

News From Your County Agent
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Zavala County

After a few days with super cold temperatures the weekend was more like early spring as temperatures hovered near or at 70 by Sunday afternoon and we are to continue this pattern for most of this week until another cold blast makes its way through our area by Sunday with near freezing temperatures by Monday. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

4-H Postal League Registration Opens Next Week

The District 12 4-H Shooting Sports Postal League was a huge success last year and we are excited to announce the 2018 event. The Postal League is designed to provide additional shooting sports opportunities for 4-H members across District 12. The event includes Smallbore Rifle, Shotgun, Archery and **NEW!** Smallbore Pistol. The term "Postal" simply refers to this event taking place locally within Zavala county. Rifle, Archery and Smallbore Pistol targets will be mailed from the District 12 office after the specific deadline. Participants in Shotgun events will provide their own targets. All Rifle, Archery and Smallbore Pistol targets must be mailed to the District office within the specified timeline, and submit scores.

Registration for these events will be administered through [4-H Connect](#). Select the "*D12 4-H Shooting Sports Postal League*" event. The registration period will begin February 1, 2018 and conclude on February 22, 2018. Coaches can register on the participant's behalf. Participants of these 4-H events should coordinate with their respective coach or county office to register. A registration fee of \$15.00 dollars will be charged per shooter per event. The shooting period will be between February 28th and April 8th. All score/targets must be in the county office on or before April 9th. Please view "discipline" guidelines for specific guidelines about submitting scores/targets. County office must have all score/targets at the district office on or before April 16th.

If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the District Office at 956-968-5581 or via email at d124h@ag.tamu.edu or the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830374-2883. Good luck and happy shooting.

2018 District 12 4-H Photography Contest

District 12 will be hosting its annual 4-H Photography Contest for 4-H'ers in District 12. The contest will be open to all three age divisions (Junior, Intermediate, and Senior) and the theme will be "*Backyard*". The contest will be done on-line including submission of photos and judging. The 2018 District 12 4-H Photography Contest Rules are attached and currently available on the District 12 4-H website at <http://d124-h.tamu.edu>. Each county is allowed 1 photo entry 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. Online registration will open March 1, 2018 and will end March 21, 2018. Payment must be made on 4-H connect at the time of registration. Payments made by 4-H check must be postmarked within three business days of registration submission. No late entries will be accepted. No refunds will be given. More about this contest in the coming weeks and through your 4-H county newsletter. I just wanted to let all of you know so that you can start taking pictures worthy for this contest.

Tip of The Week: Not To Late And Not To Early To Have a Soil Test Done

Whether your New Year's resolution was to make your lawns look nice this year or a productive vegetable garden a good start is to have a soil test done to see what nutrients your soil already has or what you need to add to make it the envy of the neighborhood. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service soil testing laboratory is ready to test your sample and get the results to you in a timely manner just in time for spring landscaping and gardening activities.

Vegetables, fruit trees, flowers and lawns all need an adequate amount of nutrients to grow and deliver peak performance. You can have a plant with the best genetics, but if it is "starving", it will not grow as expected. While we might be able provide generalities about a particular plant's nutrient needs, we are not going to have a clue about your particular soil's nutrient status. For example, a sandy soil will not have the same needs as a soil with a high percentage of clay. Also, if you have made fertilizer applications recently, there could still be a residual of certain elements, meaning you may need to alter the analysis to avoid over-fertilizing, which is not only wasteful, but also can pollute the environment. You might not even need to fertilize at all.

Another major factor affecting a plant's ability to utilize the nutrients in the soil is the pH of the soil. pH is a measure of the soil's acidity. If the pH is not in an ideal range, nutrients in the soil, or added in a fertilizer, cannot be adequately taken up by plants. The amount of soil amendments to apply depends on the pH level, the type of soil you have, and the type of plants growing in that soil. Clay soils require more lime than sandy soils to adjust the pH level, and the amount to apply per 1000 square feet could range from 0 to 50 pounds or more, again depending on the pH. Soil testing is the only way to know for sure. Adding too much lime, or adding when it is not needed, can also cause other problems. Different vegetables have a differing pH preference, with some preferring more alkaline soils, other on the acidic side.

So, how are you going to know what's really in your soil, and what needs to be added for the lawn, garden or flowers? Get a soil test done. It is an inexpensive and simple process, and easily pays for itself by providing you with accurate recommendations based on your soil and kind of plants that are growing there. The soil testing labs at Texas A&M University have state-of-the-art equipment, which are daily calibrated to provide the most accurate results you can get. Kits purchased at stores may give you general ranges, but often are not specific enough. County Extension offices do not do soil testing, nor mail soil tests to the University labs. But, soil testing submittal forms and collection bags are available at every county A&M AgriLife Extension office. Submittal forms are also available online at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Soil Testing Laboratory web site (<http://soiltesting.tamu.edu>). On that page, click on "Our Submittal Forms". For home lawns and

gardens, select the Urban Soil test form. You can use a zip locking plastic bag for your soil sample(s). The Soil Testing Lab at A&M in College Station charges just \$10 for a regular test, and you should get your results back within a couple of weeks.

The submittal form has simple directions for correctly taking a sample and a form to be filled out. It is important to follow the directions for taking your sample. Take samples from several spots in the lawn or garden and mix them up in a plastic bucket. This reduces the chance of getting an erroneous reading if just one spot is sampled (for example, a dog may have “used” that spot recently). Don’t just scoop soil from the top of the ground. Take vertical slices of soil about 4 or 5 inches deep. The report will tell you what nutrients are already in your soil and how much you need to apply for your type of lawn grass or garden plants. It also makes a lime recommendation if the pH is too low. It takes all the guesswork out of fertilizing your plants. For more information on soil testing, collecting samples or requesting submittal bags and forms contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830374-2883. Good luck and happy gardening and landscaping. M.V.

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