

News From Your County Agent
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Hot and very dry continues to be the pattern for our area and according to weather experts there is very little relief in sight. However, NOAA just updated the outlook for the current tropical season. Forecasters note more-favorable conditions for above-normal activity is expected by the end of August into September. The number of predicted storms is slightly higher -- 10 to 17 named storms (winds of 39 mph or greater), of which 5 to 9 will become hurricanes (winds of 74 mph or greater), including 2 to 4 major hurricanes (winds 111 mph or greater). The primary reason for the uptick in forecast activity is the recent demise of El Niño. El Niño conditions tend to suppress development, so we shall wait and see how accurate our forecasters really are. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

Learning From The Ground Up-Grants For Teachers Available Now

Texas Farm Bureau supports agricultural literacy in several ways. Each year, the Learning From the Ground Up garden grant program encourages teachers to take learning outside and allow students to learn about food and fiber production with their own hands. Three \$500 grants are awarded in each of Texas Farm Bureau's 13 Districts for a total of 39 grants awarded. Additionally, some county Farm Bureaus may provide additional matching funds. This grant opportunity lines up well with several programs conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Master Gardener program. Eligible projects include school gardens, raised beds, greenhouses, aquaponic or hydroponic systems that are used to specifically teach about food and fiber production and agriculture systems. School campuses that are involved with any of these projects are eligible to apply if they have students in Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Other organizations such as PTO's, Boys & Girls Clubs, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Master Gardeners or others are eligible to apply as well, but the project must be in collaboration with a school district and students in Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade must be actively involved in the project while learning about agriculture through the project. The deadline for grant applications is October 18th, 2019. Completed applications may be emailed to edoutreach@txfb.org. If there are any schools in Zavala county that are interested in this program please contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service at 830-374-2883.

4-H Updates and Reminders for 2019-20

A reminder to all 4-H families that the 4HConnect website will be offline this week from August 13-14, 2019 for maintenance. Enrollment for the 2019-2020 4-H Year will open on August 15, 2019. The Texas 4-H Year officially begins September 1, 2019. Youth entering 3rd graders will need to wait until September 1st to enroll. The enrollment system may consider them a clover kid for another year due to birthday and/or grade so please wait until after September 1st before you enroll your youngsters. And don't forget that lamb and goat projects will be validated next month on September 21, 2019 beginning at 9:00 a.m. For more information about 4-H enrollment and 4-H projects please contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service at 830-374-2883.

Tip of the Week: Time to Water Your Home Foundation

Yes from time to time we provide tips on proper watering of landscapes during droughts or proper mowing heights during a drought and yes tips on watering your homes foundation during a drought. Current weather conditions in Zavala county coupled with heavy clay soils in some parts of the county provide a good scenario for foundation problems due to drought. Drought causes many threats to the integrity of your home, which is something that many homeowners don't realize until they've experienced it. Extended periods of dryness cause foundations to shift, crack, and sink when the surrounding soil loses essential moisture. When rain finally falls again and moisture is retained, the soil expands and lifts the foundation up again...but not always evenly. These are some of the many ways that drought can damage your home.

Owning a home is a huge responsibility, so it's important to personally inspect your homes foundation on a regular basis to check for damage and address any issues before they progress beyond repair. If your area has experienced uncommonly dry weather conditions in the past, you very well may have a case of foundation damage on your hands. These are some of the most common signs that your home is suffering from foundation damage due to a previous or current drought: Uneven floors, Cracked driveway and sidewalks, cracked bricks drywalls tiles and stucco. Other signs are sticking doors and windows and cracks in the corners of walls. Keep in mind that drought conditions could have been present even before you moved into your home. So it's a good idea to check for foundation issues even if your period of ownership has been accompanied by a steady flow of rain.

Once faced with a drought, take a walk around your house to observe where the soil lies at your foundation. This is the best way to avoid serious foundation problems. A lack of gap between the foundation and soil typically indicates that moisture levels are good. But if you see a gap, your foundation is at risk of cracking and sinking. Dig about six inches down to feel below the surface to assess the dryness. If the soil at that level is completely dry, you need to moisten (but not drench) it around the base of your home. As a precautionary measure, spray the soil around your house with water to increase moisture and close the gap. One useful and aesthetic way to maintain this moisture is to plant shrubs and flowers around the base of your foundation. Plant roots will hold moisture in the soil and also keep the area shaded, which is incredibly important during drought periods. A consistent, but not overcrowded, row of plants along your foundation can help retain moisture without depleting resources.

We at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service acknowledge that watering your foundation is the most effective way to protect it from damage during a drought. Our Water Resource Program Specialist Dotty Woodson recommends creating a dedicated irrigation zone around the house and about eight to 18 inches from the foundation. You can also attach drip irrigation or a soaker hose to an outdoor faucet and set a timer to water the foundation at optimal times of day. It is essential to have a backflow preventer on your outdoor faucet so that water doesn't back up into the pipes. Homeowners can typically find then necessary irrigation supplies at local hardware stores and garden centers. It's important to not overwater your foundation though, because an excess of moisture can result in an unwanted edge lift. This occurs when the edge of the foundation's exterior is raised above the edge of the interior. As a general guideline, watering twice a day for 15 minutes with a soaker hose and timer should do the trick.

If the drought damage has already been done, don't despair. There are viable ways to restore the integrity of your foundation and protect it from future drought conditions. If you discover cracks in your foundation, fill them with waterproofing, which can be easily found in local hardware stores. However, fixing foundation is rarely a quick fix. After patching up obvious cracks, homeowners may need to install piers underneath their homes to make them less susceptible to shifts and movements in the soil. And like most household repairs, the longer you wait to call a professional to take a look at your foundation, the more extensive and expensive the repairs will be. So inspect your home often for damage and don't delay when you see the first signs of cracking. Homeowners may want to hold off on temporary fixes, like replacing doors and windows, tuck pointing, and drywall repairs, until they determined the larger structural issue affecting their homes. The structure of a home deteriorates over time and if you don't address these issues early on, you could have to deal with serious issues that will cost you more to fix. Of course like it always happens droughts will come and go and current conditions will soon end and lessen the chances of foundation damage. Have a great week.
M.V.

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