

**News From Your County Agent**  
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**Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service**  
**Zavala County**

October arrived this week and the morning of the first day of the month was damp, drizzly and foggy perhaps giving us a hint that October might be a wet month much like September was but we shall see. Remember to keep lots mowed and shredded to help keep mosquito populations down. Don't become a statistic of an illness caused by mosquitos so use repellants proper clothing when outdoors and keep an eye out for standing water in tires, cans, buckets and other containers. If you see them empty them and don't give mosquitos a chance to multiply even more. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

**Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus Mosquito Surveillance Begins in Zavala County This Week**

Mosquitoes are the deadliest animals on Earth. Obviously not due to their sheer size, but due to the numerous deadly diseases they are able to carry and transmit. Until recently the only major disease of concern to impact Texas directly has been West Nile Virus but with the inevitable introduction of Zika virus to the continental United States many entomologist in Texas and the Department of State Health Services have joined forces with the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service to look into the population status of the two species of mosquitoes that can transmit Zika. Data from the early 2000's shows both species to be distributed throughout various counties in Texas but more recent data is needed.

In Zavala county the surveillance to identify populations of *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitos will be made in La Pryor, Batesville, and Crystal City. Ovitrap traps will be used for the purpose of collecting mosquitos and mosquito eggs. The county agent will place the ovitrap traps in various locations in Zavala county in areas associated with humans. The targeted mosquitoes are human biting and live with 300 yards of humans. Ovitrap traps (cups) will be placed on Monday afternoons and picked up on Thursday mornings.

This surveillance project will be conducted in Zavala County during the month of October. The traps will be conducted weekly until the correct species are identified or until the season is over, whichever comes first. As soon as the correct species have been identified the county will no longer need to run traps. If you come across a black ovitrap(cup) identified by the AgriLife logo and the message "Research in Progress" please do not disturb them or contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

**October is County Hog Validation Month**

Saturday, October 20, 2018 is the deadline for all Zavala County youth who plan to show in the 2019 Zavala County Junior Livestock Show to get and validate a hog project to be officially entered into the show through the Zavala County hog validation process. All hog projects and the exhibitors are required to be ready at their home or location where the hog projects are being raised so that they can be validated. The validation committee will come by each exhibitors home/pens and have their animals tagged and entries paid to be officially entered in the show. The validation process will

begin at 8:30 a.m. There will be a \$20.00 validation fee per family and a \$5.00 tag for each animal validated. Note: If you have already validated an animal for the show of another species (lamb, goat or steer) you will not have to pay an additional \$20.00 validation fee. Please keep this in mind. There is no limit on the number of animals that an exhibitor can validate and there is no minimum weight requirements at validation. However, at show time in January an exhibitor can show up to 3 animals but no more than 2 animals of the same species and they can only sell one animal in the sale. If you need assistance in locating a hog project before this validation date please contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883 for more information.

### **Tip of the Week: October is Time To Make Last Year's Poinsettia Bloom In Time For Christmas**

Every year about this time I get a call or two from folks that grew somewhat sentimental about their poinsettia plant once the holidays were over last year and have kept them in hopes of having them bloom again. The best policy for handling poinsettias is to use them, then lose them! However, some folks are sentimental or maybe skeptical that people won't love them enough to give replacement plants next year. Regardless, the poinsettia plant you received for Christmas can be brought into color again this year. The results usually aren't worth the effort since the flowers (colored bracts) you produce won't be of the same quality as the ones you had on the plants last year but at least if you are successful you can brag about your skill in making poinsettias bloom.

The key is darkness!! To have the plant in full bloom by Christmas, you must keep it in complete darkness from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. starting NOW, the first week in October and continuing until Thanksgiving. Flowering will be delayed if the plant receives ANY supplemental lighting during this period. Absolutely no light can penetrate the darkness. If you place a box over them, it must not permit light to enter. If you place plants in an extra bedroom, no light can enter the room beneath the crack of the door or through a window. Even car headlights shining through a window are enough to interrupt the required darkness. Greenhouse growers use thick black cloths to cover their poinsettia crops, blocking out all light from passing cars and nearby street lights or your neighbors porch light.

If you successfully carry out the darkness routine, by early November your plants will be developing color, and you can end the daily darkness ritual and set the plants in bright, indirect light. By the end of November, the bracts should be coloring up nicely, and you'll be able to enjoy them through the next holiday season. The poinsettia will set flower buds only after being exposed to the short day (10 hours of light or less) for about 10 weeks. In the daytime the plant must be in a sunny location for maximum growth and development of bracts and flowers. Continue to apply water soluble fertilizer until mid-December, then reduce applications to one-half the normal amount. Of course the process I just described will work best if you have kept your poinsettia in a portable container and you are able to move the plant indoors when it is too cold and to begin the darkness treatment. Some of you may have decided to plant your poinsettia in the ground last spring. Now you have an earth-bound plant which will be more difficult to handle. Causing an earth-bound poinsettia to color at the right time is more difficult because of two factors. First of all, poinsettias are cold-sensitive and may freeze if left unprotected until the expected Christmas color period occurs. Secondly, poinsettias must be exposed to the total darkness treatment of a short day (10 hours) lighting period to insure Christmas color. This means that an earth-bound plant would have to be covered daily to completely exclude light. It is more difficult but it can be done. Again getting a poinsettia to re-

bloom is not an easy process, so don't be disheartened if you don't have success your first try but at least you made a good run at it. Have a wonderful week. M.V.

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