

News From Your County Agent
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Temperatures this week will feel like summer even with the official first day of fall which will be this Friday September 22nd. Maybe we will see a change by Saturday the 23rd but official weather reports indicate that it will be a hot weekend. As all of you know the tropics have been very active this hurricane season, however, Harvey, Irma, Maria, Jose have not sent us one bit of rain and the people in southeast Texas and Caribbean Islands have had more than their share, it would be nice if we could get just a little to green things up before it really does get cold. Greetings to all of you and thank you for reading this week.

This is the Weekend-Lamb and Goat Validation Saturday

It is very important that you remember that this weekend (Saturday, September 23) is when you will need to get your lamb and goat project validated so that you are able to show these animals at the 2018 Zavala County Junior Fair. If you are a 4-H family and have children who are planning to show a market goat or a market lamb in the 2018 Zavala County Junior Fair in January you will need to bring the lamb and goat project to this validation event. Validation will take place at the ZAE stockshow grounds in Crystal City. Lamb and breeding ewe validation will take place from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. Then starting at 10:00 a.m. and continuing until 12 noon will be the validation of meat goats and breeding doe's. For more information about the local validation process or for assistance in getting your lamb or goat project to the validation event contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, by calling 830-374-2883 or go to the Zavala County AgriLife Extension Service Website at <https://zavala.agrilife.org/>. This information was also provided to you via 4-H newsletter, this newspaper and on Facebook and twitter. See you on Saturday.

If You Own A Horse You Need To Get It Vaccinated

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) is encouraging owners to take precautions and vaccinate their equine to protect against the West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). As of September 1, 2017 the Texas Department of State Health Services has reported five cases of WNV and one case of EEE in 2017.

In addition to vaccinations, horse owners also need to reduce the mosquito populations and their possible breeding areas. Recommendations include removing stagnant water sources, keeping animals inside during the bugs' feeding times, which are typically early in the morning and evening, and using mosquito repellents.

Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE) is a mosquito-borne viral disease of all equine species. Infected horses may suddenly die or show progressive central nervous system disorders. Symptoms may include unsteadiness, erratic behavior and a marked loss of coordination. The death rate for animals infected with EEE is 75-100%.

West Nile Virus is the leading cause of arbovirus encephalitis in horses and has been identified in the entire continental United States, most of Canada and Mexico. The case fatality rate for horses exhibiting clinical signs of WNV infection is approximately 33%. Data have supported that 40% of horses that survive the acute illness caused by WNV still exhibit residual effects, such as gait and behavioral abnormalities, 6 months post-diagnosis.

Vaccines are available for neurologic diseases such as EEE and WNV. As part of routine equine health care, the TAHC and the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service strongly recommends that equine owners consult with their local veterinarians to discuss an appropriate vaccination program to protect their horses against mosquito-borne diseases.

Tip of the Week: Compost Piles For Spring Garden Use

As I mentioned in the opening of this column Friday is officially the first day of fall and the time when some trees will begin losing their leaves, left over garden plants have seen their better days and if you have been watering some part of your lawn you will be making some fall mowing and thus grass clippings. If you have these items readily available why throw them away. Put them in a compost pile and you can recycle them in the spring garden.

When starting a compost pile the recommended practice is to layer the materials thinly and uniformly, the same way lasagna is made with thin layers of pasta, cheese, and sauce. Never overdoing any one single ingredient and never skipping a layer in the construction process will prove successful! You only have to layer when starting a new pile. Once the pile is active you add materials by either burying them in the center or incorporating them when you turn your pile.

It is recommended to start your pile on bare ground. Don't place your pile on asphalt or concrete. This impedes aeration and inhibits microbial contact with the earth. If tree roots are a problem, a loosely laid brick foundation could be installed. Placing a pallet underneath the pile is a possibility if you feel the area may be damp or holds water in the spring. This creates air channels from below. Starting with the bottom layer (layer #1), continue to layer until you reach the top or (what happens most often) you run out of material. Firm and lightly water each layer as it is added but do not compact. The recommended size for a home compost pile is no smaller than 3 feet X 3 feet X 3 feet, and no larger than 5 feet X 5 feet X 5 feet. A smaller pile may not heat up high enough for efficient breakdown, or it may lose heat and quickly slow down the process.

Layer 1- The **organic materials** layer can be vegetable wastes, sod, grass clippings, leaves, hay, straw, chopped corncobs, corn stalks, untreated sawdust, twigs less than ½ inch in diameter, or garden debris. **Layer 2 - Animal manures, fertilizers or starters** serve as activators that accelerate the ignition or initial heating of your pile. They all provide a nitrogen source for the microbial community. Some provide proteins and enzymes. If manure from a grain eating animal is available, add 1-2 inch layer. If this is not available, add one cup of 10-10-10 or 12-12-12 commercial fertilizer per 25 square feet. If using a commercial starter, follow label directions. **Layer 3 - Top soil** or active compost introduce microorganisms. Plain garden soil is fine. Avoid soil that has been treated with insecticides recently and sterile potting soils which lack these necessary microbes. A one to two inch layer is enough.

Temperature plays an important role in the composting process. Decomposition occurs most rapidly between 110° to 160°F. Within two weeks, a properly made compost pile will reach these

temperatures. At this time, you will notice your pile settling which is a good sign that the pile is working properly. In reality, the average composter turns their pile once every 4 to 5 weeks. This mixes in the fresh material with the older, adds air to the pile and allows you to add water and keeps the temperature at 110 degrees and above to keep the compost pile “alive”. With this method, a pile started in the fall, added to and turned the following summer will be ready in late fall of that year or the next spring. Make sure to turn the outside of the old pile into the center of the new pile. The compost should be ready to use 3 to 4 months later which means you need to start the pile by the end of the month or by mid October the latest. Understanding these key factors when composting allows for efficient, quick break down of kitchen and yard wastes, turning them into “Black Gold” compost! For a complete list of items to put in your compost pile or specific details about composting at home contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883. Have a great week. M.V.

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