

News From Your County Agent
By Marcel Valdez, CEA-ANR
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Zavala County

Thanks to good growing conditions across the county lawn mowers could be heard humming and puffing as homeowners try to keep up with rapid lawn growth. Remember when you start your lawnmowers for the first time turn them on for a couple of minutes, then turn them off and do a quick scouting for bees. As plants begin to bloom bees will be out and about harvesting nectar and if you happen to have a hive close by they may feel threatened and could try to defend the hive. Just be cautious about your surroundings before you proceed with you lawn work. Greeting to all of you and thank you for reading this week.

Carnivore Management Program Set For March 30th

The Texas A&M Agrilife Research and Extension Center at Uvalde, located at 1619 Garner Field Road, Uvalde will be the site for an important Carnivore Management Program. This valuable program for producers will be held on Thursday March 30, 2017 beginning at 6:00 p.m. Producers with a pesticide applicators license that attend this event will receive 2 continuing education units (CEU's). There will be a \$20.00 registration fee to attend this event which will include dinner. If you plan to attend you are asked to RSVP by March 27, 2017 to Samantha Korzekwa at 830-278-6661.

Marcel Valdez, Zavala County Extension Agent, Dr. Maureen G. Frank, Assistant Professor & Extension Wildlife Specialist, and Samantha Korzekwa, Uvalde County Extension Agent have lined up two highly qualified speakers for this event. Mike Bodenchueck with the U.S.D.A. Wildlife Service and Dr. John Tomeček with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension will discuss options and techniques to reduce damage by carnivorous predators such as coyotes, foxes, bobcats and mountain lions.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) predators killed 23,000 adult sheep and 48,000 lambs in the State, valued at \$2,254,000 and \$3,120,000, respectively. For more information about this event contact Dr. Maureen Frank, Assistant Professor & Extension Wildlife Specialist-Uvalde at 830-278-9151 ext. 280, Samantha Korzekwa-Uvalde County Extension Agent at 830-278-6661 or Marcel Valdez, Zavala County Extension Agent at 830-374-2883.

Online 4-H Photography Contest Closes Next Week

The District 12 4-H Photography Contest for 4-H'ers in Zavala County will close online submissions next week on March 27, 2017. The contest is currently opened until March 27 for 4-H members in three age divisions (Junior, Intermediate, and Senior) and the theme is "Reflections". The contest is done totally on-line including submission of photos and judging. Online registration and photo submissions started on March 1, 2017. Each county is allowed to enter 1 photo per category in each of the three age divisions for a total of 45 eligible photos. Each 4-H'er entering photos for the District 4-H Photography Contest must register online through 4-H Connect. The registration fee will be \$8.00 per photo entry. Payment must be made on 4-H connect at the time of registration. Payments made by check must be postmarked within three business days of registration submission. No late entries will be accepted. No refunds will be given.

All photos must be submitted through 4-H CONNECT as part of the registration process. Please read these submission rules and requirements very carefully to prevent disqualification of entries. Photos must be in the correct format for proper evaluation. All entries with submitted eligible photos will be judged between April 5th and April 11th via an online evaluation process. All judges will be able to evaluate entries and provide individual feedback for respective photos.

A custom-designed photography t-shirt is available for purchase by participants when they register for this event on 4-H connect. The T-shirts will also be distributed to agents along with the awards in May. All proceeds from shirt sales are used to support District 12 4-H Events and Council leadership and service activities. The 2017 District 12 4-H Photography Contest Rules are currently available on the District 12 4-H website at <http://d124-h.tamu.edu>. For more information about this contest you may contact Marcel Valdez, County Extension Agent at the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883. This is an excellent contest for 4-H members without the need to travel to compete. I hope to see several Zavala County Entries in this contest.

Tip of The Week: Be Alert and Check For Texas Leaf Cutter Ant Damage.

A local Crystal City resident came by the office last week to discuss problems with ants that seem to be defoliating his trees and making unsightly mounds of dirt in his yard. Immediately just by the problems he described to me it is evident that the culprits are Texas Leaf Cutter Ants. They love tender young shoots on trees, shrubs and other plants at this time of year, so start patrolling your landscapes for these tenacious pest.

The Texas leaf cutting ant, *Atta texana* (Buckley), has several common names including the town ant, cut ant, parasol ant, fungus ant and night ant. *Atta texana* can be extremely destructive to landscape plants, gardens and some agricultural crops in Texas. Leaf cutting ants live in large colonies of up to two million. The name comes from their habit of cutting leaves and other plant parts from a variety of plants. In Texas, these ants damage weeds, grasses, plum and peach trees, blackberry bushes and many other fruit, nut and ornamental plants as well as several cereal and forage crops. The ants do not eat the leaf fragments they collect, but take them into their underground nest where they use the material to raise a fungus garden. As the fungus grows, certain parts of it are eaten by the ants and fed to the larvae. This fungus is their only known source of food.

Individual colonies can exist for years. Where adequate food is available, colonies may expand to contain over 2 million ants. Above ground, the colony is marked by numerous crater-shaped mounds, 5 to 14 inches-high and 1 to 1 ½-feet in diameter. Each mound has a central entrance hole. Above the underground central nest cavity, several entrance holes will be marked by typical crater shaped mounds and a buildup of soil. On flat land, this buildup of soil is very apparent. With older colonies, this central area is as much as two to three feet higher than surrounding land. Below ground, the nest consists of several chambers that may reach 15 to 20 feet deep.

During the summer, leaf cutting ants forage almost exclusively at night. The rest of the year, foraging takes place during the day, when air temperatures range between 45 to 80 degrees F. Most mound building activities occur during the cool hours of the day. Defoliation by leaf cutting ants can

resemble damage produced by several other leaf chewing insects, particularly sawflies and leaf cutting bees. Trees defoliated by the leaf cutting ant usually are within sight of an ant nest and the ants themselves may be seen carrying leaves. Foraging trails will be littered with pieces of leaf tissue that can be traced to a feeder hole. Considerable damage to a plant can occur in a few hours. Small- to medium-sized trees can be stripped in one night.

Control of Texas leaf cutting ants can be difficult. Although plants can be protected temporarily using dust or granular formulations of contact insecticides, like acephate (Orthene®), carbaryl (Sevin®) or permethrin (Terro™), such treatments must be reapplied frequently. Also, plant applications do little to eliminate the underground nest. The large size and complexity of leaf cutter ant nests makes it difficult to obtain good control with dust, liquid or granular insecticides. Because these ants eat only the fungus they cultivate, they do not respond to most other ant baits, such as those labeled for fire ants.

A special formulation of hydramethylnon, sold under the trade name Amdro® Ant Block, is currently the only widely available bait product labeled for control of leaf cutting ants. This product can be used on most sites such as lawns, landscaped areas, golf courses, ornamental gardens, and other non-cropland areas such as roadsides, commercial grounds, etc. Apply bait according to label directions while ants are foraging. Ant activity in the treated colony will decline over a 4 to 6 week period. However, about half the time activity will return in 4 to 6 months, requiring a second treatment. Note that this product may not be used in agricultural sites (e.g., livestock pastures, gardens, cropland) and should be applied around all mounds of a colony (not just feeder holes or mounds) to ensure the best control. Leaf cutting ant baits should not be stored for extended periods of time due to relatively short shelf life. Amdro® Ant Block should be available through a variety of stores, including Ace Hardware and Wal-Mart. Before using any chemical, READ THE LABEL and follow all instructions and safety precautions. Avoid chemical contact with skin. Wash exposed areas with generous amounts of soap and water. Store chemicals away from human dwellings in locked cabinets and out of reach of children and pets. The information given herein is for informational and educational purposes only and no discrimination is intended to other sources providing the same or similar products nor an endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service or this news media is implied. Have a wonderful week. M.V.

March 18-20 , 2017

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