

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

Our area continues its transformation from winter to spring fairly quickly. And what a winter this has been snow in December was the highlight of this past winter, which is rare for our area. Grasses are starting to green up, some wildflowers are starting to bloom, trees have some new foliage and folks are out and about getting the garden ready for spring planting. Several folks have called asking if it is safe to put out frost sensitive plants and the answer is yes. We are expected to have a cool down again by the latter part of the week however temperatures are expected to only get down only to the mid to upper 40's, plenty safe for all cold sensitive plants. Greetings to all of you and thank you for reading this week.

Cotton Ginning Cost Share Program Announced By USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved a cotton ginning cost share program that offsets a portion of a cotton producer's 2016 crop season ginning costs. The Cotton Ginning Cost Share (CGCS) program, announced by USDA, will provide direct marketing assistance to producers. This program, based on the 2016 cotton crop, will help to fill the safety net void until the seed cotton ARC/PLC program is implemented beginning with the 2018 crop year.

Payments will be calculated based on a producer's 2016 cotton acres reported to the Farm Service Agency. Regional per-acre payment rates are set at 20 percent of USDA's regional costs of ginning and are set at \$30.39 for the Southwest which includes Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Cost share payments are capped at \$40,000 per individual or entity. Cost share program payments do not count against the 2014 Farm Bill payment limitations.

To be eligible for a cost share program payment, each applicant is required to be a person or legal entity who was actively engaged in farming in 2016 and who complies with requirements including, but not limited to, those pertaining to highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation provisions, commonly referred to as the conservation compliance provisions. A producer's three-year average adjusted gross income may not exceed \$900,000 to be eligible for the cost share payments. The program sign-up period is March 12, 2018 to May 11, 2018. More information about the CGCS program can be obtained by contacting the local FSA office or visiting www.fsa.usda.gov/cgcs.

Steer Tag Orders Begin Next Month

It is hard to believe we are already thinking about ordering tags and UINs for next year. Tag/UIN ordering will begin April 1, 2018. Steer Validation: Market Steer validation tag ordering process will be held online. Only ONE order per county will be accepted and should be submitted by the County Validation Chairperson. Validation fee for Steers \$15 per head if ordered from April 1-April 20. Tags will go up to \$25 per head for orders placed from April 21-June 23. Payment will be due at the time of invoicing, not ordering. The website will generate email invoices that will be sent on April 24 for orders placed on or before the deadline. Late orders will be invoiced June 26. There will be more information regarding the steer tag ordering process.

Tip of The Week: Pruning and Trimming Freeze Damaged Plants

Several folks have called to ask how to go about pruning and trimming part of plants that seem to have been damaged from the snow and freezing conditions we had this winter. First you need to make a very good inspection of your fruit trees and other plants that seem to show freeze damage. If you have summer bedding plants that have been severely damaged or killed such as Impatiens, wax begonias, Penta, blue daze, scaevola, periwinkle and coleus. Although it's nice when they make it through the winter and provide another year of

flowers, we must remember these plants are not intended to be permanent. Check for signs of life at the base of these plants. If you still see some green, cut the plants back to the living parts to stimulate regrowth. Once you do this check and see how they respond. If you do not have green at the base of these plants the time has come for you to replace them in your flower bed.

Do not prune anything for several days after a freeze so I hope that you have been putting off any pruning activities up to now. It often takes several days for all of the damage to be evident. You may even find that some plants that look damaged immediately after a freeze actually aren't. I left a pot of Easter lilies in active growth out to see if the cold would hurt them. (It got down to 28 degrees in my area.) After the freeze, the foliage looked dark and water soaked, and I was afraid they had frozen back. By the next day, though, the foliage was bright green and healthy.

Damaged growth on herbaceous or non-woody plants, such as cannas, elephant ears, birds-of-paradise, begonias, Impatiens, philodendrons and ginger, may be pruned back to living tissue. This pruning is optional, and is done more to neaten things up than to benefit the plants. However, if the damaged tissue is oozy, mushy, slimy and foul smelling, it should be removed. Many folks around this area have banana trees as well so this is what you need to do. Remove the damaged foliage from banana trees but do not cut back the trunk unless you can tell for sure that it has been killed. It will look brown, feel mushy, feel loose in the soil and will bleed a lot if punctured. The exception would be any banana trees that produced a bunch of fruit last year. They will not send up any more new growth, and should be cut to the ground to make room for new shoots that will come up this summer.

Dead leaves on woody tropical plants, such as hibiscus, tibouchina, angel trumpet, croton, ixora, schefflera, copper plant and rubber tree, can be picked off to make things look neater. If you can clearly determine what branches are dead on a woody plant, you can prune them back. Try scratching the bark with your thumbnail. If the tissue underneath is green, it's still alive. If the tissue is tan or brown, the branch is dead. Start at the top and work your way down to see how far back the plant was killed. Generally, it's a good idea to delay hard pruning of woody plants until new growth begins in the spring and you can more accurately determine which parts are alive and what is dead. Remember, don't be too quick to dig up tropical plants that have been severely damaged. They may eventually re-sprout from the base of the plant or the roots in April or May. Have a great week. M.V.

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