



MARCH 2019 VOLUME 12, ISSUE 3

A Newsletter for the Residents of Legend Oaks II

## College Scholarship

Scholarship Amount: \$2,500

Application Deadline: Tuesday, March 26, 2019 (before 5:00pm)

The Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District hosts a college scholarship essay contest dedicated as a memorial scholarship honoring one of Austin's most influential environmental planners, Kent Butler. Dr. Butler specialized in bringing science and policy together. He encouraged open conversation, collaboration, and participation from all perspectives. The Kent S. Butler Groundwater Stewardship Scholarship Essay Contest increases the awareness of groundwater issues by rewarding high school students for high quality research and writing. The \$2,500 scholarship can be applied toward tuition for any college, community college, or training institution. A panel of independent judges reviews all essays and score them based on content, accuracy of information, originality, grammar, quality of research, and style. The judges represent a cross-section of skills and expertise.

Essays must generally discuss groundwater issues, which may include but are not limited to non-point source pollution, pollution prevention, water conservation, groundwater management or hydrogeology. While essays must focus on

groundwater issues, applicants do not have to be planning a career path in a water-related field.

The scholarship contest is open to high school juniors, seniors, and immediate graduates. Students must reside in one of the eight school districts overlapping the District boundary. These eight independent school districts are: Austin, Del Valle, Dripping Springs, Eanes, Hays Consolidated, Lockhart, San Marcos Consolidated, and Wimberley.

Find out more at [www.bseacd.org/scholarships](http://www.bseacd.org/scholarships)



## KENT S. BUTLER MEMORIAL GROUNDWATER STEWARDSHIP COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP

Amount: \$2,500

Application and Essay Due: March 26, 2019

[www.bseacd.org/scholarships](http://www.bseacd.org/scholarships)

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## NEWSLETTER INFO

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### NEWSLETTER

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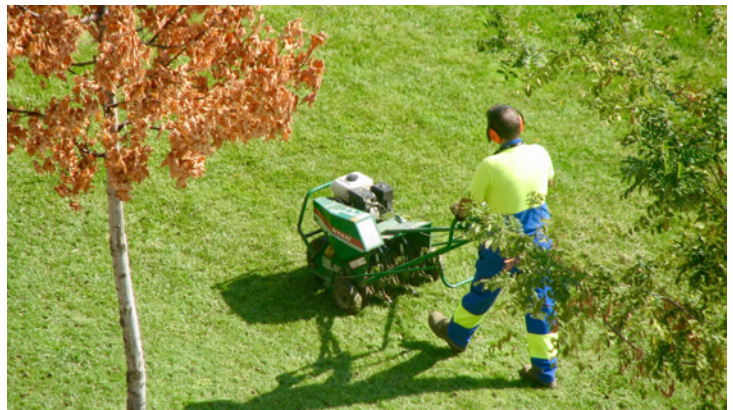
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## Aeration Now Can Help Your Spring and Summer Irrigation



In order to prepare your lawn for a healthy spring growing season, you should employ basic lawn care practices at this time of year, which includes aerating your yard. It is important that nutrients reach the soil beneath your grass, and aeration can help you get that done.

Aeration involves making small holes in the soil to allow air, water and nutrients to get to the grass roots.

This helps the roots grow deeper and produce a stronger, more vibrant lawn.

Aerating helps alleviate soil compaction. Compacted soils have too many solid particles in a space, which prevents proper circulation of air, water and nutrients within the soil. Excess lawn thatch or heavy organic debris buried under the grass surface can also starve the roots from these essential elements.

So when is the right time to get this aeration done? These next six to eight weeks leading up to the spring season, when grass begins to grow again, is a good time to aerate.

The two main aeration tools are the spike aerator and a plug aerator. The spike aerator poke holes in the ground with a solid piece of metal. Plug aerators remove a core or plug of grass and soil from the lawn. Most landscaping companies and horticulturists recommend the use of the plug aerator. The machines can be rented or you can have a lawn care service aerate for you. After aerating, it's always a good idea to apply about a half-inch of compost over the aerated yard. The compost fills in the holes left by the plug aerator and brings organic materials into the root zone.

If you have noticed that your turfgrass isn't looking its best or that water has difficulty penetrating through the soil surface, it may be time to aerate your lawn. Lawns with clay soils that get a lot of foot traffic typically require aeration more often as they become compacted over time. Here's a great tip to check to see if your yard needs to be aerated.

Using a shovel, dig a square-foot section of grass about six inches deep and take a look at it. If the grass roots don't extend further than two inches deep into the soil, your lawn would benefit from aeration.

If you plan to aerate your own yard, here are a few helpful tips to get the job done.

*(Continued on Page 3)*

(Continued from Page 2)

- Before you get started, make sure the soil is moist enough. There's nothing more frustrating than trying to aerate soil that is bone dry. Aerating the day after a rain shower or watering your lawn the day before is advised.

- Most aeration machines cover only a small percentage of soil surface per pass, so make multiple passes over the most compacted areas. Save resources (and your energy) by leaving unaffected areas alone.

- The soil plugs can be left on the ground after aeration and allowed to decompose. Or, you can rake them into piles to throw in the compost bin. However, this isn't necessary as it should take about two to four weeks for the soil cores to break down naturally. Sprinkle compost (sand or peat moss can be used instead of compost) over the lawn to fill in the holes.

- An aeration myth is that if you apply a pre-emergent herbicide on your lawn in the spring, aerating your lawn will destroy the herbicide "barrier." This is not true — research shows that aeration will not affect crabgrass control or weed prevention.

After aerating, it's important to continue appropriate lawn care practices.

Aerating will help you save water over the spring and summer seasons. Instead of running off or only penetrating a few inches,

water will be better absorbed in an aerated yard. That makes your entire landscape and your water bill happier.

### Did you know...

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, outdoor water use varies greatly depending upon geographic location. In dry climates such as that in the Trinity Glen Rose District, a household's outdoor water use can be as high as 60 percent. Some experts estimate that as much as 50% of that irrigation water is wasted due to inefficient watering techniques, wind and evaporation.



## COMMON GROUND COMMON GOALS COMMON GOOD

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## Still on the Fence About Hosting an Exchange Student?



You don't have any kids? Are you a single parent? Same sex couple? An empty nester? This is not a problem, we place our students in all kinds of families!

You're not rich? Neither am I! Your exchange student comes with their own spending money

and health insurance. All you provide is room/board and three meals a day. Oh and TLC...but that's free.

Live in the middle of no where? Small town? Not a big deal. Some kids prefer to get away from the hustle and bustle of big cities. The exchange students also do pretty well in small schools, as they usually get to be the center of attention and make friends rather quickly. Our students also get chances to travel to New York, Washington DC, Hawaii and California...so they can get their fill of the city life and return back to the peaceful sounds of nature.

Do you consider yourself a boring person? More than likely this is not true, and you should quit being so hard on yourself. Your student

will make friends. Your student will meet other exchange students. Your student will attend activities offered by our program. Your student will get involved in sports and school clubs. Your purpose is not to entertain them. But you might find that you bring a little adventure to each others lives.

Kids are too young? Great! Lots of students love young kids, and your kids will love them. It's beneficial to introduce your kids to new cultures at a very young age. You're preparing them to accept people no matter what the religion, color of their skin, or language they speak. That my friend, is good parenting.

Don't hold back! This is a gret experience for both parties. You get the opportunity to change a child's life. You get the satisfaction of seeing them grow, even after they leave your home into becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a diplomat, artist, teacher...the list goes on. And you contributed to that success! And the best part of it all, is you gain another family member for life. We need people like you to give these kids a chance.

STS Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to place exchange students in our area. If you are interest in hosting, please contact me at 832-455-7881 or at vicki.stsfoundation@yahoo.com. I'll be happy to answer any question you might have and get you started on hosting your very own student!

# SAVE THE DATE!

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## NATURE WATCH

### TREE SERPENTS

by Jim and Lynne Weber

One of the most beautiful and harmless snakes in Texas is the aptly named Rough Greensnake (*Opheodrys aestivus*). Its genus is derived from the Greek *ophios* meaning ‘serpent’, and *dryas* meaning ‘tree.’ It has a 22 to 32 inch long and slender bright green body, which fades to yellow or yellow-green on the sides near its abdomen. Common to the eastern two-thirds of Texas, this snake is also colloquially called grass snake, green tree snake, and vine snake, but it gets its most recognized common name from its dorsal or topside scales, which are rough or ‘keeled’, having a ridge down the center rather than being smooth.

Primarily arboreal, the Rough Greensnake is found in open deciduous forest, pastures, and suburban gardens, most frequently those adjoining a watercourse such as a creek, stream, lake, river, or upland ravine. It climbs into bushes, shrubs, and trees, favoring those with horizontal rather than vertical growth, both for protection and to forage for food. It hunts crickets, grasshoppers, and spiders, as well as caterpillars of butterflies and moths. Rough Greensnakes are diurnal, and they sleep at night coiled up on branches of vegetation. Active most months of the year except for December through February, they take refuge in the cooler months hiding under rocks, logs, or debris.

One of the most curious facts about this snake, and others in this genus, is that they turn blue shortly after death. Yellow pigment

combines with blue pigment to give the snake its vibrant green color during life, but when it dies, the yellow pigment breaks down quickly and only the blue pigment remains. Rough Greensnakes may be confused with Smooth Greensnakes (*O. vernalis*), but the latter, while similar in color, is shorter in length, has smooth dorsal scales, and occurs only as a relict population along the Gulf Coast of Texas.

While Rough Greensnakes become active as early as March, they mate in June and July, with females laying clutches of eggs in the second half of summer, typically in a depression under a flat rock. Incubation is short – only 4 to 24 days – since embryonic development begins while the eggs are still in the female’s body. These snakes can be most active in August or September, when the young emerge and are foraging for food, often in grassy lawns. Be alert for these snakes when mowing grass at this time of year, as they are beautiful, harmless, and beneficial creatures!

Send your nature-related questions to [naturewatch@austin.rr.com](mailto:naturewatch@austin.rr.com) and we’ll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our books, *Nature Watch Austin*, *Nature Watch Big Bend*, and *Native Host Plants for Texas Butterflies* (all published by Texas A&M University Press), and our blog at [naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com](http://naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com).



*Rough Greensnake*

## A FEW DAYS IN THE LIFE OF A HOME HANDYMAN

by: Gordon R. Watson

### DRIPPING FAUCETS

Vacationing at my mother-in-law's home always means doing some repair work. I like keeping busy, and there are generally some things needing attention. One of the recent issues there was a dripping kitchen faucet. Drips are really a thing of the past for most faucets. Happily, ceramic has replaced rubber as the seal, so most faucet manufacturers have a lifetime warranty of one sort or another. I gave her my standard verbal disclaimer (that her home's piping is old and something might break and require a real plumber). So far, I have never had to resort to calling one (knock on wood). I turned off the main water supply outside because her 1950's home doesn't have shut off valves (called stops in the trade) beneath the kitchen sink. Outside, after digging a hole in a flower planter to find the shut off valve, I gently advised her not to bury the main shut off valve because it wasn't designed to be buried, and it might be difficult to find quickly. In the kitchen again, fully expecting the old style rubber washers, I removed the kitchen faucet handle, protected the shiny chrome with masking tape, applied a wrench, and removed the faucet stem. To my surprise, the sink faucet did have new-style ceramic style seals. The problem, it turned out, was that debris, probably from her home's aging and rusting (50+ year old) galvanized pipes, had stuck in the ceramic cartridge, causing the seal to be incomplete. Fortunately, once I cleaned the debris out, the drip went away. I love it when I don't have to buy parts for a repair. The fact that the old piping is obviously corroding and slowly failing is another story for another time. Replacing that piping almost certainly will require a real plumber. Sometime I might mention to her that it might be a good idea to replace the old pipe on her schedule rather than the pipe's schedule.

### CORROSION

Her home also has a clothesline (not all that common these days) which had all but fallen over. The old clothesline was the old style with two "crosses" each cross with a two-inch galvanized pipe stuck in concrete (with five ropes for holding the clothes). Over time, these pipes rusted away. The funny thing is that the pipes really only rusted in one place: about two inches above the ground and two inches below the ground. The remaining pipe was in near-perfect condition. Even the pipes buried twenty-four inches in the ground were near-perfect! My point in mentioning this is that this corrosion is caused by moisture and oxygen. While we will likely never have a clothesline, the principle applies to all materials such as iron and wood placed in the ground and prone to rust or wood rot. While there is little we can do about oxygen, to the degree



feasible, we should try to keep water away from anything placed in the ground. Better yet, when feasible, avoid putting anything which can rust or rot directly in the ground.

### STUD FINDERS

Over the years, I have owned at least three electronic stud finders. These are the devices that are supposed to locate the wooden or metal studs behind the sheet rock. My history with them hasn't been trouble-free. My last one worked fairly well for a few years, but it recently proudly advised me that the closet wall I wanted to attach a shelf to, had no studs. I now have three "broken" stud finders in my tool box. I promise to properly dispose of them soon. Fortunately, while doing some work at my son and daughter-in-law's home, I found (in my son's tool chest) a non-electric, entirely rare earth magnet-type "stud finder" that works so well that I don't think I will ever go back to the electronic type. It is made by C.H. Hanson. Of course, it only indirectly finds the stud. It finds the nails or screws holding the sheet rock to the stud. At about \$10, it is a bargain. I just bought one for myself, and believe it may be the last I ever have to buy (unless I lose it, of course). Hint: Once a stud is found, you can apply painter's tape (masking tape (not too tight or you may strip away the paint) to the stud location, or you can place another magnet on the nail location as a marker.

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