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Be A Pickup Man

Cassidy Heskett

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ON THE COVER

Cassidy Heskitt is the 2025 Miss Rodeo Oklahoma, and promotes her platform, "Be A Pickup Man." (Photo by Sherry Smith Photography, provided by Cassidy Heskett)

letter from the editor

As I sit down to write this, Oklahoma is still green. The pastures are thick, the ponds have water, and for now, things feel steady. But we all know how fast that can change. The shift from green to brown can come in a matter of weeks, and the start of a drought always seems to sneak up on us, even when we see it coming.

Just south of us, in Texas, devastating floods have left entire communities reeling. It's a sobering reminder that in life, we don't control much. Weather humbles us. But in the wake of disaster, what we do see, time and again, is people showing up for each other. Neighbors with trailers, strangers with boats, ranchers with spare hay and open pastures. No titles. No spotlight. Just quiet hands making a difference.

That kind of steady, behind-the-scenes support is something Cassidy Heskett understands. The 23-year-old from Pawnee is this year's Miss Rodeo Oklahoma, and her platform, "Be a Pickup Man," isn't just about rodeo. It's about being the person others can count on. In her feature story this month, she shares how that message was born from personal loss and shaped by years of hard work in and out of the arena.

We're proud to share Cassidy's story and so many others in this issue. As always, I'm grateful for the talented writers and contributors who help bring these pages to life. Their work keeps us grounded in what matters: community, perseverance, and the land beneath our boots.

Feel free to reach out to me with story ideas at Editor@OFKROnline.com.

Savannah Magoteaux

Savannah Magoteaux, Editor
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The National Finals Rodeo, which drew thousands to Oklahoma City every year, devastated locals when it was moved in 1984 to Las Vegas. The rodeo started at the Jim Norick Arena at State Fair Park, as shown in this 1971 photo, and later grew into the much larger Myriad arena downtown.

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Farm & Ranch...

In this issue of Oklahoma Farm & Ranch, Dr. Barry Whitworth delves into the ongoing threat of anaplasmosis in cattle, providing valuable insight on how to recognize and manage this disease. Justine Anderson of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission introduces a unique perspective on land improvement, highlighting how one board member is making a difference through his conservation efforts. In Noble Learning, Burt Rutherford explores whether virtual fencing could be a viable option for ranchers looking to modernize their operations. Meanwhile, Aubrey Sturgeon continues her enlightening series on the lifecycle of a show steer, guiding us through the stages that lead to successful showmanship.

Anaplasmosis: A Late Summer Threat to Cattle Health

By Barry Whitworth, DVM

Late summer and early fall are busy times for most cattle producers. Unfortunately, this is also when most cases of anaplasmosis in beef cattle are reported across many states. It's a critical time for producers to be vigilant and closely monitor their herds for signs of illness.

Anaplasmosis is a disease caused by Anaplasma marginale, a rickettsial, gram-negative bacterium that infects red blood cells. Its name stems from its tendency to reside on the margins of red blood cells. This pathogen is commonly found in ticks, wild and domestic ruminants. Although infections have occurred in sheep and goats, anaplasmosis is primarily a cattle disease. It has been identified in nearly every U.S. state, excluding only Alaska and Hawaii, and remains a global issue in cattle production.

Cattle producers need to work closely with their veterinarian to develop a tailored prevention and control program. (Courtesy photo)

Cattle may be infected with A. marginale in a variety of ways. The micro-organism may be transmitted when a tick that is infected with the pathogen feeds on a susceptible cow. Biting flies such as horseflies can carry blood containing A. marginale from one cow to another during feeding. Contaminated equipment used during procedures like castration, dehorning, or dirty needles can transmit the pathogen if not properly cleaned and sanitized between animals. Unborn calves may become infected in the uterus from infected cows. These calves are born persistently infected with A. marginale.

Once an animal is infected, clinical signs of the disease appear in 3 to 6 weeks. The severity of the disease depends on the age of the animal and virulence of the pathogen. In cattle less than two years of age, illness is rare or mild with very few cattle dying. Cattle that are two years or older tend to show clinical signs of the disease. Typical clinical signs include fever, anemia, weakness, respiratory distress, lowered milk production, abortion, jaundice, and death. Aggressive behavior is also associated with A. marginale infected cattle, so producers should be cautious when anaplasmosis is suspected.

Cattle that recover often remain persistently infected and serve as reservoirs for the disease. These animals may show signs again if their immune system becomes compromised due to stress or secondary infections.

Diagnosing the disease is normally based on history, clinical signs, and finding the micro-organism on a stained blood smear microscopically. Additional blood test may be used to confirm the disease.

Treatment can be challenging, especially if clinical signs are severe. Treatment with tetracycline is helpful if initiated early in the disease, but maybe of little value in the latter course of the disease. In cows that are not eating, B vitamins and rumen inoculants may stimulate appetite. Blood transfusion maybe needed in cows with severe anemia, but the stress of the transfusion may result in death. Also, cattle with clinical signs of anaplasmosis need to be isolated since they harbor large numbers of A. marginale. It's important to note that treatment often reduces symptoms but does not eliminate the pathogen from the body.

Eliminating A. marginale entirely from an infected cow is generally not practical. Additionally, clearing the infection would make the animal susceptible to re-infection. Therefore, producers should focus on prevention and control. One option is to maintain a herd with A. marginale so that young animals are sure to be exposed to the pathogen. A vaccine is available, though its effectiveness is debated. Consult your veterinarian before use. Feeding tetracycline can reduce clinical signs but doesn't protect all animals equally. Tick and fly control are important in eliminating transmission. Lastly, cattle producers should keep their equipment clean and disinfected as well as change needles frequently.

Anaplasmosis continues to pose a threat in Oklahoma. Producers should stay alert during late summer and fall, monitor cattle for signs of illness, and act quickly when disease is suspected. Cattle producers need to work closely with their veterinarian to develop a tailored prevention and control program. The local Oklahoma State University County Extension Agriculture Educator is also a valuable resource for more information on managing anaplasmosis in your herd.

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Jeff Hiner Uses Experience on Local Conservation District Board to Improve His Land

By Justine Anderson - Oklahoma Conservation Commission

Jeff Hinter uses rotational grazing practices to help improve forage production, improve soil health, and have healthier cattle. (Left photo by Justine Anderson, Right photo provided by Jeff Hiner)

Jeff Hiner's land in Ellis County/Beaver County has been in his family for generations, and he is dedicated to preserving that land for generations to come.

Hiner says one of his main goals is to leave his land better than he found it for the people who live on it next.

Jeff sits on Ellis County Conservation District's board as their Vice Chair and is passionate about guiding fellow producers on their journeys to being more sustainable landowners.

Jeff was brand new to the conservation world when he stepped onto the board of directors, but he knew he had to change how he was managing his land.

At the time, he was mainly a wheat farmer and tried out no-till farming for the first time.

He loved watching the soil get back to how it was meant to perform, but after some time, he ran into some problems with his wheat that were causing financial strains and had to reintroduce tillage.

"You have to do a little trial and error on your own place and with your own budget and find out what works for you."

Now, Jeff almost exclusively uses his land for forage and grazing, but he still has some irrigated acres dedicated to growing alfalfa and wheat.

Jeff uses rotational grazing practices to help improve forage production, improve soil health, and have a healthier herd of cattle.

Jeff attributes his involvement in his local conservation district to enhancing his knowledge of these conservation practices.

"Lacie Landers (Area 1 District Coordinator) encouraged me to join the OACD Leadership Classes, which have really helped me grow and learn more about industries and practices I didn't know existed, like abandoned mine land restoration and watershed operation and maintenance," Jeff said.

When asked what advice he would give to fellow producers who might be hesitant to learn more about conservation practices, he said, "Stay out of the coffee shop. There are naysayers in there who don't care about what's working; they just like to criticize. Ultimately, you just have to run your own race and not worry about what your neighbors will say."

Ellis County Conservation District offers many programs for landowners and education opportunities to learn more about conservation practices.

Noble Learning:

Is Virtual Fencing Right for Your Ranch?

By Burt Rutherford

Do barbed-wire fences and adaptive grazing work in harmony? With labor shortages along with the cost of cross-fencing with either permanent or electric fences, traditional fencing isn't always an option, especially in big pastures.

Virtual fencing, while not the be-all and end-all, can be a solution. Essentially, virtual fencing is a system a rancher can use to program virtual barriers on a smartphone or computer to include or exclude certain areas of a pasture. Animals are fitted with collars that have GPS transceivers, tracking their location and generating sound cues and humane electrical impulses when animals come near the boundary.

Leo Barthelmess is an early adopter who tested such a system on the ranch he and his family run south of Malta, Montana, half on private land and half on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) leases. They run a commercial cow-calf outfit on 25,000 acres in an ecosystem that he's told is the largest intact grassland in the world.

The region is home to the second longest migration corridor in the country for wildlife, especially antelope, and is the summer home to around a dozen prairie bird species facing potential endangered species listings.

"There's a lot of conservation interest here," he says, "and nobody wants more infrastructure out here."

Pros, cons and what to know before buying into virtual fencing as an alternative to traditional permanent or temporary fencing.(Courtesy photos)

Technology to the Rescue

Barthelmess, through the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance (www.ranchstewards.org), received a grant to discover if virtual fencing is a viable alternative to traditional fencing. In November 2019, he collared a herd of dry, pregnant cows grazing winter pasture.

Turns out that virtual fencing was indeed a viable alternative, allowing him to change adaptive grazing paddocks virtually, protect riparian areas and use animal impact to help restore native forages.

Barthelmess' ranch has 40 permanent-fence pastures on both private and BLM land, the largest of which is 4,000 acres.

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The ranch's 40 sections have 60 permanent water sources most years. And access to water is what determines how cattle graze a pasture.

He and his crew subdivided the largest pastures based on water availability and used virtual fencing to move cattle.

His goal was to increase stock density by applying traditional pasture rotation with a more targeted, high density grazing program.

Higher density grazing means cattle are moved more frequently, and each grazed pasture unit has a longer rest period.

"We just move from water source to water source with the virtual fence," he says. On BLM ground, he can keep cattle away from streams, riparian areas and other places the public likes to use.

Much of the rangeland in northeast Montana was tilled during the homestead era and has since supported non-native plants such as crested wheatgrass.

"We have been using virtual fencing to target those non-native grass areas within the big pastures," Barthelmess says.

Long term, it will help the land return to native grasses and forbs. In the meantime, "It's allowed us to freshen up the nutrition and palatability of the grass, because we're knocking a bunch of that decadent material down to the ground to feed the soil."

Some Questions Remain

However, the technology is new enough that questions remain, says Robin White, associate professor and associate director of the Center for Advanced Innovation in Agriculture at Virginia Tech.

"These technologies typically rely on GPS collars on animals, and they work a lot like an electric dog fence," she says.

"Typically, there's an audio stimulus when the animal comes close to a perimeter, and then there is an electric stimulus to encourage the animal to stay away from the barrier."

The collars allow a beef producer to track the location of animals in near real time through web- and phone-based apps.

"Some of the things we don't know is how often you can move the boundaries. Is the animal really responding to the visual or the auditory stimulus, or have they learned that that part of the field is where they get shocked and they don't want to go over there?"

Virtual Herding

There are a lot of reasons that virtual fencing might make sense. Mike Williams has one very compelling reason.

He leases a 12,000-acre ranch in the mountains northeast of Los Angeles. One of the lease stipulations is no cross fences.

He herded his cattle when he first leased the ranch, keeping them in a bunch and moving them around every two or three days.

While it worked, it was pretty much a full-time job, and Williams runs the ranch mostly by himself.

"When you get sidetracked, the cows get spread out, and it's a job getting them back together again. So, I saw virtual fences as a way of maybe reducing the amount of area I had to go to when I did put them back together," he says.

"It's been so successful that I don't spend nearly as much time with herding as I do relying on the virtual fence.

"Although I still use herding when I want a specific herd impact in specific areas, more concentrated than what the virtual fence is really designed to do."

Beyond that, Williams says while cattle can be influenced by the virtual fence, they're not necessarily confined by it.

"Some cows learn how to beat it," he says. "It's not something you'd want to use next to a highway, for example." In addition, battery life of the collars is something to keep in mind.

However, he says the virtual fencing collars are effective in keeping track of the cattle in general.

"Just looking at the computer, you get an idea where they are at any given time, and you get an idea of the intensity that they've been in particular areas. I was surprised at some of the areas the cattle go to and some of the grazing patterns that the cattle were demonstrating."

For More Information

If you're interested in grants or other help to add virtual fencing, contact your preferred local conservationist, says Martin Townsend, Ranchers Stewardship Alliance conservation director.

"NRCS is offering [cost-share] help through EQIP in most states. National and state grazing land coalitions, conservation districts and other entities may be as well."

The challenge is that grants and similar support continue to change, according to Allison Burenheide with Vence, Merck Animal Health's virtual fencing system.

"We've seen great success working with BLM, Forest Service and conservation organizations such as Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and Sage Grouse Conservation," she says.

Things to consider about virtual fencing:

Available funding within your area.

Needs within your area: post-burn grazing, wildlife migration/protection, invasive grass species, conservation focus, etc.

Be prepared for what you'll need for grants — most likely a grazing plan showing that you work with your range conservationist.

Knowledge of topography and cell signal availability, which can impact effectiveness.

Lifecycle of a Show Steer

By Aubrey Sturgeon

This is Tarzan at our County's spring livestock show, only two months after his surgery. (Photo courtesy of Aubrey Sturgeon)

Back in March, I introduced a series about the lifecycle of a show steer, specifically using the life of my OYE breed champion, Tarzan, as a guide. I started with the importance of pedigree, and since then, I've covered over half of a show steer's life, from birth to learning how to trust their showman. After these early steps, the real fun begins—jackpot season.

For an OYE steer like Tarzan, jackpot season usually starts in mid-April and stretches through the spring, taking a break during the summer heat before kicking back up in the fall. Jackpot shows offer exhibitors a chance to get their animals in the ring a few times before the major show. The preparation for jackpot shows is much like preparing for a major show, but a bit less intense. Despite the everyday work that goes into getting livestock ready for show season, the real preparation starts in the week leading up to the event.

Before that big prep week, though, there are a few key things to handle to ensure a steer is in shape to show. First, we monitor their weight and make sure they're eating all their feed each night. Show steers also need to have their feet trimmed every 45-60 days, so

we make sure that gets done on schedule. Additionally, we sometimes visit a chiropractor to check for any hidden pain that could hinder performance. We keep a close eye on these areas, especially as we approach showtime.

Between myself and my sister, Brett, we often take as many as four steers to each jackpot, and my cousins usually bring two to four of their calves, making the days leading up to the shows pretty hectic for us. The first order of business is giving every calf at least one bath and haircut.

When it comes to clipping a calf, there are countless variables that determine how the experience will go, both physically and mentally. The right signs, according to the farmer's almanac, are essential when giving a haircut. My dad does all the clipping, so we don't have to travel anywhere. Jackpot season overlaps with the school year, so as soon as Brett and I get home from school, we get a steer on the wash rack.

That's where the real work starts. We need to keep the steers calm and ensure their bath is both relaxing and efficient. If we take too long, the steer will be too tired by the time it's time for clipping, and they won't stand still. After the steer is washed and dried, we move him to the chute. One of us scratches him with a show stick to keep him calm while Dad does the clipping. Scratching is crucial—if done wrong, it can cause more stress than peace for the steer. The most important factor in this whole process, though, is maintaining a positive attitude, no matter how the steer is acting. Show steers, like all animals, can sense emotions, and it definitely affects them.

The night before we head to the fairgrounds, after all the calves are cleaned up and ready, we start loading the trailer. We have to pack almost everything we use daily at home, plus a few extras. This includes bedding, panels to build stalls, combs, and hair-working supplies. I won't bore you with the entire list, but forgetting even one piece of equipment could mean either buying a replacement or going without for the weekend, if there isn't a show supply trailer at the fairgrounds.

Jackpot shows generally require cattle to be checked in the evening before the show, which is when most families arrive. However, with my dad being a full-time steer jock and my mom staying home to tend to the cattle that need to sit this one out, we're lucky enough to head up the morning before the show.

This way, we can keep the cattle cool and have plenty of time to get settled in. Once we're at the fairgrounds, the race begins—build a stall, unload the calves, clean them up, and feed them. We want them to have time to settle in, especially if it's their first time out in public. My dad usually has other calves that need clipping once we arrive, so my cousins—Brett, Skyler, Paisley, Bentley, and I—settle into our chairs to watch the calves, covering for each other as we grab food or chat with friends.

By the time my dad finishes, it's nearly time for evening chores. We rinse every calf to cool them off, then offer them supper and water. After they finish, it's time to head to the hotel and get plenty of rest before the big day. We all know the next morning will be an early one, but it's nothing compared to the mornings ahead of us come March, when we'll head to the OKC fairgrounds long before daylight, full of nerves and excitement.

The next morning, we exercise the calves to stretch their muscles for the show ring, then wash, dry, and feed them, ensuring they have time to rest before their turn in the ring. We typically don't fit calves for jackpots, but the days we do are hectic, though incredibly rewarding. Our entire crew loves seeing a calf we've been obsessing over finally come together, looking his best.

Finally, it's showtime. For me, this is the most nerve-wracking part. There are so many factors influencing how my calf will act, and I only have a few minutes to handle as many of them as I can. For Tarzan, this was easy—except for one thing.

Tarzan was the easiest-going steer I've ever shown, something I was incredibly thankful for each time we entered the ring. He walked at the perfect pace, set his feet just right, and held his head at the perfect height. If you saw Tarzan by the end of his career, you might not believe he ever placed below first, but you'd be wrong. Due to his hernia surgery, Tarzan's size didn't quite measure up. Steer classes are divided by weight, and though he was in classes with steers his size, Tarzan was just too scrawny.

Even though my family believed in Tarzan's potential, no judge seemed willing to see that. Until we went to Clayton, New Mexico, where Tarzan placed fourth overall. Just to back up my claim that no one else saw what I did in Tarzan, this was a two-ring show, and the other judge didn't even use Tarzan to win his class. The judge who did believe in Tarzan was Kaleb Selman, a member of Oklahoma State's National Champion Collegiate Livestock Judging Team.

My dad and I chatted with him after the show and learned that Kaleb grew up less than an hour from our hometown of Cordell. His aunt was also my second-grade teacher, and Kaleb went on to be my eighth-grade ag teacher and judging coach.

Ironically, Kaleb is someone who believes in me when the odds are stacked against me—just like he did for Tarzan.

Equine...

In the equine section, Dr. Garrett Metcalf takes us through the critical process of colic surgery, offering advice on how to make informed decisions for your horse's health. Donald Stotts shares expert advice on landscaping for horses, helping equestrians create safe and functional environments for their animals.

The Ins and Outs of Colic in Horses

By Dr. Garrett Metcalf, DVM

The horse's gastrointestinal tract has plagued owners and veterinarians for centuries, causing long nights of endless worrying, fear, and financial strain. The gastrointestinal tract is far from perfect in horses, but we have come to understand it much better in the past few decades, leading us to be able to treat and prevent colic with much greater success. There are many causes of colic in horses with some avoidable and some that are not. Colic is a very broad overarching term that indicates abdominal pain and is not a diagnosis but rather a symptom. This article will discuss the key aspects of colic in horses, treatment methodologies, and ways to avoid colic.

The first goal is diagnosing why the horse has colic, which in some cases is easier said than done. (Courtesy photo)

Prevalence of Colic

If you are a horse owner and haven't experienced colic before, consider yourself blessed. There will be a time when just about every horse owner will have a horse colic. According to data from the USDA, the incidence of colic published in 2001 was 4.2 events/100 horses per year. In previous studies, the find-ings ranged from 3.5-26 colics/100 horses per year. The incidence of fatalities from colic was 11 percent, and the overall percentage of horses that required surgery was only 1.4 percent. Demographics play a role in the types of colic that horses experience. A short list of these factors is the types of hay available, weather patterns and breeds in the area that affect the types of colic seen in a given region. Gender and use of horse is not a factor for colic, but horse breed is a factor, and certain breeds have higher previous of certain causes of colic. The key point to remember is that the majority of colics respond to medical treatment that is usually provided by the owner's primary care veterinarian. Still, there are a low number of horses that surgery is required to correct the cause of the colic.

Diagnostics and Treatment Options

The first goal is diagnosing why the horse has colic, which in some cases is easier said than done. Think of working up a horse with colic like assembling a puzzle, taking bits and pieces of the puzzle and putting them together to gain the full picture of why the horse is colicky. Some of the pieces of the puzzle in-clude breed, age, sex, history, diet, housing, and any recent changes that have occurred. Diagnostic workup includes a physical exam (heart rate, temp, gut sounds, etc.), blood work, rectal exam, nasogas-tric intubation, abdominal ultrasound, and occasionally abdominocentesis, which is sampling of the fluid in the abdominal cavity surrounding the intestines. Radiographs of the abdomen are of limited use except in specific causes of colic such as sand colic, when the mineral accumulating in the large colon can be seen radiographically. These tools or pieces of the puzzle help put together the findings or a picture of the cause of the colic.

Many factors are involved when it comes to deciding a treatment plan for a horse with colic, and treat-ment plans can be divided into two categories: either medical or surgical. One of these factors is the comfort of the horse. Suppose the horse is mildly uncomfortable but otherwise, vital parameters are stable. In that case, the likely emergent need for surgery is very low, but very painful horses that cannot be controlled medically often need surgery to correct the issue. Diagnosis of a specific cause or lesion with very little or no chance of correction without surgery made at the time of presentation to the pri-mary or referral veterinarian is an indication to undergo surgery. Advancements in diagnostic tools and techniques have made it more possible to pinpoint a diagnosis before surgery, but these diagnostic tools have limitations, and sometimes the only option to diagnose the cause of the colic is to perform explora-tory abdominal surgery. The more quickly the diagnosis is made, the sooner the appropriate treatment is provided for the horse to have the best possible outcome. In many cases, a referral is needed to practic-es that are equipped to perform more advanced diagnostics and have the capability to perform ab-dominal surgery in horses.

Medical treatment of colic can vary greatly in intensity. Medical treatment can be simply pain manage-ment with I.V. Banamine or more intense care such as I.V. fluids, hospitalization and 24 hour monitoring. It is common to see

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your veterinarian place a nasogastric tube into the horse's stomach. This practice is important in more ways than one and is part of a complete work up of a colic case. This can be, first of all, a life-saving procedure if the horse's stomach is greatly distended with fluid because horses' stom-achs can rupture, which will lead to death. Passing a stomach tube is also diagnostic and part of gathering more information about the cause of colic. Nasogastric tubes also allow a way to administer water, electrolytes and laxatives in cases of impactions, for example. Other medical treatments for colic involve treatment for infectious causes of colic with antibiotics. One particular cause of colic that is very success-fully treated medically is a left dorsal displacement of the colon. This occurs with the colon becomes hooked on top of the spleen near the left kidney. In order to correct this problem a drug is administered I.V. to shrink the spleen and provided room for the colon to be replaced into the correct position.

Prevention

As Benjamin Franklin put it "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." There is no panacea when it comes to preventing all causes of colic in horses, but every little bit helps when it comes to avoiding major causes of colic. Below is a short list of husbandry practices to avoid colic and to be fur-ther prepared if colic occurs in your horse.

•Good quality roughage that is consistent throughout the year when possible and avoiding sudden changes in diet. This is a common struggle for horse owners and some have turned to more processed feed stuffs such as alfalfa cubes due to availability of good quality hay and supply.

•More turn out time, free or consistent forced exercise and access to fresh water in multiple loca-tions.

•A newer trend that is important to keep horses' gastrointestinal tract happy is mimicking natural grazing with slow feeders and keeping roughage consistently available in small quantities over a longer period of time.

•Normal routine care such as deworming, vaccination and dental floating should be part of the preventative steps of colic.

•Keeping your horse at a healthy weight and avoid overfeeding concentrate grain diets.

•Have a plan in place when it comes time if your horse is colicking. Know who to call and be pre-pared to trailer the horse.

•Sometimes there is no easy straight-forward answer in cases of colic so be patient and be in-volved with the horse's care decisions.

•Always avoid advice from people's past experiences or hearsay that will delay you from seeking veterinary care.

Colic is not always avoidable, and everyone who has a horse should be prepared to face it at some point in their lifetime. Remember that not every colicky horse is the same and that there are many, many different causes of colic in horses. It is important that owners remain calm during these situations so that the care of the horse is not impeded, allowing the horse to be fully examined to get the most accu-rate diagnosis as quickly as possible. While waiting to get in contact with a veterinarian, it is important to withhold food and water to prevent further worsening the situation. Please, whenever possible seek medical care from your veterinarian, especially if the initial care rendered by the owner or trainer is not correcting the problem in a short period of time.

Landscaping for Horses Requires Thoughtful Planning

By Donald Stotts | OSU Agriculture Communications

Appearance, functionality and animal safety are important factors for horse owners to consider as they change the trees and other plants in an equine's environment. (Courtesy photo)

Appearance, functionality and animal safety are important factors for horse owners to consider as they change the trees and other plants in an equine's environment, Oklahoma State University Extension experts said.

"People are used to just getting on the internet and looking things up, but information about what plants are acceptable around horses can be very confusing and often seemingly contradictory," said Brad Secraw, Cleveland County Extension agricultural educator.

For example, in Cleveland County where urban and rural lifestyles meet, a horse owner may want to provide privacy screening to keep animals out of sight of neighbors. There are several elements to weigh, among them whether the plants grow well in Oklahoma, whether they lose their foliage during winter months and, most importantly, whether they are toxic to horses.

"I recommend contacting your local county agricultural or horticultural Extension educator to see if he or she can't make an on-site visit," said Kris Hiney, OSU Extension equine specialist. "General recommendations a person might get off the internet are a good starting point and can help the property owner better understand input costs and investment of time, energy and effort.

However, there are a great many variables that need to be considered with each specific site."

For privacy, the following plants are good possibilities for Oklahoma horse operations:

Eastern redcedar – An invasive plant seen far and wide across Oklahoma but able to maintain its greenery in colder weather. Never plant seed-bearers, often referred to as females.

Tree nursery operators should know the difference between sex

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types.

Arborvitae – Similar to a cedar tree but not as competitive with other plants in terms of soil nutrient and water use. It is a thick and tall evergreen when fully grown.

Crepe myrtle – Scenic flowers will bloom mid- to late-summer. The loss of leaves in winter may limit the screening effect.

Forsythia – This selection has showy yellow flowers in the spring, and while it loses leaves in winter, the plant has a thick branching structure. However, it only grows to about 5 feet tall.

Rose of Sharon – Nice flowers and it becomes more treelike as the plant ages. The major drawback is that it loses leaves in winter.

Russian olive – This attractive option is a light silvery green color. Unfortunately, it has thorns and loses its foliage in the winter.

Star magnolia – Flowers in the spring but loses its leaves in the winter.

Southern magnolia – An attractive and functional selection for anyone not in a hurry. The drawback is that a group of such trees would likely take 20 or more years to effectively screen off an area.

The listed plants are not poisonous to horses and other equines. They should be planted 15-20 feet from the fence line and spaced from one another according to planting recommendations. Cost will vary according to planting size.

"I would not recommend Leyland or Arizona cypress; the trees are great for a while, but then issues such as Seiridium and Botryosphaeria canker can become an issue," said Jen Olson, OSU Extension diagnostician with the university's Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory. "Property owners with horses might want to consider one of the improved, upright junipers such as Spartan or Taylor."

Just because a tree might be a good candidate for privacy screening does not automatically make it a desirable choice for shade, where potential toxicity issues become more of a concern.

Good pasture will keep a horse happily munching on grass, but poor-quality forage can lead to inquisitive equines looking for more palatable food options. In drylot situations, a bored horse may chow down on anything that looks interesting.

Southern magnolia, cottonwood, American sycamore and hackberry are useful shade options. Elm trees have potential, but some varieties are susceptible to disease and therefore may not be the best monetary investment. Certain American elms – the Princeton and Prairie Expedition varieties, both favorites of Secraw – are disease-resistant and have been identified as "Oklahoma Proven" under that plant evaluation and marketing program coordinated by faculty in in OSU's Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture.

"Don't confuse American sycamore with acer pseudoplatanus, a type of maple that is also called sycamore in England and has been connected to atypical myopathy in horses," he said. "If your internet source is from England, it's easy to become confused because of language differences."

The acorns of oak trees are dangerous to horses.

Never plant a maple tree in a horse pasture or lot. For barns and fence lines, err on the side of safety and keep all plants out of reach.

For more information about research-based horse management and horticultural practices, consult OSU Extension fact sheets, available online and through all county Extension offices.

OSU Extension is one of two state agencies administered by the university's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and is a key part of OSU's state and federally mandated teaching, research and Extension land-grant mission.

The Rose of Sharon has nice flowers and it becomes more treelike as the plant ages. The major drawback is that it loses leaves in winter.

At The Ranch

Saturday August 30th, 2025 ~ A Bar Ranch
Claremore, OK ~12 Noon

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CATTLE WILL BE SORTED INTO BREED TYPE AND CALVING PERIODS.

35- Angus 3-5 year old pairs. Calves are sired by Angus bulls.

43- Angus & Brangus pairs 3-5 year olds. Calves are sired by Angus and Charolais bulls.

80- Angus 3- 5 year old heavy bred cows safe to Express Ranch Angus bulls. To start 9-1-25

120- A Bar Ranch Angus spring bred heifers safe to Express Ranch 4-Star calving ease bulls to start calving 2-1-26. Sorted into 30-day calving periods

85- A Bar Ranch UltraBlack spring bred heifers safe to Express Ranch 4-Star calving ease bulls to start calving 2-1-26. Sorted into 30-day calving periods

42- A Bar Ranch Black Baldy spring bred heifers safe to Express Ranch 4-Star calving ease bulls to start calving 2-1-26. Sorted into 30-day calving periods

120- 7S Stuart Ranch Angus spring bred heifers. Safe to Express Ranch 4-Star calving ease bulls. To start calving 2-1-26. Sorted into 30-day calving periods.

42- 7S Stuart Ranch Black Baldy spring bred heifers. Safe to Express Ranch 4-Star calving ease bulls. To start calving 2-1-26. Sorted into 30-day calving periods

126- Angus 3-5 year old spring bred cows safe to Hinkson and Schilling Ranch Angus bulls. To start 2-1-26.

43- Brangus 3-5 year old spring bred cows safe to Angus and Charolais bulls. To start 2-1-26.

42- Red Angus 3-5 year old spring bred cows safe to Angus bulls. To Start 2-1-26.

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For Cattle Information
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martha@abarranch.com
to view sale: www.abarranch.com

Be A Pickup Man

Cassidy Heskett

The pickup man in a rodeo isn't there for the glory. He rides in when things go wrong, ex-tends a steady hand, and ensures everyone gets out safely. Cassidy Heskett thinks we could all stand to be a little more like that.

Now serving as Miss Rodeo Oklahoma 2025, Cassidy promotes her platform, "Be A Pickup Man," as a reminder that strength isn't about showmanship. It's about being the person who shows up, especially when someone else is struggling. It's a fitting message for the 23-year-old cowgirl from Pawnee, Oklahoma, whose path to the title has been anything but easy, and who's using her time in the spotlight to champion mental health awareness across the rodeo and agricultural communities.


Rodeo
Oklahom

Cassidy grew up in the small, historic town of Pawnee, where she attended school from pre-K through graduation. She describes her childhood as a blur of activities, including 4-H, FFA, FCCLA, Beta Club, and any other organization that kept her busy and connected. "I did a little bit of everything," she said. "Livestock judging, opening and closing ceremonies, alumni camp - you name it." Horses were always part of the picture. "I think as soon as I could sit up, my dad put me on a horse," she said.

Early on, Cassidy helped with the family cow-calf operation, riding pastures and pushing cattle. That love for riding naturally led her to play days, where she began competing in bar-rels, poles, and flags. Over time, she expanded to junior rodeos, where she added goat ty-ing and even chute dogging to her events.

By the time she graduated high school, she'd earned a rodeo scholarship to Connors State College and competed on their rodeo team while earning her associate degree in agriculture. Though her dad was a team roper and bull rider, Cassidy blazed her own trail in the barrel racing pen, supported every step of the way by a father who may not have known much about barrel patterns but knew how to encourage a daughter chasing her goals.

After college, she spent time working at a rural hospital in the rehab department, but horses and rodeo were never far from her mind. That same pull would eventually lead her back to the arena, but this time, with a crown.

Cassidy's entry into the world of rodeo pageants wasn't exactly planned. "My sister-in-law talked me into my first pageant when I was 14," she said. "It was the Chandler Roundup Club Rodeo Queen pageant, and I didn't even really want to do it. She told me, 'It's just a pattern and a couple of questions.'"

Cassidy agreed, reluctantly.

Cassidy and her father. (Photos provided by Cassidy Heskitt)

But after borrowing some makeup and learning to style her hair, she walked into the contest and left hooked. "From there, it just kind of spiraled," she said. "My mom likes to say that it got out of control."

She won her first two titles the very next year, the Cherokee Strip Riding Club Rodeo in her father's hometown of Perry, and the Pawnee Bill Memorial Rodeo Teen title in her hometown of Pawnee. More titles followed. Cassidy chased pageants at the local level, eventually earning a spot in the 2019 Miss Rodeo Oklahoma Teen pageant.

But that year didn't go as planned. A diagnosis of mononucleosis meant she couldn't compete in horsemanship. "We joke about it now," she said, "but I brought a stick pony to my horsemanship interview so I could at least demonstrate a few moves." That stick pony has since traveled to more ro-deos than most horses, becoming something of a mascot for Cassidy, especially among the younger girls who attend her clinics and events.

She took a break from queening while she was focused on college rodeo, and later during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the 2020 pageant season was effectively shut down. But by 2023, the itch returned. Three months before the Miss Rodeo Oklahoma deadline, Cassidy decided she wanted to give it a shot.

It wasn't a decision she made lightly.

In 2021, Cassidy lost her father unexpectedly. The grief was deep, and it didn't fade quickly. "Rodeo was our thing," she said. "It was always what we did together." Her platform, "Be A Pickup Man," emerged as both a tribute and a mission. The phrase represents not just the literal pickup men in rodeo, but also the quiet heroes outside the arena: the people who show up when someone is hurting, who offer help without being asked, and who remind others that they're not alone. "I knew I wanted to stay in rodeo somehow and be able to talk about mental health," she said. "That platform gave me the reason to keep going."

She didn't win in 2023, but she wasn't done. Cassidy spent the next year training. Horse-manship, modeling, public speaking—she threw herself into every detail. "I was riding with a trainer at least once a week. I gave speeches anywhere people would listen. I was out in the pasture practicing my

modeling turns," she said. "You do what you have to do."

The hard work paid off. In 2024, Cassidy was crowned Miss Rodeo Oklahoma, and her reign officially began on January 1, 2025.

Since then, she's traveled extensively, sharing the rodeo lifestyle and her message of sup-port and awareness with audiences across the country. Her stops have included the Na-tional Western Stock Show and Rodeo in Denver, Silver Spurs Rodeo in Florida, Will Rogers Stampede in Claremore, and the legendary Woodward Elks Rodeo. She even made it to the Buffalo Bill Rodeo in Nebraska and the Frontier Days Rodeo in Abbeville, Kansas, where the town's famed pies nearly stole the show. "They baked 400 pies for the weekend and sold out by Saturday night," she said. "The shirts said, 'Come for the pie, stay for the rodeo.' I believe it."

By the time Cassidy graduated high school, she earned a rodeo scholarship at connors State College. (Photo by Herschman)

In addition to her numerous Queen titles, Cassidy has also earned both her Oklahoma State FFA Degree and her National FFA Degree. (Top photo by Sherry Smith Photography)

For Cassidy, rodeo queening has offered a different perspective. "As a fan, you sit in the stands and watch," she said.

"But as Miss Rodeo Oklahoma, you get to see the people behind the scenes - the contractors, the pickup men, the stock handlers. It's amazing how much goes into every performance, and I've learned so much more about rodeo than I ever expected."

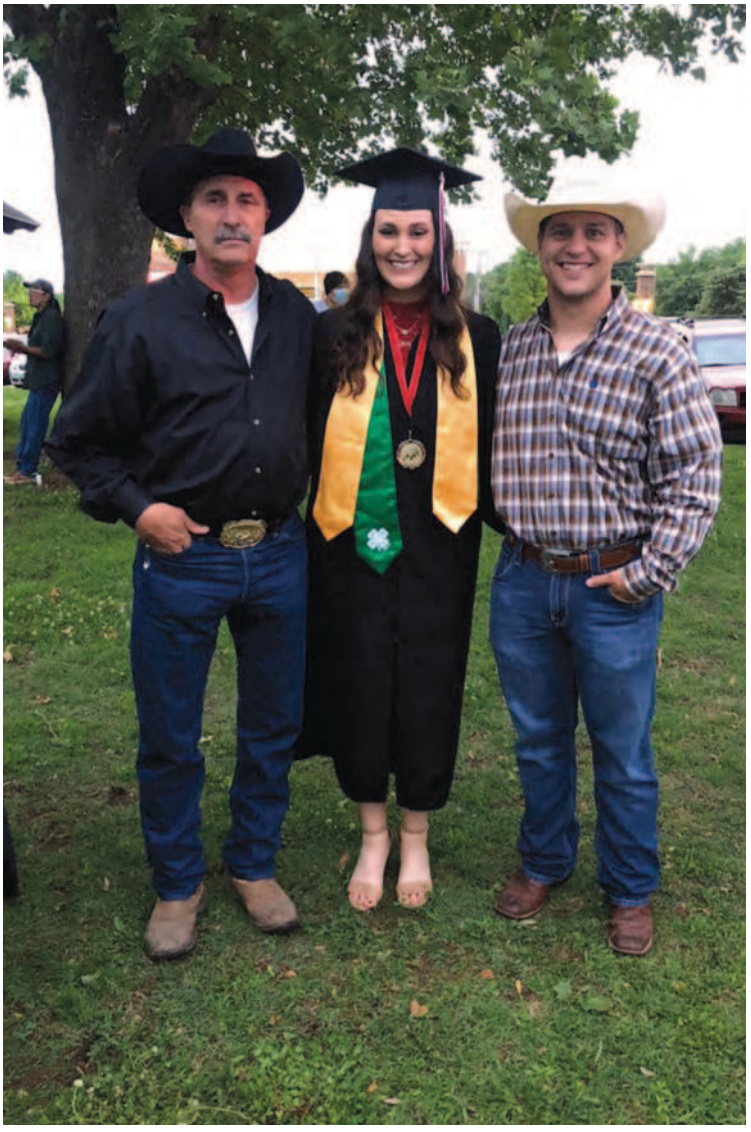
She's also been learning how to prepare for the next step: Miss Rodeo America.

That pageant, held each year in Las Vegas during the National Finals Rodeo, is a nine-day marathon of interviews, speeches, modeling, horsemanship, and non-stop evaluation. "We turn in our phones and stay completely focused on the competition," Cassidy said. "It's all volunteer-run, and it's incredible how they pull it all off. But it's intense."

As she continues to travel and prepare, Cassidy is also looking ahead to what comes next.

After her reign, she plans to return to college to complete a bachelor's degree, likely in agriculture communications, and pursue certification to become a therapeutic riding instructor.

It's a path that blends her love of horses with her heart for helping others.



Cassidy encourages girls to try running for a rodeo queen title if they have an interest. "Take the leap of faith," she said. (Photos on right by Sherry Smith Photography)

When asked what advice she'd give to girls thinking about running for rodeo queen, Cassidy doesn't hesitate. "Just do it," she said. "Put yourself out there and take the leap of faith. You never know where it'll lead."

That's not just a pep talk. It's the very essence of her platform. To be a pickup man is to step up when it's hard, to offer help when it's needed, and to ride toward the chaos instead of away from it. Cassidy Heskett isn't just wearing the crown.

She's living the example.

Lifestyle...

Lacey Vilhauer provides a sweet treat this month with her recipe for caramel apple dessert cups, while Summer McMillen shares her personal reflections on "mellowing with age" in Western Housewives. Beth Watkins discusses how the rhythm of life on the ranch aligns with "Living on Country Time," and we welcome Ashley Burkhart Walker of Fresh from the Hen House, who shares her journey alongside a delicious recipe for homemade vanilla simple syrup. Lastly, Editor Savannah Magoteaux ties in her experience with procrastination and tomato cages, reminding us how small tasks can teach valuable lessons.

Lacey's Pantry

By Lacey Vilhauer

Caramel Apple Dessert Cups

Ingredients:
4 -5 cups apples peeled and chopped
½ cup light brown sugar
1 tsp cinnamon
2 cups vanilla wafer crumbs
¼ cup salted or unsalted butter, melted
1 pkg instant vanilla pudding mix (3.4 ounce)
1 cup whole milk
⅓ cup salted caramel sauce homemade or store bought
1 ½ cups heavy cream
additional caramel sauce for garnish

Instructions:

In a medium saucepan, combine peeled and chopped apples, brown sugar and cinnamon. Stir and cook over medium heat until the apples are soft and the liquid thickens. Set aside to cool.

In a mixing bowl, combine vanilla wafer crumbs and melted butter. Stir until fully incorporated.

Portion vanilla wafer crumbs into either 28 two-ounce plastic cups or larger glass containers for a more refined look. Press down to create a crust.

In a large mixing bowl, combine instant vanilla pudding mix and milk. Whisk to combine. Chill for 5 minutes.

Add salted caramel sauce to the vanilla pudding mixture. Use an electric hand mixer on medium speed to mix the caramel into the pudding until smooth.

Pour in the heavy cream to the pudding mixture and whip then whip with an electric hand mixer for 3-5 minutes until it becomes thick and creamy.

Transfer the caramel mousse mixture to a large piping bag. Pipe the mousse into the plastic cups on top of the vanilla wafer crust.

Using a spoon, portion the cinnamon apples over the caramel mousse. Drizzle with additional caramel sauce if desired.

Seal the cups with a lid and chill or cover with plastic wrap. The cups can be served immediately or stored in the refrigerator for two to three days.

WESTERN HØUSEWIVES

BY SUMMER MCMILLEN

"We mellow with age." That's an age-old myth I've heard since I was a little girl. They said it about my grandpa when he became a grandfather to two little girls. They said it about my dad as he got a son of his own. And now, they say it about my parents as they've become grandparents to my own children.

They used to say it about horses, too. The colts we used to ride - who would leap over creeks like they were hot lava - turned into aged geldings that would calmly walk across the creek as if they were carrying the queen of England. Young mares that would run away from anyone trying to touch their new foal became older, wiser mares who stood sturdy, studying their surroundings.

It seems that, with time, everything mellows. As I'm starting to add a little age to myself, I'm wondering if my day will ever come when I find myself mellowing.

Most days, I hit the floor running. There's breakfast to be made, clothes to wash, horses to ride, and kids to turn into decent human beings. The list goes on and on. I'd love to say I handle it all with beauty and grace, but that would be a bit of a stretch. I mostly handle it with gritted teeth and forehead wrinkles. Oh, and coffee. Lots of coffee.

In my family, it's a tradition for the eldest born to show their lack of mellowness by talking through gritted teeth. My dad had it, I have it, and now I'm starting to notice it in my firstborn as well. We aren't mad, and we aren't yelling. And we sure aren't being mellow. But our teeth are gritted because we mean business. Darn it.

My lack of mellowness was pretty evident the other day when my husband and I were trying to get a group of cows out of the cedars and across a creek crossing during the heat of the day. After two attempts and finally some success, I noticed my jaw was extremely sore. It wasn't because I had been yelling at the cattle or mad at my husband. It was because my teeth were gritted. I was trying to will those cows across the creek with my own teeth. Who do I think I am? I never said it was a wise trait, just a family trait.

Summer's husband, who she says was born mellow. (Photo courtesy of Summer McMillen)

As we were riding back to the trailer, I wondered if I would ever, in my life, get the chance to be mellow. It seemed like a good time was had by people who mellow. They walk around without a care in the world. About that time, Bog Country walked up to a little creek with a more-than-steep bank. I remembered that water wasn't his favorite thing to cross, because the last time we did it together, he lunged so hard I slipped out of the saddle and landed on his rump. I wasn't eager to repeat history, so I stepped off of him and decided I'd get my boots wet if it meant leading him across instead of riding.

As I was climbing up the bank, trying not to get mauled by the big creature behind me, I turned around and watched him delicately place his hoof in the creek and cross it like a perfect gentleman. Mellowed.

I was encouraged, to say the least. If this big, swift, and athletic creature could learn to mellow, maybe I could too. The more I thought about it, though, I decided that now is not the time for me to mellow. I have kids to raise, a husband to encourage, and cattle to move. Being "mellow" isn't exactly a personality trait that will help me get all those things done efficiently.

One day, I'll look up and find myself sitting on the porch, drinking iced tea with a little sugar in it (because that's what calm people do), and my grass will be a little too tall, and, Lord willing, my grandkids will play in puddles I would've never let my own kids play in. Everyone will look at me and laugh and say, "Man! Has she mellowed?" And I'll laugh, through gritted teeth, and say, "Yes, it came with time."

Where the Paved Road Ends

Livin' On Country Time

By Beth Watkins

Phone conversations between me and my country boy usually include: "When will you be home?" His answer is always, "Soon." I've come to realize "soon" could mean anywhere from 30 minutes to just before dark.

City folks run their lives by clocks, calendars, and chirping apps. Out here, good old boys run on sun, seasons, and whether the tractor has oil pressure and air in the tires.

When I lived in town, I used to fuss over traffic - slow left-laners, backed-up intersections, end-less red lights. Turns out, when you don't deal with them daily, they lose their sting. These days, the only traffic backups are caused by people following hay equipment crawling down a county road. Listen up, people! We are barely moving - give your car a little gas and go around… bless your hearts.

We live where cows outnumber people, and one Saturday we rode our tractor to the little store for fuel. The only "traffic" we met was another John Deere doing the same thing.

Life may be slower, but I've found a new thorn in my side: procrastination. Unlike rush hour, it doesn't come and go - it settles in like dust on a dirt road, in every nook and cranny. Out here, procrastination isn't about laziness - it's all strategy and timing.

In some homes, when something breaks, folks call a repairman. But in a country boy's house, we fix it ourselves - eventually. If we can't fix it, we don't need it.

When approaching the subject of things left undone on the list, I try to handle it with mercy and grace. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 21:9, "It is better to live in a corner of the attic than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife." Wise words - no one wants to live with a nag. So, I care-fully, artfully, and creatively steer my "honey" toward his to-do list. I have a plethora of "carrot on a stick" type incentives. Some work like a charm. All are great ideas, but when you have a hus-band who works all the time, some of them are marked NA - Not Available.

(Courtesy photo)

You want to know how deep procrastination runs out here? Let me paint you a picture. My cabbed rake tractor lost its right-side mirror to a low-hanging branch three summers ago. I wasn't on duty that day, so when I asked about it, I was told it was on order and would be fixed "soon."

This year, my tractor has an automatic quitting time built in. The light switch quit working, so dark-thirty means it's time to head to the house. I swear I had nothing to do with it - the knob just came off in my hand.

The mower hasn't had a cover since the last belt change. Belts fly off, and I suggested putting the cover back on so we wouldn't have to walk the pasture looking for them. He shrugged and said he'd just have to take it off again anyway. Country logic: why secure what you'll unscrew by lunchtime?

He keeps saying we'll get a new mower once we get ahead - a phrase that means nothing in our operation because as soon as you fix one thing, something else decides to retire without notice.

My husband has been cutting and baling hay in a cabbed tractor with no air conditioning for the last three years. He even has the parts to fix it, somewhere in the back of his work truck. But instead of taking the time to fix the problem, he just shrugs and keeps right on baling - inside a rolling "green"house, where temperatures have reached a high of 116 degrees.

If you're asking yourself, "Can't he remove the doors and glass to get some air moving?" The answer is, "Absolutely, he can!" But then he risks being swarmed by bumble bees. You see, bumble bees build nests in the ground, and when you run over one in tall grass, they get real irri-tated. He's had a bad experience before. Years ago, he ran over a nest in an open-cab tractor and ended up bailing off the side while it was moving. The bees chased that tractor all the way into the pond.

My country boy is tough be-

cause he never complains. I honestly don't know how he does it. I hate being hot. And I know what you're thinking - why don't you start really early in the morning when it's cooler? You can't start until the morning dew has burned off. On the days when there is no dew, that means it's been hot all night and it's about to get hotter. I think his tractor sauna has warped his brain - somewhere between heatstroke and hay dust - because by dark, he'll say, "It wasn't that bad today."

If you ask him why he hasn't fixed the A/C, he'll squint across the pasture and say something wise-sounding like, "Well, I was gonna… but then it was hay season." As if that explains everything - and in a way, it does.

When we bought our new-ish work truck, it was really nice. A clean black mega-cab dually with a manual six-speed that had been deleted and tuned and ran like a scalded dog. But the truck has had more run-ins with deer than a game warden during rut season. The first deer collision messed up the grill. We replaced the grill and bought a chrome grill guard with a winch. That grill guard has been sitting on the garage floor for the past nine years. A few years ago, he blew a tire and took out a dually fender. The heater hasn't worked in so long that his winter driving routine involves scraping ice off the inside of the windshield. It hasn't seen a car wash in eight years

The side mirrors are great - they stick out far enough to keep an eye on the trailer but are broken from the last hailstorm that gave the whole truck a good beat-down. Oh, and the brakes only squeal some of the time. Last week, the A/C stopped working. The truck is a beast - and now looks like one too.

In our little slice of heaven, we have two main seasons: propane season and hay season. Pro-pane really goes on all year; it's just not as busy in the summer. Hay season falls somewhere in the summer, in a sweet spot that changes every year. After the rains stop, the weather has to warm up so the grass can grow. Fertilizer gets sprayed, followed by a little rain. While waiting for the hay meadows to dry and the grass to shoot up, it's supposedly the perfect time to prepare all the mowing equipment for the season. But sometimes in Oklahoma, the weather shifts overnight and - bingo - it's go time. Daylight's a wastin'.

Meanwhile, some folks get antsy and bale too soon. Just the other day, we were loading last year's hay from a location about thirty minutes from our place. I sat there, doing my job: holding my foot on the brake while the hay was loaded, and I watched in amazement as a guy across the road, in a brand-new tractor pulling a brand-new baler, made deep ruts in the mud and nearly got stuck every time he turned the corner to run over wet windrows, water pouring from his bal-er. An old timer driving down the road stopped to chat. He looked over to see why my expres-sion looked so worried and said, "Reckon he'll learn the hard way. He just moved here from Cali-fornia."

When you bale wet grass, it molds on the inside and you also risk it catching fire when the temperatures rise. Bless his heart.

And finally - let's not forget that front flower bed. As I'm typing this, my Romeo is outside with fifty bags of mulch, laying out plans. We built our home in 2016 and moved in that November. "Front flower bed" has been on his honey-do list since 2017. Time is the hottest commodity here at The Cross Creek Cattle Company. So it is chosen wisely.

Fresh from the Hen House

By Ashley Burkhart Walker

If you raise farm animals, you know there will be some ups and downs. (Courtesy photo)

If you raise farm animals, you know you will have your ups and downs. You hope that the majority of your days are smooth but expect kinks here and there. As long as it's nothing worse than a little kink, it's good, but you know, that there is always the chance of some terrible, unexpected situation. That's just part of it.

I've been living the milk cow dream for a decent amount of time now. We've been through drying off and calving. Naturally, the next thing was breeding. I decided on AI-ing. For just one or two cows, it made sense. We had my cow Pepper AI-ed and a couple months later, learned how to draw her blood to do a at home cow pregnancy test. It was a happy day seeing those two lines on the test. We were golden and knew exactly when to dry her off and when to expect a calf.

I started really watching Pepper as she got closer to her due date. Both of my Jerseys can look like they are going to calve any day after a day of grazing, so it's hard to tell if they are carrying by just looking at their right side, but as a cow gets closer to calving, she'll have some very obvious signs. Pepper was having none of those signs. I figured maybe she'll come on all of a sudden. After a while, I started really questioning whether she was even bred. I can't even tell you the amount of

dread I held at just the thought. I put off voicing it to my husband, because it's when you are super confident when some situations really, really get you down. I felt like a complete and utter failure with the whole situation. My milk cow was not bred.

She was not going to calf. She was not going to fill this family's fridge with nourishing raw milk. Failure. It took me some time to work through it and realize, I was confident because we had a positive test, I didn't feel the need to check on anything after that. Now, being in a situation you never ever want to be in with a milk cow, I know better.

My family loves the milk cow life. It's a huge amount of commitment, endless dishes, and milking equipment everywhere, but we are in this for the long haul. We can't imagine a more fulfilling life or having to buy store bought milk and dairy products again.

So, I told the husband we were in a "up the creek without a paddle" situation and told him the only solution I had, which was insane, was we were going to buy another cow and try like heck to get Pepper bred and back on track. I can see a lot of husbands would just put a huge "whoa" on the "buying another cow", but no, not mine. He asks what cow and where.

That's how we ended up with Georgi the Brown Swiss, the very large Brown Swiss who can reach the very top of a bale while my Jerseys shove their face in the middle of the bale, because you know, that's as far up as they can reach.

Family milk cows are not easily found most of the time, especially not around here, so I was fortunate for ending up with one with a due date in November. Along with the cow, we bought some Brown Swiss milk. We love our full, sweet Jersey milk, so figured we'd better see what we were getting into. Don't tell the Jerseys, but that Brown Swiss milk may be even sweeter than theirs and just a delicious flavor.

For now, my super low production Jersey, Phronsie, is getting us by, and thankfully after weaning her calf, she is not holding back at all on her cream.

We're taking it all as it comes, each and every day. I don't do so well with the "downs" of life anymore, maybe too much tragedy, loss changes a person. I know things may not go as planned and we just have to figure out how to get through it the best we can. So here we are, working to get through one of life's unexpected kinks thrown our way.

I feel pretty spoiled with my morning coffee lately. Fresh cream and homemade simple syrup make it pretty gourmet. It took me buying two bottles of the simple syrup in the past before I figured I should be making it myself. It literally takes under 10 minutes, helps my wallet, and has less ingredients than store bought. That's a win for me.

Homemade Vanilla Simple Syrup

½ cup water
½ cup granulated sugar
½ Tablespoon vanilla bean paste, or vanilla extract

Instructions

In a small or medium saucepan, whisk together water and sugar over medium-high heat. Bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally until sugar is completely dissolved. The liquid should be clear. Remove from heat.

Stir in the vanilla bean paste. Allow to cool or use immediately. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks and use in your favorite beverages or recipes as desired.

Tomato Tales

By Savannah Magoteaux

Procrastination doesn't spare us from the consequences of what we put off. (Courtesy photo)

There's a lesson I've learned over the years that I keep trying to master: procrastination always catches up with you. It's a lesson that's often taught in small, everyday moments. A moment that stands out vividly for me this year happened right in my own backyard—among my tomato plants

This year, I had an ambitious goal: to grow a bumper crop of tomatoes. I planted them in early spring, nurtured them, watched them sprout, and cheered them on as they blossomed. By the time they reached the point of producing fruit, I could see the payoff of all the care and attention. It was exciting. But here's where the procrastination came in - on the care they needed next.

I knew that tomato plants need cages, stakes, or some form of support to keep them from sprawling out of control, especially as they grow taller and heavier with fruit. But somehow, I kept putting it off. Maybe I told myself, "I'll get to it tomorrow" or "It's not that urgent." What I failed to account for, though, was that procrastination is often a slow burn. It doesn't hit you immediately, but eventually, it does.

Weeks passed, and my plants grew larger, stronger, and more unruly. The branches started drooping, tangled in the weight of their own growth. The tomatoes, heavy and plump, hung on the branches like little weights. It became clear that the longer I waited, the harder it would be to control the plants.

Then came the day when I decided to stop procrastinating. Armed with the largest tomato cages the local feed store had in stock, I marched out to the garden ready to tackle the chaos I'd allowed to unfold. I carefully placed the cages over the plants. Or, at least, I tried to.

No matter how large the cages were, they weren't large enough. The plants had already spread too

far out, the branches (or whatever you call those green arms of the tomato plant) had become tangled, and I found myself in a bit of a mess. As I tried to lift the branches into the cages, I snapped a few in the process. It was heartbreaking to see them break, knowing I could have avoided it if I had just dealt with it earlier.

But as I stood there looking at the aftermath, I realized something bigger was at play - this wasn't just about tomato plants. It was a perfect metaphor for procrastination in life. Whether it's a project, a relationship, or something on our to-do list, when we delay something that we know needs to be done, we often end up creating a much bigger problem for ourselves down the road.

It wasn't that putting the cages on the plants was inherently difficult. I could've done it early on, easily and without breaking anything. But by waiting too long, I turned a minor inconvenience into a full-blown headache. My tomato plants were now an image of what happens when we let things go on for too long - unruly, messy, and more difficult to handle than they would have been if I had simply tackled the task earlier.

So, what can we take away from my tomato plant fiasco?

First, procrastination doesn't spare us from the consequences of what we put off. Sure, we may have a sense of relief for a little while by avoiding something, but the longer we avoid it, the bigger the problem becomes. In my case, those branches didn't just grow heavier - they grew so heavy that they became harder to manage, more prone to damage, and ultimately, more disappointing. Had I just caged them when I first planted them, I would've saved myself a lot of trouble.

Second, there's a real sense of urgency when it comes to taking action. We often think there's plenty of time to deal with something, but time moves fast. Before you know it, you've waited too long, and the situation is out of your control. This happened with my tomato plants, and I've seen it happen in so many areas of life.

Whether it's procrastinating on a task at work, putting off an important conversation with someone, or delaying a health decision, the longer you wait, the harder it becomes to fix. Life doesn't wait for you to feel ready. Just like the tomatoes, things have a way of growing out of hand when left unchecked.

And lastly, there's the lesson about self-compassion. I'm frustrated by the mess I created with my tomato plants, but I've learned to forgive myself. We all have moments where we fall short of what we expected of ourselves. What matters is that we don't beat ourselves up and let it paralyze us into further inaction. Instead, we learn from it and take what steps we can to remedy the situation.

After all, the damage wasn't irreversible. The plants still grew. They still produced tomatoes, even if they weren't as perfect as I'd hoped. I adjusted the cages as best as I could, and I'll keep tending to them throughout the season. In the end, it's not about avoiding mistakes - it's about learning from them and doing better next time.

Procrastination doesn't care if it's gardening season or deadline season - it'll get you either way. But next time, I'm aiming to be proactive, not reactive. The tomato plants may have taught me that lesson, but I'm determined to apply it to more areas of my life.

So, take it from me: don't wait too long. Whatever it is - whether it's a project, a conversation, or something in your garden - take action now, before you find yourself trying to catch up, breaking branches along the way.

Outdoors...

This month in Outdoor, Andy Anderson offers tips on hunting feral hogs, a growing concern for Oklahoma landowners. Norman Winter, the Garden Guy, introduces us to the beauty and benefits of Mexican Bush Sage, a must-have for your garden. Trisha Gedon explains how extreme heat and drought are impacting fall garden plans, offering solutions for gardeners to adjust their strategies. Alisa Gore highlights a partnership between OSU agriculture and a nonprofit working to fight food insecurity, while Janice Laney shares proof of porcupines making their mark in Oklahoma, a fun and surprising update for outdoor enthusiasts.

Bucket List & More

By Andy Anderson

Helicopter pig hunting is an experience unlike any other. It just simply cannot be compared to anything else. It is truly a once in a lifetime experience and certainly worthy of a "Bucket List" adventure.

More often than not, people who have embarked on a helicopter hunt often reflect on the experi-ence as a whole, not just the kills or the flight, but the entire experience from start to finish.

The anticipation builds the moment the hunt is booked. Clients report a lack of sleep, dreams of ham-mering down on huge sounders of pigs, dropping them with one shot each. As clients arrive, they are all smiles and full of laughter; they are beyond jovial, the excitement nearly palpable. The sight of the helicopter or the distinct buzz of the helicopter in the distance as it is on approach brings about a state of elation.

The helicopter is a great tool, but not the only one. It takes a combination of methods to manage feral hogs in a given area. (Courtesy photo)

Most everyone has flown in an airplane or helicopter at one time, but few have sat on the edge of the door of a helicopter, strapped in with a harness while holding an AR15. The flight itself is an exhilarating experience, buzzing tree tops or hovering a few feet from the ground.

The tight turns, steep banks and rolls suck you down into the floor, making your stomach touch your toes. The adrenalin courses through your veins, you're focused and intent on the target, a state of hypervigilance compared only to a combat- like experience.

In the military, door gunners and Special Forces units undergo months, if not years, of training before they are allowed to shoot out of a helicopter. After about a 45 minute safety briefing, you are ready to go. Don the harness, check your weapon and climb aboard the helicopter.

Helicopter hunting is just that, hunting. Contrary to popular videos and television shows, you do not spend the entire flight shooting. After spinning up and taking off, you cruise around scanning the ground for movement. You have to find them before you can kill them. Sometimes it's a loan boar or a single coyote that gets things started, but then, you find them. A large sounder of hogs is spotted, the pilot calls them out, sets up the approach and notifies the shooters in back which side of the helicopter he's bringing them up on. The nose of the helicopter drops forward, speed picks up and the hogs fall in line. Start at the back and work your way forward. If done right, all hog are dispatched within a few minutes.

It's an action packed way to manage a problem, a problem that's plagued the state of Texas for years. Helicopter Hog Hunting is a depredation program. By law it is unlawful to sport hunt from a helicopter; however, as part of a depredation program it's a legal and very effective means at managing wildlife.

Landowners across the state who take advantage of the depredation program do it free of charge. Landowners, farmers and ranchers can enlist the help of a helicopter operator to manage feral hogs on their property without spending one dime and get the full benefit of its effectiveness.

In just a matter of a few hours a helicopter crew can dispatch as many as 60 hogs or as many as 600 in a day. But it takes consistency to be fully effective. You cannot fly one or two times a year and expect to affect the hog population. Consistency, as with any management program, is what makes it so success-ful.

The helicopter is a great tool, but not the only one. It takes a combination of methods to manage feral hogs in a given area. Trapping, hunting by traditional means and changes in farming practices help im-mensely. While we will never get rid of hogs, we can manage them to a level we can all live with.

The Garden Guy

By Norman Winter | Horticulturist, Author, Speaker

Mexican Bush Sage
A Favorite for Butterflies and Hummingbirds

The Mexican bush sage has been blooming for a few weeks now, and like clockwork, it's proving to be a favorite nectar source for Monarch butterflies heading south. It's always fas-cinated me that, with so many other nectar flowers available in the fall, there's something they especially like about this salvia.

Known botanically as Salvia leucantha, the Mexican bush sage is native to Mexico and Central America. It's one of those plants I can't imagine not having in my garden.

A short-day (or long-night) bloomer, it starts flowering in late summer and keeps going through sev-eral frosts. The fuzzy, velvety purple spikes with white or purple flowers are produced in abundance.

For cut-flower enthusiasts, this plant can easily yield a hundred stems for the vase. Even when not in bloom, its gray-green foliage adds interest to the garden.

As I mentioned, it's a favorite for butterflies - especially Monarchs - but it's also a regular feeding stop for hummingbirds. They're drawn to the white blooms emerging from the velvety purple calyces. The ideal growing location is full sun, though the plant can tolerate a bit of afternoon shade. The soil must be very well-drained, so consider planting in raised beds or amending heavy soils with compost or humus. In fact, well-drained soil may be the key to encouraging a surprising

The Mexican bush sage is the perfect complement to fall planted marigolds, sometimes called Marimums. (Photos courtesy of Norman Winter)

Left: This Ruby-throated hummingbird finds the Mexican bush sage to be just perfect.
The Golden Thyrallis is becoming popular in Texas and makes an ideal companion for the Mexican Bush sage.

spring return in regions farther north than expected.

When preparing your soil, incorporate 2 pounds of a slow-release 12-6-6 fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed space. Space the plants 24 to 36 inches apart, and plant them at the same depth they were growing in their containers. Avoid planting near streetlights or flood-lights, as this salvia blooms in response to the number of dark hours.

Provide supplemental water during prolonged dry periods. After the first hard frost in the fall, cut the plants back to ground level and add a layer of mulch for winter protection. Feed again in the spring when you see new growth emerging, and continue feeding every six to eight weeks through September. For even more blooms in the fall, lightly prune once or twice in late April and early June. You can also harvest stems and tie them with sprigs of rosemary to hang in the kitchen - an aromatic and beautiful touch.

Mexican bush sage is mostly sold generically, but there are some standout selections worth noting: Midnight (with dark purple flowers), Kathiann Brown (a dwarf with lavender blooms), and the similar Santa Barbara (also a compact lavender variety). The standard form of Mexican bush sage typically reaches about 4 feet tall, while the compact varieties stay under 3 feet.

For companion planting, consider pairing with classic fall-blooming yellow mums - they're an obvious but perfect match. In the herb garden, Mexican bush sage pairs well with rose-mary, garlic chives, and lavender. The fall-blooming forsythia sage (Salvia madrensis), with its massive yellow flower spikes, also makes an incredible companion. Other great partners include yellow marigolds and golden lantana.

Mexican bush sage is perennial in USDA zones 8 and sometimes in zone 7, especially with perfect drainage and a protective layer of mulch. Even in cooler climates, it's worth growing as an annual if you have a long enough season - just know it won't bloom until August. In places like St. Louis, it typically blooms from mid-August through frost. It's also one of the easiest plants to root from cuttings or propagate by division.

Spiky flowers always bring energy and visual interest to a garden, and Mexican bush sage is one of the best - providing nectar for pollinators, beauty in the landscape, and cut flowers by the dozen. At this time of year, it's practically without equal. I hope you'll give it a try.

Extreme Heat and Drought Impact Fall Garden Plans

By Trisha Gedon | OSU Sr. Communications Specialist

While daylight hours are still very warm this time of the year, nighttime temperatures are slightly cooling off, allowing plants to recover in the evening. (Courtesy photo)

With extreme heat and little rain still on the horizon for Oklahoma, gardeners may need to alter their fall garden plans.

"There's nothing better than fresh produce throughout most of the year, but the lack of rain-fall coupled with excessive heat may put a damper on successful fall gardening," said David Hillock, Oklahoma State University Extension consumer horticulturist. "Typically, some of the best quality garden vegetables in Oklahoma are produced and harvested during the fall season when the warm days are followed by cool, humid nights."

In ideal conditions, Hillock said plant soil metabolism is low; therefore, more of the food manufactured by vegetable plants becomes high-quality produce. Unfortunately, the current climate across much of the state involves high soil temperature, high light intensity and rapid drying of soil.

"This can be a problem for gardeners because achieving a full stand of plants in these extreme weather conditions may require special treatment," he said. "Gardeners may have to employ strategies such as shade row covers when seeding, along with supplemental water-ing to reduce soil temperature to aid in seed germination."

Vegetable seeds are also vulnerable to the hot soil surface exposed to the summer sun.

"In order for viable seeds to germinate or sprout, they must have the proper temperature, adequate moisture and sufficient oxygen," Hillock said.

Shade row covers can be made from burlap and a few stakes, said Laura Payne, horticul-ture specialist in the OSU Extension Payne County office.

"The burlap still allows light

through but diffuses the heat on the tender plants," Payne said. "Gardeners can also use screen wire strips or boards to cover the rows, which will moder-ate both soil temperature and soil moisture. Remove the covers after the seedlings emerge."

Another option to help stave off the heat is creating deeper furrows in which to plant. This allows the seed to germinate in cooler soil. Even then, gardeners will need to supplement with extra irrigation to ensure the soil remains moist at seed depth.

Season extension methods, such as high tunnels or hoop houses, will help, especially if planting is delayed a few weeks to avoid excessive heat.

While daylight hours are still very warm this time of the year, nighttime temperatures are slightly cooling off, allowing plants to recover in the evening. Payne said the cooler evening temperatures will help with the establishment of a fall garden, but once seeds are sown, irrigate adequately. A garden's soil dries out quickly during the day.

Gardeners who use transplants should condition them by reducing the amount of water supplied and exposure to full sunlight. Hillock said this process can take three to five days.

"When you're ready to plant the transplants, do so in the late afternoon or early evening when it's cooler to help reduce transplant shock," he said. "Water the plants as they are set. A water-soluble fertilizer can be used if necessary."

Typical fall vegetables to plant include broccoli, leeks, onions, peas, radish, kale, cabbage, collards, kohlrabi and cauliflower.

Casey Hentges, host of Oklahoma Gardening, has more tips for planting a fall garden. Additional gardening information is available from OSU Extension.

OSU Agriculture Partners with Nonprofit to Fight Food Insecurity

By Alisa Gore | OSU Agriculture Office of Communications & Marketing

An OSU horticulture graduate student is conducting surveys centered around the barriers grocery stores face while assessing programs and policies that hinder food security. (Photo by Mitchell Alcala, OSU Agriculture)

Connections between grocery stores, local producers and consumers could help combat food insecurity in the state, according to Oklahoma State University researchers and Hunger Free Oklahoma, a nonprofit organization that works to ensure Oklahomans have access to affordable, nutritious foods.

Sophia Darrow, a horticulture graduate student in the OSU Ferguson College of Agriculture, is conducting surveys centered around the barriers grocery stores face and assessing programs and policies that hinder food security.

"This project is a unique opportunity for Sophia because she gets to work with nonprofits and industry partners. She is assessing real-world problems with real-world solutions that have a direct impact on our state," said Justin Quetone Moss, department head for the OSU Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture.

Darrow said she recognized a link between the capabilities of local producers and the needs of grocers. By surveying select grocery stores in Oklahoma about the challenges they face in sourcing produce, she hopes to increase market access for local growers.

"Through the horticulture lens, I see the disparities in Oklahoma's fruit and vegetable production and health," Darrow said. "Consumer education, represented in both nutrition and business, is crucial to sustaining local producers, and right now, fruit and vegetable producers experience hardships and difficulties in production because consumers are not educated on a healthy diet."

Darrow said her goal is to connect the fields of horticulture, nutrition and business together to create awareness for people in the food industry and adjacent fields and policymakers, leading to better support, understanding and resources within the food system.

"We will remedy the disparity in local food systems by identifying the importance of local food systems, creating the necessary resources for producers and consumers and by identifying the importance of the consumption and promotion of specialty crops."

Through her study on grocers, Darrow hopes to help shed light on market accessibility for local producers and increase consumer awareness regarding local economies and quality diets.

"By doing this survey and having conversations, we will better understand the position grocers are in, learn where they are experiencing success, the areas they need support and how to use resources to help them," she said.

A second survey being conducted by Hunger Free Oklahoma is related to food as a source of health and well-being. The survey will identify the state's current, past and future food-related efforts as a means of healing and wellness.

Larsen said the hope is that the surveys will help us understand where to intervene to increase access to locally grown foods in grocery stores and the number of programs available to patients living with diet-related chronic conditions.

"The Oklahoma Food is Medicine Coalition is thankful for the support Sophia is providing. Her research is helping us identify barriers and opportunities for growth for some truly impactful programs," said Lauran Larson, senior manager of food and health at Hunger Free Oklahoma.

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Porcupines in Oklahoma?

Photograph by Janice Russell

Porcupines are one of the largest rodents. They used to inhabit only the north western states, but is becoming more common to see them in Central Oklahoma. Usually a secretive creature, they can be seen foraging during the early morning or late evening. They prefer rock dens but will settle for hollow trees. Porcupines do not shoot their quills as people believe. They will charge a predator and the quills become embedded into whatever comes within close contact with them.

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