

Canyon Creek CHRONICLE

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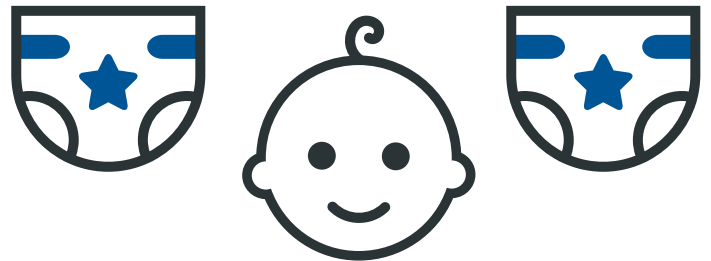
INSTEAD OF TOYS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, SOME KIDS JUST WANT THEIR BASIC NEEDS MET

by Dr. Beverly Hamilton

One in four children in the Austin area live in poverty. The tiniest members of our community don't care yet about toys but they might know what it's like to not have enough diapers. Diapers are not covered under assistance programs and cost \$800-\$1,000 per year. This price tag means some families have to decide between paying their rent or paying for diapers. A national study showed that 1 in 12 mothers reported leaving their baby in a soiled diaper longer than necessary due to limited resources.

The founder of Austin Diaper Bank, Beverly Hamilton, started the diaper bank out of her spare bedroom after learning this sad fact. Now the organization has grown exponentially and occupies a modest warehouse on Burnet Road in north Austin. Austin Diaper Bank helps make sure that Central Texas families have the diapers they need to keep babies healthy. By working with a network of over 40 partner agencies, the diaper bank serves thousands of people from Georgetown to San Marcos.

The diaper bank is a grassroots community effort, largely donation driven and volunteer run. To directly help babies in Central Texas this holiday season, you can host a a diaper drive, donate much needed funds, provide diapers (larger sizes are especially in demand) or volunteer. Individuals and groups can spend time in the warehouse sorting, counting and bundling diapers for distribution to the community. The littlest Central Texans thank you.



NEIGHBORHOOD COMPASSION WATCH!

COMPASSION IS ACTION

Let's each of us make it our mission to bring positive change and solutions to our own lives, our communities, and our world. Let's sustain our hope for a better world through personal action.

Try this in December. Start a compassion jar or box in your home. Challenge yourself and your family members to seek out and discover compassion in your home, neighborhood, school, and workplace (acts of kindness, service, respect, love, acceptance, generosity, hope, peace, gratitude, forgiveness, and caretaking of the Earth). Pay close

attention and discover these acts in yourself and others. Recognize these acts by dropping a note or a marble or pebble into the jar or box. See how full it gets. Find a time to share with each other what you discover.

Share your stories here and we'll publish them www.peelinc.com/residentsArticleSubmit.php. Also, share via social media with the hashtag #compassionup.

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DEER & TREES & SUCH

Bambi is cute. His daddy and momma are majestic and elegant - and all of them are very very hungry! No doubt you have noticed that deer these days are becoming bolder and that deer-resistant plant lists are shrinking each year. Why? Populations in suburban-rural areas are increasing due to many factors all the while their native food sources are dwindling. Toxic and disagreeable landscape plants are becoming necessary for their forage as natural predators, hunting, and routes for migration become almost non-existent. Often corn is provided with good intentions, but it is well documented that it is of little nutritional value and can cause them to die as a result of acidosis. It has become a situation which is costly and undesirable for hill country communities and deer alike. One of the best sources of food for deer has always been the acorn. One of the less considered repercussions of the national tree epidemic we all call oak wilt, is the loss of this major deer diet staple in those more and more prevalent locals where this fungal pathogen has caused the death of oak trees. Property clearing has also affected them by the generic approach of remove everything but the Live Oaks and grass (deer don't have the capacity to digest mature grasses) from the lot and raising tree canopies above the height that deer can reach to browse. Also, not a minor issue of deer over-population is the genetic defects arising from in-breeding.

Though some may think it is "neat" to see deer so close to our back porches, it is incredibly unnatural. The lack of fear and decline of self-preservation instincts can take a serious toll on our bodily safety on the roads that the deer constantly jay-walk across, our insurance premiums, and obviously and arguably the worst consequence is the painful injury and likely drawn-out death the deer experience after vehicular impact. Also a result of this lack of fear (along with hormonal craziness), bucks are during the rut choosing our landscape trees as their punching bags if you will – both letting out there aggression and leaving their scent behind, both culminating in the likely event of your tree dying. Cages or plastic protectors are absolutely critical for any planted tree to survive these days.

Humane, well-thought-out plans of action are absolutely necessary to bring deer populations to levels (and maintain them at those levels) advised by wildlife experts, who have both the knowledge and are motivated by compassion to seek the good of both the community and the deer. Trapping, relocating, more park space, food plots of nutritional forbs, mast, and browse as well as regular education of the public of informed care practices for these amazing animals are just a few of the many things which can help enrich our lives and theirs.

Questions or comments this article or previous articles have generated, may be directed to me at: kevin@arborcareandconsulting.com

Hitting the slopes this ski season?

Keep in mind these tips to preventing injuries on the slopes.

As a former US Olympic Men's Ski Team physician and orthopedist, every year during the winter months I treat many ski & snowboard injuries in Austin recreational athletes of all ages and abilities.

For 15 years, as a traveling doctor for the team, I accompanied the athletes throughout the US, Canada and Europe on the World Cup tour and was responsible for the triage, stabilization, and treatment of injuries in these world-class skiers.

One of the most frequent questions I get this time of year from my patients who ski is

"How can I avoid hurting myself on the ski slopes?"

So what do I tell recreational skiers about staying healthy on the hill?

First and foremost, adjust to the altitude in your first few days. While there are medications that will improve your blood oxygen, they require a prescription and can have side effects. Perhaps the easiest to take along are low-dose aspirin or ginkgo biloba, as both are safe (unless allergic) and easy to take. Low-level exercise and lots of water (especially during the first night) are also key, as is abstinence from alcohol during the first 24 hours at altitude. Early trip moderation equals a better mountain experience!

Modern skis, boots, and bindings are universally safe now, unlike in decades past. Multi-release bindings help you come out of your skis safely in a fall and with less stress on your knees, the most commonly injured joint in a skier. Make sure they are set correctly.

Speaking of knees, in most solid, intermediate skiers, unlike beginners (learning to stop) and racers (ACL injury from shear forces), serious knee injuries are actually quite rare.

The best way to protect yourself from ski injury is:

- Get in good "ski-shape"
- 6 weeks of strength and some aerobic training will suffice
- Ski within your limits
- Stay relaxed, focused & well hydrated
- Watch out for that last, fatigued run of the afternoon
- If you fall, fall forward and throw your hands in front of you it's proven that less knee and shoulder injuries occur in the forward lean of a fall.
- And always, always, wear a helmet!

Before you ski, take time to take stock of your physical condition, especially your knee, shoulder and hip joints. Pre-trip aches and pains will not make for an enjoyable ski trip!

*Written by Kelly Cunningham, MD Orthopedic Specialist and
Founder, Austin OrthoBiologics Sports Medicine Clinic*

Austin resident Kelly Cunningham, MD is board certified by the American College of Orthopedic Surgeons, and an active member of the Arthroscopy Association of North America and the International Cartilage Repair Society.



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NATURE WATCH

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

by Jim and Lynne Weber

While most people are familiar with the tropical, non-native species of Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera* sp.) often sold as houseplants, not all are aware that we have a native Christmas Cactus (*Cylindropuntia leptocaulis*) here in Texas. Our Christmas Cactus, also called Tasajillo, Pencil Cactus, Christmas Cholla, and Desert Christmas Cactus, is a true cactus much more adapted to our types of soils and climate. Common in the central and western parts of Texas, this plant's species name, *leptocaulis*, means 'slender-stemmed', and it is a very good descriptor of its form.

Upright, shrub-like, with many branches made up of slender, cylindrical jointed segments, this 2 to 5 foot tall plant is most often found growing in sandy or bottomland soils, having a trunk or main stem up to 4 inches in diameter with thicket-forming stems that exhibit various shades of green and feature a solid, woody internal core. While occasionally spineless, it typically has very slender, 1



Tasajillo bloom

to 2 inch grayish-white spines grouped with much tinier spines, along each stem. Botanists now think that two forms grow in Texas, a 'long-spine' form and a 'short-spine' form. Its leaves are very small, often not even noticed before they fall early in the growing season. Small, pale, yellow-green flowers appear at irregular intervals in April/May and July/August, opening in late

afternoon or evening. But the true color display occurs in December, when its fruits turn conspicuously bright red and seemingly cover the plant like it has been festooned for the holiday season.

(Continued on Page 5)

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(Continued from Page 4)

Christmas Cactus can grow from seed, but it is much more likely to spread by cloning. The jointed stems can easily detach without harming the rest of the plant, and they are dotted with areoles, a structural feature of cacti that contain buds. All a stem needs to do is come in contact with the right soil, and it can take root and grow a whole new plant.

While the Christmas Cactus can be a nuisance if it develops in the wrong areas, it can also provide desirable value to wildlife and to humans. Growing best under the protection of other vegetation, it offers dense cover for a variety of nesting birds and provides a good food source for white-tailed deer, bobwhite, wild turkey, most bird species, and many small mammals. From a human perspective, Christmas Cactus has a good ornamental value in a mostly xeric landscape, as it stands out in the bleak winter landscape, adorned with red fruit when most other vegetation is bare.

Several sources describe the fruits of the Christmas Cactus as edible, even intoxicating. But they are so small, and the spines so troublesome, that the plant usually yields only a sporadic nibble to the curious human. Nevertheless, native tribes made it part of their traditional diet, noting that the fruits, also called tunas, are vaguely sweet with a taste similar to the fruit of a prickly pear cactus.

Take the time to get to know our native Christmas Cactus and consider adding it to your wildscape. You will easily learn to fall in



Tasajillo fruit

love with its prickly nature, especially at Christmas time!

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, check out our book, *Nature Watch Austin*

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