

You Can Help Us Keep Your Rates Lower



**MESSAGE
FROM
MANAGER
ALAN
LESLEY**

Most of you probably don't give much thought to electricity. You flick a switch, and it's there. It helps light your house, cook your meals, or keep you comfortable. That's how we at Comanche Electric Cooperative want it to be. We deliver a product that is more than a modern convenience—it is a necessary part of life. And you have enough on your mind without worrying about electricity.

Granted, you might worry some about your electricity bills as we are all affected by rising costs everywhere. Every month in these pages of Texas Co-op Power and 24/7 on our website at www.ceca.coop, we share with you ways to use electricity more efficiently and help you save money. We are interested in helping you manage your energy costs. This is one area where your involvement as a member-owner of this cooperative can have an effect on our bottom line and on the rates you pay.

It might seem counterintuitive that an electric company would encourage its customers to use less power. But we're not in this for the money. Your co-op is a nonprofit business. After paying all the operational obligations, we invest our margins in infrastructure or return it to you in the form of capital credits. We don't have outside investors inter-

ested solely in profits.

You are our only stockholders. When the co-op thrives, you are the beneficiaries. But this business model also places more responsibility on you than what customers of for-profit companies have.

Your involvement in the cooperative is crucial, whether through feedback that helps us make our service better or your vote at our annual meetings to elect the board members who make decisions about the co-op's future.

Your cooperation also can help us keep expenses down and your power costs lower in other ways. One way you can help is to allow crews to access your property to trim trees and perform other necessary maintenance. Clearing limbs that encroach on power lines helps keep reliability high and reduces repair expenses. Fallen limbs and trees are a major cause of power failures and line damage, especially during a storm.

You can also help by keeping an eye out for trouble. Theft of copper from our lines and theft of the electricity they deliver is a problem for cooperatives across the state.

These thieves are stealing from you because lost sales and repair costs add to our expense, which we must pass along. If you see anything suspicious, please report it to our office at 1-800-915-2533 or to local law enforcement.

My sole aspiration as general manager, and that of the board of directors that hired me, is to bring to you reliable power at the lowest possible price.

You, our members, can help us reach that goal. We thank you for your cooperation.

THE VALUE OF ELECTRICITY

While it may seem that everything costs more these days, electricity is still a great bargain. Just look what a dollar's worth can get you:

36 
(intense) hours of gaming

48 
hours of watching TV

72 
freshly ironed shirts

72 
hours of laptop Internet access

100 
hot pots of coffee

375 
pieces of toast (nicely browned)

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy;
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

FIND GREAT ENERGY SAVING TIPS AND INFORMATION AT TOGETHERWESAVE.COM

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Landscaping Reaps Big Energy Savings

BY MEGAN MCKOY-NOE

You've upgraded your appliances, insulation and lighting to help lower your monthly electric bill. What else can you do? Plenty, if you have a yard with landscaping options. The right combination of plants and trees can unearth hidden energy savings.

The U.S. Department of Energy claims landscaping with energy efficiency in mind, on average, could save enough energy to recoup your investment in less than eight years. There are several ways to think about planting for energy savings: **climate**, **shading** and **windbreaks**.

Climate Clarity

Climate determines the direction your landscaping planning should take. The United States is divided into four types of regions: temperate, hot-arid, hot-humid and cool.

Central and South Texas are in hot-humid regions and West Texas is in a hot-arid region. All will benefit from shade over roofs, walls and windows. Homeowners without air conditioning should encourage summer breezes to swing by. Those with conditioned air should try to block or deflect winds.

North Texas and the Panhandle area are classified as temperate, where residents should maximize the warmth of winter sun. Likewise, summer shade should be prized. Winter winds should be deflected from buildings, while summer breezes need to be brought toward a home.

Simple Shading

You might be protected from the hot summer sun in your home, but your electric bill isn't. Solar heat absorbed through windows and your roof causes your air conditioner to work harder.

Shading a home with trees could drop the surrounding air temperature by as much as 9 degrees. It gets better closer to the ground—since cool air sinks, the air under trees may be up to 25 degree cooler than the air over the driveway.

Different trees serve unique purposes. To block summer solar heat but let the winter sun through, plant deciduous trees. Evergreen trees and shrubs are ideal to provide continuous shade and block heavy winds.

Don't forget about shrubs and groundcover plants. These short but sturdy shade-givers reduce heat radiation, cooling air before it reaches your home's walls and windows. If you

have an air conditioner, shading the unit can increase its efficiency by as much as 10 percent.

Shading takes time. For example, a 6-foot to 8-foot deciduous tree planted near a home will begin shading windows in a year. Depending on the species and the home, the tree will shade the roof in five to 10 years.

Windbreaks

Shrubs and trees create windbreaks—essentially walls to keep the wind chill away from a home. Why is that important? Wind speed lowers outside air temperatures. A windbreak reduces wind speed nearby, saving your home from higher heating costs.

It's best to block wind with a combination of trees and shrubs with low crowns—foliage that grows close to the ground. Evergreens are ideal, and when combined with a wall or fence these windbreaks can deflect or even lift wind over a home.

For the best protection, plan on leaving between two and five times the mature height of the trees or shrubs between the windbreak and the protected home.

Ready, Set, GROW!

Remember, your landscaping plan depends on your climate and how your home is situated. Find out more about your climate, microclimates, shading dos and don'ts, and windbreaks at www.energysavers.gov.



Megan McKoy-Noe writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

These Artisans' Skills, Products Are Sharp

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

It has been around since the beginning of time, and it is still as valuable in its current state as it was during the Stone Age. Its original use was mainly for hunting and survival, but it was also used to prepare food and myriad other functions. While it is no longer a vital tool for survival, it is still used daily in most households and is a common collector's item.

It is the knife. Originally made from materials such as bone, wood, glass and flint, the knife blade has evolved into an art form made mostly of steel. Most of our knives these days are mass-produced in factories. However, there are still a handful of artisans who sculpt the steel by hand and piece the knives together with painstaking detail. Once you have seen one of these beautiful pieces of art, you will most likely not be happy with any of those mass-produced blades again.

I visited with two local knife makers: Danny Marlin of Marlin Knives and Randel Mackey of Mackey Custom Knives. Both craftsmen use much the same technique in their art. They start with 1/8-inch tool steel or ATS 34 stainless cutlery steel and cut and grind it to form its basic shape. From there, they hand-carve delicate designs on the spine of the knife. It is then run through a series of grinding and buffing steps that eventually gives the steel a sharp edge and shiny finish. Each craftsman then stamps his brand in the steel before placing it in a heat-

treating oven to give the blade its strength. Finishing touches, including handles, decorative designs and custom-made scabbards, complete the work. It was fascinating to watch as they ground and shaped steel into a beautiful tool worthy of a king. These are their stories, and I hope you find as much enjoyment in reading them as I did in visiting with them.

Danny Marlin

Local native Danny Marlin began his knife-making career in 1990 by accident. Danny was a member of the Outdoor Life Book Club and was having trouble one month finding a book that interested him. As a last resort, he chose a book on knife making. When it came in the mail, he tossed it to the side where it lay for several months before he picked it up. His first attempt at making a knife was just as an experiment, but he was satisfied enough with it to attempt a second knife. Someone saw the second knife, liked it and offered to buy it, and Danny's newfound hobby quickly turned into a second career.

Danny says his knives not only have to look good, but also must feel good and rest comfortably in the hand and be capable of doing the work for which they are meant. If the knife does not pass any of these tests, it is not shipped to a new owner. Danny will make whatever knife a client wants, but his favorite and



Danny Marlin

- 1:** Push dagger with aoudad handle. **2:** Drop point hunting knife with a Corian handle. **3:** Copy of a 19th century dagger made in Sheffield, England, with an aoudad handle. **4:** Boot knife with a mesquite handle.



Randel Mackey

1: M2 style skinner, ATSS34 stainless steel blade, elk stag handle, nickel silver bolsters and nickel silver pins. **2:** #4 style skinner, ATSS34 stainless steel blade with vine file work down the spine of the knife, a stabilized maple handle, nickel silver guard and mosaic pins. **3:** #3 style. The CPM154 has a stainless steel blade, hand-engraved SS bolsters, oak handle and SS pins. **4:** #4 style skinner, ATSS34 stainless steel blade, vine file work on the spine of knife, nickel silver guard, black ash/antique ivory micarta handle with mosaic pins.

most common design is a Semi Skinner. This is a beautiful knife with somewhat of a drop point, and its curved blade is good for working on game animals. When I visited Danny's shop, he was working on a handle made out of a sika deer horn. It had been stained a deep brown, and he was still in the process of shaping and smoothing it to perfection. Even in its unfinished state, it was beautiful to behold. The file work on the spine of the knife was the "Broken Wave," which is the most common.

Danny also specializes in making and repairing all sorts of knives and tools used for leather work. He says that probably the most unique tool he ever made was a knife for a veterinarian to use on show horse tails. The veterinarian, who did surgery on the horses to make the tails stand out, contracted Danny to make a special knife for the surgery.

In addition to the knives, Danny can be found making the leather scabbards for his knives, lamps and towel holders out of deer horns and carving sets out of deer horns and mesquite wood.

Danny's leather-working tools can be purchased directly from him or from Weaver Leathers.

But you won't find any of Danny's knives in stores. They can only be purchased by special order. Or, if you are lucky, you might have an opportunity to bid on one at a local fundraiser. Danny is a home-grown boy with a big heart who believes in giving back to the community. He donates a knife each year to the Comanche First United Methodist Church for its Harvest Festival, to area volunteer fire departments for annual fundraisers, and to the ARK in Brownwood, as well as to other fundraisers for organizations and individuals who are in need.

Danny can be reached at Marlin Knives, 1550 CR 207, Blanket, TX 76432, or at (254) 842-4915.

Randel Mackey

Randel Mackey began making knives after he found that he had too much free time on his hands. Randel worked for the Brownwood Police Department as a 911 officer until he retired in 2004. He made his first knife in 1992 because he couldn't

find a knife quite like he wanted. What started as a hobby in 1992 became his career after he retired in 2004.

Randel attends several knife and gun shows and says he really enjoys the people he meets. He has found that ideas for knives can be as varied and individual as the clients for whom he builds them. Because of the wide variety of requests he receives, he has accumulated a plethora of custom knives as well as his stock knives. His favorite design, and his biggest seller, is the one he calls No. 3. It is 6 1/2 inches long with file work down the spine and an engraved bolster. He then adds any stock or custom handle the customer prefers.

Randel prefers to use natural materials such as horn, ivory and exotic woods on the handles. He has several patterns he uses for the intricate detail on the spines. They are Vine, Arrowhead, Rope, Double S and M's. To make a knife from start to finish takes about three days.

Randel also does his own leather work and leather tooling. He can do custom pieces such as scabbards for knives and guns, gun holsters and chaps. If you are looking for leather items, this just might be the place to come.

Randel had a wide assortment of knives and leather goods in his showcase when I visited. Each was unique and beautiful and displayed the range of his capabilities. He says his most unique sale was when a man came from Italy to set up a machine at Kohler. Randel was attending a knife show in Brownwood, and the man happened by and purchased a knife to take back to Italy with him. Many of Randel's knives are given as gifts, so he is not sure where they might wind up, but he does know that his knives have gone as far away as Italy, Alaska and California.

Randel can usually be found at the Outdoor Expo in Midland, Market Hall in Dallas and at Gun and Knife Shows in Brownwood, Fort Worth and Fredericksburg. His knives can be found at Beckwith's Blades in Houston and at The Salt Branch Outpost in Fredericksburg. Or, you can reach Randel at Mackey Custom Knives, 6100 FM 1467 North, Blanket, TX 76432, e-mail him at mackeyknives@yahoo.com, or call him at (325) 748-3321 or (325) 647-5638.