUME CONTEST

Submitted by Jean Mayo, ARSC Chairperson

Save the date and get those costumes ready! Fall is approaching and the Avery Ranch Social Committee has a Harvest Hayride planned for everyone on Saturday, October 27th from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the MAC (Main Amenity Center)

There will be two horse-drawn wagons to ride on! To entertain the children who are waiting for their turn to get on the hayride, we'll have a story teller to help them remain occupied. As in the past years, cider and cookies will be served.

Wear your Halloween costumes for the costume contest! It's for kids 12 years and under. There will be two (2) age group categories for judging: 1 to 6 years old category and 7 to 12 years old category. Judging will be at 5 PM.

We always need help – if you're motivated to volunteer, get in touch with the co-chairs Jean Mayo and/or Karen Niefert or send an Email message to arsc@averyranchhoa.com. In particular, we are looking for an Avery Ranch resident that can help out as a magician for this event.

We're fortunate to have the community spirit at Avery Ranch. Come on out and enjoy what living at Avery Ranch is all about.



HOME ON THE RANCH

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

EMERGENCY 911
Fire..... 911
Ambulance..... 911
Sheriff – Non-Emergency 512-943-1300

SCHOOLS

ROUND ROCK ISD

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..... 16200 Avery Ranch Blvd.
Elsa England Elementary School 704-1200
..... 8801 Pearson Ranch Road
Cedar Valley Middle School..... 428-2300
..... 8139 Racine Trail
McNeil High School..... 464-6300
..... 5720 McNeil Dr.

LEANDER ISD

Rutledge Elementary..... 570-6500
..... 11501 Staked Plains Dr.
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..... 100 N. Vista Ridge Dr.
Vista Ridge High School..... 570-1800
..... 200 S. Vista Ridge Dr.

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NEWSLETTER INFO

EDITOR

Rona Quejada..... ARNEWS@AveryRanchHOA.com

PUBLISHER

Peel, Inc. 512-263-9181
Advertising..... advertising@peelinc.com

BOARD MEMBERS

PRESIDENT

Steve Roebuck..... steveroe@AveryRanchHOA.com

VICE PRESIDENT

Marc Boucher marcoucher@AveryRanchHOA.com

SECRETARY

Khris Mire khrismire@averyranchhoa.com

TREASURER

Steven Pierce..... steven.pierce@AveryRanchHOA.com

RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

Pat Wimberly..... PatWimberly@gmail.com

RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

Lance Goldsmith b.lance.goldsmith@gmail.com

RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

Mike Steinkoenig..... msteinkoenig@AveryRanchHOA.com

RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

April Aguren april.aguren@AveryRanchHOA.com

RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

Rober Betts Rbetts@AveryRanchHOA.com

RESIDENT BOARD MEMBER

Robert Cummings.. robert.cummings@AveryRanchHOA.com

D.R. HORTON

Tom Moody..... TEMoody@drhorton.com

AVERY RANCH HOA WEBSITE

Visit the Avery Ranch HOA website at AveryRanchHOA.com

FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

For questions or concerns in your neighborhood contact
our Property Manager and HOA Board at GetHelp@
AveryRanchHOA.com.





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The Austin Diagnostic Clinic
512-901-1111 • *ADClinic.com*

HOME ON THE RANCH

AVERY RANCH CALENDAR

HOA MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Next meeting - Monday, October 8th

Board Meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7pm, except for holidays. Board members will meet on these dates to discuss issues related to Avery Ranch. Agenda can be found on the Avery Ranch Website in the discussion forums section no later than Friday prior to the meeting. If you have an item you would like discussed during one of these meetings, please contact Alliance Association Management, Inc. at 347-2888. The location for meetings is at the Morningside Amenity Center.

UPCOMING AVERY RANCH EVENTS:

AVERY RANCH YARD & GARDEN CLINIC

Thursday, October 18th at 7 p.m.

Meeting Room, Main Amenity Center

Master Gardener Bob Beyer and landscape professional Lisa LaPaso offer free landscape advice. (See article in this issue for details)

HARVEST HAYRIDE & CHILDREN'S COSTUME CONTEST

Saturday, October 27th from 4-6 pm at the Main Amenity Center

Costume contest for kids 12 and under, Judging at 5 pm and prizes will be awarded. Come out for a hayride in horse drawn carriages. Details on the front page. If you're motivated to volunteer, get in touch with the co-chairs Jean Mayo and/or Karen Niefert or send an Email message to arsc@averyranchhoa.com. In particular, we are looking for an Avery Ranch resident that can help out as a magician for this event.

ACC STAGE ENSEMBLE BAND PERFORMS AT THE MAC

Saturday, November 3rd from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Dance to the delightfully sweet sounds and timeless music of the American swing era preformed by the Austin Community College Stage Ensemble Band featuring one of our Avery residents, Jose Reyes. Hughes BBQ – owned and operated by Avery residents Kraig & Whitney Hughes - will be providing BBQ plates for sale and Kona Ice will be out selling their delicious snow cones. Be sure to bring some lawn chairs, as this event is sure to attract a big crowd.

Enjoy an evening of family fun at the MAC Amphitheater



MOVIES IN THE PARK IS BACK!

Saturday, November 17th

at 6:30 p.m./dusk

Amphitheater of the

Main Amenity Center

Your Social Committee is bringing back the "Movies in the Park" at the MAC with a date set for November 17th.

Plans are underway to revive this popular family social event coinciding with the return to standard time, earlier nightfall and cooler weather, Refreshments (Popcorn, hotdogs, drinks) will be available to enjoy while watching a family friendly movie for people of all ages.

More details will be provided in the November issue of our newsletter. Contact Bob or Lana Beyer, co-chairs for this event at 238-6732, if you have any questions or suggestions.

HOLIDAY SLEIGH RIDE

Saturday, December 15th from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Main Amenities Center

Save the date! Watch out for details in the December newsletter issue.

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HOME ON THE RANCH

HOA Addresses Resident Concerns

By Steve Roebuck, AROA President

In response to inquiries from residents at the annual meeting, the HOA has investigated the use of reclaimed water obtained from Brushy Creek. As we have written before, much of our landscaping water needs are satisfied by two pumps, housed in a building on the golf course. From these pumps, reclaimed water is piped from Brushy Creek and inserted into our irrigation system. The price of this water is substantially below what it would be if we purchased it from the City, and as city officials say, "It is a cost-effective way to improve the city's ability to provide water for non-drinking water purposes and conserve the city's water supply, especially important during droughts." What that means to residents is that they can be proud of the sound, ecologically-friendly way we have found to supply our needs, and they can enjoy homeowner dues that directly reflect the savings from using this resource.

In November of 2011, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport began using reclaimed water, resulting in a savings of 35 million gallons per year. We can beat that, Austin! Avery Ranch, over a 5 year period has saved an average of 89 million gallons per year. This is 89 million gallons of water that did not have to be taken from the City of Austin supply, 89 million gallons that did not have to be treated by the city's plants, withdrawn from the lakes and piped out to Avery Ranch. This is another example of how Avery Ranch respects the environment, gives back to the community and works at controlling costs for our residents.

Reference: www.bizjournals.com/austin/news/2011/11/17/austin-water-abia-activatereclaimed.html?ana=RSS&s=article_search&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+bizj-austin+%28Austin+Business+Journal%29



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THANKS

To The Social Committee and Sponsors!

The Avery Ranch Homeowners Association are giving a shout out to the Avery Ranch Social Committee and to our community event sponsors Rudy's Country Store, Randolph Brooks Federal Credit Union and Mighty Fine Burgers!!

They continue to make our neighborhood activities possible!

HOA Announcement

On the opening of the Glenfield Pool Amenity Center, the board established a "No Alcohol Policy" on a trial basis, while the rest of the other pool amenity centers remained unaffected.

After several years of study, the HOA board has determined to abolish the liquor ban on the Glenfield Pool Amenity Center. Bringing and consumption of alcohol within the limits of the law are now allowed in ALL Avery Ranch swimming pool amenity centers. Please feel free to responsibly enjoy your adult beverages while remaining respectful of others. Kindly note that glass containers are NOT allowed in any of our swimming pool amenity centers.

Help the HOA Save YOUR Money

Want to save \$6,000 annually? That is the postage expense incurred by the HOA to mail your quarterly paper statements. Opt to receive your quarterly statement electronically. To register for this free service, visit www.estmt.net. Then watch out for an email notification that your HOA quarterly statement is ready for viewing, you'll need to log-on to the site to confirm your request for electronic billing.

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SAVE THE DATE

November 3rd, from 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

The Avery Ranch Social Committee would like to invite everyone out to enjoy an evening of family fun at the MAC Amphitheater November 3rd, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.. Dance to the delightfully sweet sounds and timeless music of the American swing era preformed by the Austin Community College Jazz Ensemble Band featuring one of our Avery residents, Jose Reyes. Hughes BBQ – owned and operated by Avery residents Kraig & Whitney Hughes - will be providing BBQ plates for sale and Kona Ice will be out selling their delicious snow cones. Be sure to bring some lawn chairs, as this event is sure to attract a big crowd.

To stay up-to-date on events happening within Avery Ranch please check out our Facebook page: Avery Ranch Neighborhood Events.

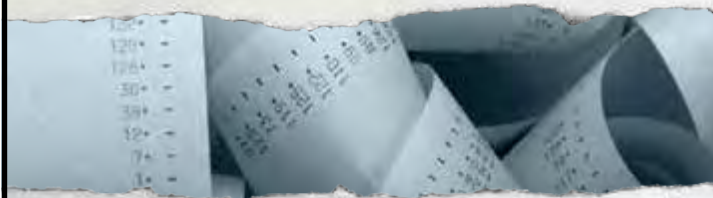


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Glenfield Avery Ranch

D.R. Horton has been Building Homes and Building Value in Avery Ranch for 11 years. Since August of last year we have welcomed 44 new families to the Glenfield Community.



New Home Sales Consultant:
Raquel Atwell

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D·R·HORTON DRI LISTED NYSE
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In our New Section Glenfield 3-3 we released 42 new lots and we already have several homes ready for October move-in. There is a HIGH DEMAND for single family homes in Austin. Check out the article published in the Austin American Statesman on August 20th 2012. It confirmed that "Central Texas home sales rose 20% in July, the 14th straight month of year over year increases, the Austin Board of Realtors said Monday."

The Board reported that 2,344 single-family homes were sold in the Austin area in July. This is compared to only 1,951 in July 2011. Pending sales were up 16 %, with 2,310 homes in the pipeline to close. There were 7,662 homes on the market, 18 % fewer than the 9,393 homes on the market in July 2011.

Our neighborhood has the most convenient location which helps drive up demand as well as our home values! In response to this increased demand, we started our next section Glenfield 3-4 sooner than expected. We will have approximately 47 lots ready to start construction by the beginning of the new year!

The housing market in Austin is strong, especially in Avery Ranch! We sold and closed 97 homes in the 6 month timeframe from February to July 2012. This is due in part to the lowest interest rates that we've seen in years.

According to MLS Statistics as of mid-August, Avery Ranch only had 29 homes on the market within the price range of \$185,000 - \$300,000. 97 homes (new and resale) sold within the 6 month period from February - July 2012. This is due in part to the lowest interest rates that we've seen in years and the limited number of homes available for sale. This historically creates demand.

Now you might ask "What has D.R. Horton done for me lately?" D.R. Horton helps drive up home values in Avery Ranch. The average sales price for a new home in Avery Glenfield is \$251,000 and the average square footage is 1939. This equals an average price per sq. ft. of \$130 while Austin's average is only \$124/sq. ft.!

Glenfield has several home closings each month that do not get published in MLS. If you need this information to help you with the sale of your home, please call me. Several of you may have outgrown your existing home or may want to downsize. I would love to show you our new plans. Sales Office open Monday - Saturday 10:30 - 7 and Sunday 12:30 - 7.

I'm so excited about the future of our community and look forward to meeting more of you. Bring a friend by to see our model home and the map of the next section and you'll receive a gift card for a free appetizer at Waterloo Ice House (while supplies last), plus get a chance to enter a drawing to win a \$100 gift card when your referral registers with us. See you Soon!



BOOFEST AT RUTLEDGE

Submitted by Yi-Chi Chao, from Rutledge Elementary PTA - Fall Festival Committee

Don on your Halloween attire and join the Rutledge Ranchers for an afternoon of Halloween fun, food and entertainment! The Rutledge Elementary PTA will be celebrating its annual fall festival, BooFest, on Saturday, October 27th, from 3-6 p.m. at Rutledge Elementary School, located at 11501 Staked Plains Drive. The festival will feature an array of games, activities and entertainment as well as a silent auction. This family event will offer over 20 games and activities including a petting zoo, face painting, inflatables, and hamster balls. There will be entertainment featuring the musical talent of ACC Stage Ensemble and Austin's favorite kids performer, Bonzo Crunch, followed by a live performance by Austin's own children's singer, Joe McDermott.

The local community will also have an opportunity to meet and learn more about the Austin Fire Department, EMS, Bomb Squad, K9, SWAT and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children will hand out complimentary children identification kits.

No entrance fee. \$15 wristbands will be available for purchase to participate in the games and activities, and to attend the Joe McDermott performance. Children ages 3 & under do not need a wristband to play. \$1 food tickets are also available for purchase. All proceeds will go directly to Rutledge Elementary to allow the school to continue offering quality education programs for its students.



REACHING YOUR NEIGHBORS

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- Belterra
- Canyon Creek
- Chandler Creek
- Cherry Creek on Brodie Lane
- Circle C Ranch
- Courtyard
- Davenport Ranch
- Forest Creek
- Hidden Glen
- Highland Park West Balcones
- Hunter's Chase
- Jester Estates
- Lakeway
- Lakewood
- Legend Oaks II
- Long Canyon
- Lost Creek
- Meadows of Bushy Creek
- Meridian
- Pemberton Heights
- Plum Creek
- Ranch at Brushy Creek
- River Place
- Round Rock Ranch
- Sendera
- Shady Hollow
- Sonoma
- Steiner Ranch
- Stone Canyon
- Teravista
- Travis Country West
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- Villages of Westen Oaks
- West Lake Hills
- Westside at Buttercup Creek
- Wood Glen

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LANDSCAPE AND GARDEN CLINIC RESUMES

by Bob Beyer

Fall is a great time to begin implementing your landscape redesign for the coming year, especially if you are thinking about a water-wise, easy to care for xeriscaped yard. Now that landscaping maintenance is being enforced again by the HOA, even under Category 2 water restrictions, you may need a different approach to landscaping and gardening. Well, help is here.

With the blessing of the HOA, we have a Landscape and Garden Clinic which meets the third Thursday of each month in the Main Amenities Center meeting room at 7:00 P. M. Landscape designer Lisa LaPaso and Master Gardener Bob Beyer co-host and lead discussion on any and all gardening topics. Bob and Lisa bring different areas of expertise and perspectives to the Clinic. We will have a 30 minute

presentation followed by open discussion, Q&A, and sharing of experiences that will help us all with our landscaping and gardening challenges.

Lisa will begin the Fall series with a presentation on Fall Gardening, September 20th. Subsequent sessions will be a presentation by Bob Beyer on October 18th about Winter Gardening. On November 15th, we will talk about preparing our landscapes and gardens for Spring – what we can and should do during the colder months to be ready for a successful garden in 2013. There will be no clinic in December. Come, share, learn, and enjoy these opportunities to meet your neighbors and get help with solving problems and improving your landscape and gardens. Feel free to bring refreshments to share at these informal clinics.

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HOME ON THE RANCH

Get Involved in Your Community

We have community events because AR Residents make it happen!

Join the Avery Ranch Social Committee! Help out your community by getting involved, even in just one event. If you have a passion for a certain activity, come out to our monthly social committee meeting and let us know. You don't have to attend every meeting all year long. Contact our Avery Ranch Social Committee Chairperson Jean Mayo at jmayo002@austin.rr.com.

The Social Committee meets every 1st Thursday at 7p.m. at the Meeting Room located by the pool of the Main Activity Center (Morningside).

The Event Calendar is posted on the HOA website under the Social Committee Forum and at the Avery Ranch Neighborhood Events Page on FaceBook.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Austin-TX/Avery-Ranch-Neighborhood-Events/132212366794767>

Playtime for kids ... Adult time for parents! Become a part of the Avery Ranch Playgroup! To know more about it, contact April Aguren at april.aguren@averyranchhoa.com.

SEND US YOUR *Event Pictures!!*

Do you have a picture of an event that you would like to run in this newsletter? Send it to us and we will publish it in the next issue. Email the picture to ARNEWS@AveryRanchHOA.com. Be sure to include the text that you would like to have as the caption. Pictures will appear in color online at www.PEELinc.com.



Happy Halloween!

Here's a fun project for kids of any age.

Step 1: Color your Jack O' Lantern

Step 2: Cut out your Jack O' Lantern along the dotted line

Step 3: Poke a hole through the X, place a string through it and hang up your decoration for a "ghoulish" good time!



Melanie Hadley

Vice President • NMLS 208645

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Halloween Tips

PORCH LIGHTS - a porch light on means fair game for Trick-Or-Treating. If you are not distributing candy or are done for the evening, please turn your lights off. And Trick-Or-Treaters...if you see a porch light off, be respectful and move on to the next illuminated house.

HELLO? - Knock or ring the bell no more than twice. If the door isn't answered within a minute despite the porch light being on, assume you've gotten one of those folks who didn't read Tip 1.

FRIGHTENING LIMITS - If you are the person who wants to jump out of the coffin tucked in the corner of your front porch, please make sure that the age of the 'victim' is appropriate. While pee will wash off concrete, you might ruin the night for a dressed up 2 year-old princess.

WALKING - Stay on sidewalks or pathways. Don't take short cuts through lawns or flowerbeds.

Manners matter - Saying "Trick-or-Treat" before and "Thank You" afterward is a small price for collecting free candy on Halloween.

GAME OVER - Don't Trick-or-Treat after 9pm. Families with children or older people may well be in bed after that.

TRAFFICKING - Vehicles: drive extra slow and look for kids. Chaperones/Kids: Stay off roads as much as possible.

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT - Glow sticks, reflectors, flashlights - all are good to make your kids visible to anyone who fails at Tip 6.

FLAME OFF!! - Jack-o-lanterns/candles set a spooky mood, but open flames near dangling costume sleeves and flammable accessories is dangerous. Consider battery-powered tea lights.

THANKS... - If you're going to give out goodies to Trick-or-Treaters, buy individually wrapped treats. Save special homemade goodies and fresh fruit as presents for the folks you know rather than strangers who are coming to your door Trick-or-Treating.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T - Not everyone celebrates the holiday, or celebrates it in the same way you do. We live in a community with diverse beliefs and views. Please show respect as you yourself would want to be respected.

DON'T SCARE THE LITTLE ONES TOO BADLY! - If you've got a really creepy costume to answer the door, or you decorate your house from sidewalk to front porch in graveyard chic - remember that what can be delightfully frightening to older kids and adults can terrify toddlers and young kids. Before jumping out of bushes, screaming when you open doors or leaping out of fake coffins at Trick-or-Treaters, take a quick glance to make sure they're of an appropriate age-group to enjoy such a scare. Save the best frights for those who can really appreciate them. You'll have more fun, and the parents of the little kids will be grateful. Having to take home a hysterical Trick-or-Treater who has been scared witless on their first time out is no fun for anyone.



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“If I Installed Solar, How Much Electricity Would It Generate and How Much Would I Save?”

By Chris Lee

For those of us living here in Austin, we're all acutely aware that the sun is a plentiful, if not unrelenting, source of heat and sunlight (okay, the heat is really a byproduct of the intense sunlight). And for many of us I bet that we've thought, "Gosh, if I could harness just some of that free sunlight..." The harder part is trying to answer the obvious questions about installing a solar array or solar panel system on the roof of your home - "How much electricity would it generate and how much money could I save on my electric bills?"

Without having to know much about solar or needing to contact a solar installer or solar company, you can easily get those estimates at your fingertips. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), which is operated by the US Department of Energy, has created a website allowing anyone to calculate the amount of electricity a PV (photovoltaic) system (aka: solar panel array system) would generate. Here's the website (notice that it already takes into account that you're in Austin): <http://rredc.nrel.gov/solar/calculators/PVWATTS/version1/US/Texas/Austin.html> (Shortened: <http://goo.gl/H9a8y>)

Once on the website, for your initial estimate, you can use the default information presented and just click on "calculate" at the bottom. On the results page you will see that in Austin, a South facing solar panel array (which means the Array Azimuth = 180 degrees) that's built for 4 kW of electricity generation, would generate 5450 kWh in a year and save you \$528.65. To give you a better estimate, there are 3 settings you can go back and change:

1. **Array Azimuth in degrees.**
2. **DC Rating in kW.**
3. **Cost of Electricity in cents.**

ARRAY AZIMUTH:

If you're considering placing your solar array on the side of your roof that gets the most sunlight and that part of the roof faces due South, then the Array Azimuth would be 180 degrees. If your proposed solar array will be facing Southwest, the azimuth would be 225 degrees. Southeast would be 135 degrees. And so forth. The more accurate your submission, the more accurate your estimate will be.

DC RATING:

The DC Rating (in kW) default is 4 kW in the calculator. This would be the "size" of electricity generation by your solar array - basically, by adding (or subtracting) more solar panels to your proposed system, the DC Rating would increase (or decrease). Makes sense - if you add more solar panels to your array, you'll increase the amount of electricity generated and therefore increase the amount of money saved.

COST OF ELECTRICITY:

The default is the Texas state average of 9.7 cents per kWh. For those of you with an electricity provider with higher (or soon to be higher) rates, you should change the rate accordingly to get a more realistic estimate.

So that's it, an easy way to determine what you would be generating with a solar array on the roof of your home. This is a simple but fairly accurate way to determine the benefit of installing solar on your home. Of course, YMMV (your mileage may vary) but by getting a fairly accurate estimate of the amount of electricity generated and the money saved, you can better determine whether or not installing a solar array on your roof would make financial sense for you and your family. If you have any questions, please ping me at leec89@gmail.com.

End of Summer Home Maintenance Tips

Submitted by Eric Hegwer

As the weather begins to cool in Central Texas, and the brutally hot days of August are behind us, now is the time to take care of all those little items that you've been putting off in favor of staying inside your air conditioned living room.

Each of these projects is inexpensive, easy, and you can easily accomplish several in a weekend.

LANDSCAPING

Pull up some weeds, lay down some mulch, and prune back the plants. Hire some neighbor kids to rake the leaves. The end of the summer is also a great time to fertilize for the fall/winter dormant season for native Texas plants.

CLEAN GUTTERS AND DOWNSPOUTS

Clogged gutters can overflow, potentially causing damage to the wood fascia around your home. Cleaning your gutters is easy, but does involve climbing up a ladder and scooping out some gross stuff. If you aren't comfortable with heights or don't know how to use a ladder, hire a pro. Scoop out the dirt, leaves, and debris, and wash everything clean with water from a hose.

OUTDOOR PAINTING AND TOUCHUPS

Walk around your house and look for any areas that need touch ups, are peeling, or look rough. Carefully scrape or sand the area, prime, and paint with the matching color to complete the repair.

CAULKING AND SEALING

Check key areas around windows and doors for gaps. Cracks can cause leaks and higher energy bills and can be easily repaired with caulk or expanding foam. Also, check for loose trim boards, and re-attach them as necessary.

ASPHALT AND CONCRETE REPAIR

To prevent shifting and tilting of driveways and sidewalks, reseal asphalt every two years and fill cracks in concrete with epoxy.

Maintaining your home doesn't have to be difficult. Especially when you catch problems early and fix them. In doing so, you will increase your home's value and prevent costly repairs down the road. If you aren't able to do this work yourself, hire a professional or inquire with your neighborhood HOA to see if any able bodied neighbors can help.



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GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ON LAWNS

Author unknown | Submitted by Bob Beyer

GOD: Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it - sometimes twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bail it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No Sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, Sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the

growth and save them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

GOD: Enough. I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us?

ST. CATHERINE: Dumb and Dumber, Lord. It's a really stupid movie about ...

GOD: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.

Moral of the Story: People garden in order to make something grow; to interact with nature; to share, to find sanctuary, to heal, to honor the earth, to leave a mark. Through gardening, we feel whole as we create our personal work of art upon our land – BUT nothing compares to what the Creator has already given us in nature.

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Austin Newcomers Club



Austin Newcomers is dedicated to introducing new residents to Austin while extending a hand to make new acquaintances and join fun Interest Groups. Rosina Newton, the Horticulturist and Education Coordinator at The Natural Gardener, an award-winning Austin nursery, is the featured speaker. She will talk about Native and Xeric Landscaping, especially important in the present drought.

The monthly luncheon will be held on Wednesday, October 17 at Green Pastures Restaurant, 811 Live Oak St, Austin TX 78704. The luncheon is \$20 per person; reservations are required, and payment must be received by Thursday, October 11.

The club website is www.AustinNewcomers.com and the telephone number is (512) 314-5100.



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Kids R Kids, one of the nation's premier providers of early childhood education services upholds the philosophy of loving education and implements an accredited curriculum. Its programs are specifically tailored for children between six weeks and 12 years of age—infants, toddlers, pre-kindergarten, and school-age. In addition, Kids'R'Kids will be offering Spanish and music classes to further enrich children's talents and skills.



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Splitting Hares

Nature Watch

by Jim and Lynne Weber

Colloquially known as 'bunnies', rabbits and hares are small mammals that can be found in a variety of habitats, including meadows, woodlands, grasslands, deserts, and even wetlands. But did you know that there are true differences between rabbits and hares?

Rabbits are clearly distinguished from hares in that rabbits typically have young that are born blind and hairless (altricial) and hares have young that are born with hair and able to see (precocial). Since young hares are well camouflaged and mobile within minutes of being born, the mother does not protect them and is with them only long enough to nurse. Rabbits, other than cottontails, live underground in burrows, but cottontails, like hares, live in simple grass nests above the ground called 'forms.' Unlike rabbits, hares usually do not live in groups (although a group of hares is called a 'drove') and they are generally larger than rabbits, with longer ears and black markings on their fur. Hares are also called jackrabbits, as they are very quick and can run up to speeds of 45 miles per hour! They have jointed or kinetic skulls, which are unique among mammals. This joint permits relative motion between the anterior and posterior part of the skull's braincase, helping to absorb the G-force created as the hare strikes its powerful hind legs with impact against the ground.

In our area of Texas you can find the Swamp Rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*), the Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), and the Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*). Living in the eastern third of our state and one of the largest cottontails in its range, the Swamp Rabbit inhabits poorly drained river bottoms and marshes. Its upper parts are grayish-brown heavily lined

with black with a white underside and cinnamon-colored front legs and tops of hind feet. At home in the water, this rabbit's dense fur helps to waterproof its skin, and unlike other rabbits it will cross streams and rivers on its own. Also unlike other rabbits, its young have fur at birth but their eyes and ears are closed.

Eastern Cottontails are the most common rabbit in the eastern three-fourths of Texas and are moderately large with rusty-brown fur, relatively short ears, and large hind feet. These cottontails commonly frequent brush-dotted pastures and are active largely in the twilight hours and at night, when they venture out to meadows or lawns to forage. They often live at the edges of town and feed in gardens and flower beds, and are common along country roads lined with dense vegetation. Eastern Cottontails are prolific breeders, and can have as many as four or five litters throughout the year.

The Black-tailed Jackrabbit, also known as the Desert Hare, reaches a length of about two feet and weighs from three to six pounds. Its distinctive long ears and powerful rear legs distinguish it as a hare. With dorsal fur that is dark buff peppered with black and an underside of creamy white, its black markings are found on the tips of its ears and the top of its short tail. In warmer climates like ours, this jackrabbit breeds year round and the average litter size is four, but it can range from two to seven depending on the food supply. Since it does not hibernate or migrate, it uses the same square half-mile to mile habitat of oak-juniper woodland as its territory.

Now that you know the subtle (and sometimes confusing) differences between these closely related mammals, you too can try your hand at splitting hares!



Swamp Rabbit



Eastern Cottontail



Black-tailed Jackrabbit

*Send your nature-related questions to naturewatch@austin.rr.com and we'll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, look for our book, *Nature Watch Austin*, published by Texas A&M University Press.*

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