

Time Marches On

But our mission never changes



**MESSAGE
FROM
MANAGER
ALAN
LESLEY**

I don't know about you, but I am excited about the end of this year and the approach of the clean slate that 2011 offers.

While 2010 was not as financially difficult for as many people as was 2009, it still presented abundant challenges both for ordinary folks and for businesses like Comanche Electric Cooperative.

Your cooperative, thanks to the hard work and dedication of its employees and the forward-thinking leadership of the board of directors, met the challenge of this business climate. And Comanche Electric is poised for whatever challenges might come its way in 2011.

You see, the cooperative exists solely to fulfill one mission: to provide you the best possible electric service at the lowest possible cost. That's what all of us who work here—from the front desk to the warehouse, from engineering to accounting and everywhere in between—dedicate ourselves to, year in and year out.

As the new year nears, I'd like to take this time to thank all of the employees at Comanche Electric. I've never seen a more dedicated group of people. All of them come to work each day with service to the co-op's members on their minds and the safety of themselves and their fellow workers foremost.

And I'd like to thank the members of the co-op's board of directors who have taken on the responsibility of running a multimillion-dollar utility. It takes a real commitment to keep up with the latest standards of this complex and fast-changing industry while making decisions that affect thousands of their fellow members.

I'd especially like to thank you, our member/owners, who make all of our jobs possible. Thank you for your support and understanding when things don't go exactly as planned; thank you for paying your bills on time, which keeps the

cooperative financially strong; thank you for sharing your suggestions, compliments and complaints—we do listen to them and they all help us do a better job for you; and thank you for your participation in our annual meetings.

Without you, there would be no cooperative.

As we say goodbye to 2010 and look ahead to 2011, let us hope it will be a banner year for all of us.

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Get Your Chimney Ready for Cold Weather—and Santa

You empty the ashes and sweep your fireplace after every use to keep it safe and looking nice, right? But is it ready for Santa?

Your fireplace isn't really clean until you remove what you can't see: the creosote, soot, ashes, dust, leaves and even birds that are stuck in the flue and chimney.

Unless you want Santa to scrape off the flaky mess with his big belly on his way down the chimney on Christmas Eve, you'd better get the job done before he arrives.

If you do, you'll have a clean, safe chimney and fireplace to sit around with company during the holidays.

Unless you're already finished with your shopping, baking, wrapping, mailing and card writing, you might want to hire a professional chimney sweep to do this time-consuming and messy job. That will cost you \$100 or so.

Why bother? When smoke from your fireplace goes up the chimney, some of it condenses into soot and tar in the flue, which is the chimney's inner surface. That creosote builds up over time, and it's highly flammable.

Keeping your chimney clean will help Santa slide down it worry-free. And it will help your family enjoy celebrating the holidays around a dancing fire—also worry-free.



What can **you** do to save energy?

Find great tips and information at

TogetherWeSave.com

AT COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Conservation Matters

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Room Humidifiers May Lower Winter Energy Bills

BY JAMES DULLEY

Most people suffer during winter from overly dry air in their homes. Since the indoor humidity level drops or increases gradually as seasons change, the variation of indoor humidity levels may not be noticed. These changes throughout the year are a function of the region of the country, so always check with local experts for specific advice.

Properly humidified indoor air is not only comfortable and healthy for your family, but it also can reduce your winter heating bills. Room humidifiers typically use less energy than a 100-watt lightbulb. Many models have built-in humidistats that automatically switch the unit on and off, so they consume even less electricity than listed on the unit's nameplate.

There is a cooling effect when the water from the humidifier evaporates, so running the humidifier will actually cool a room's air slightly. This is the same evaporation process (perspiration) of moisture from your skin that makes you feel cool as water changes state from liquid to vapor (gas). However, the heat generated from the humidifier's electricity usage offsets the slight cooling effect.

Just like sweating outdoors on a low-humidity day makes you feel cool, the same process occurs indoors in dry air. The amount of moisture evaporation from your skin is greater when the indoor air is excessively dry, so you may actually feel chilly when the indoor air temperature is high enough

for comfort. The evaporation of your skin's moisture can also dry your skin, make you itch and irritate sinuses.

Running a humidifier helps save energy by reducing the chilling effect of the evaporation of skin moisture. By properly humidifying the air, you can feel comfortable at a lower room temperature. This allows you to set the furnace thermostat lower, and you should end up saving much more energy than the humidifier uses. Depending upon your specific climate, you should be able to save 1 to 2 percent on your heating bills for each degree you lower your furnace or heat-pump thermostat setting.

The proper type of room humidifier depends on your family's needs and the size and room layout of your house. One or two room humidifiers are generally enough for a reasonably airtight, energy-efficient home. Older, leaky houses may need more or larger-capacity models. Humidity in the indoor air tends to naturally migrate throughout the house. Cooking, bathing and washing clothes and dishes also adds a significant amount of moisture, often adding too much in specific rooms, such as bathrooms.

For daytime use, an evaporative type of humidifier is effective and the least expensive to buy. These humidifiers use a wick material that has one end submerged in a water reservoir. It naturally draws up water from the reservoir. There is a fan inside the humidifier that draws room air

through the wick where it evaporates into the air stream.

Evaporative humidifiers are easy to keep clean, which is important to minimize mold and microbe growth in the wick. Some wicks are treated with an antimicrobial substance. Evaporative models usually have a three-speed fan. The high speed can be noisy, so this may not be the best option for a bedroom. The low-speed setting on some models is quiet enough not to interrupt sleep.

If your children tend to get colds, a warm mist humidifier would be a good bedroom choice. These models boil water to create water vapor. The steam is mixed with room air before it comes out so it is not too hot. Germ-free models include an ultraviolet light purifier chamber to further sanitize the air flowing through it. These include a humidistat and use about 260 watts of electricity.

Another design uses ultrasonic waves to create water vapor mist. These are the most energy efficient, using about 50 watts of electricity. A very quiet fan blows the mist into the room. I use a Vicks ultrasonic humidifier in my own bedroom at night.

The following companies offer free-standing humidifiers: **Essick Air**, 1-800-547-3888, www.essickair.com; **Holmes**, 1-800-546-5637, www.holmesproducts.com; **Hunter Fan**, 1-800-448-6837, www.hunterfan.com; **Kaz**, 1-800-477-0457, www.kaz.com; and **Lasko Products**, 1-800-233-0268, www.laskoproducts.com.



On Flatwood Farm, you can find fresh honey, home-cooked sorghum syrup and freshly ground cornmeal and flour. All are made of fresh ingredients grown on the family farm.

Sorghum Syrup the Old-fashioned Way

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

A aahhh, food! Don't we love it? And all the conveniences: restaurants when you don't want to cook, fast food when you are in a hurry, quick foods to cook at home, and grocery stores for everything imaginable for your pantry! No longer do we have to milk the cow, weed and harvest the garden or collect the eggs. Do you need bread? It's delivered fresh daily. Want to cook a hamburger? The meat is already ground and formed into patties, just waiting for us to pick it up. Pancakes for breakfast? Syrup is on the grocery-store aisle with the jelly and peanut butter.

Life wasn't always this easy. Our ancestors worked hard for their groceries. There wasn't always a corner grocery store within easy distance, and when it was, people many times had no money to spend there. So they worked. They made everything from their soap and down pillows to their



Mike Siebert explains the tools and processes to Larry, one of the 'newbies'.

butter and canned fruits and vegetables. It was a hard life and I, for one, am glad we don't have to work as hard as they did. But I am also saddened at what we have lost over the years. The ability to be self-sustaining is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Fortunately, there are still those out there who enjoy the history behind the old ways and work to preserve at least a small part of the heritage.

Mike Siebert is one of those rare people. From his family farm in Flatwood, just south of Eastland, Mike has resurrected several of the old processes of food production. On a crisp Saturday morning in October, my brother, my two sisters and I ventured to the farm to watch Mike and his friends make sorghum syrup the old-fashioned way. It was a full day's project, and very labor-intensive, but the rewards at the end of the day made it all worthwhile.



The stripped cane is fed into the mill, where the juice is extracted and strained into a 5-gallon bucket. When the bucket is full, it is strained and made ready for the cooker.

Mike has always been fascinated by his ancestors and their way of life, which is most likely the reason he pursued his particular hobbies. When I questioned Mike about what got him started he said, "I really don't have a good answer for what got me started. There was just no one around here doing it, but I had an interest in it from stories I would see every now and then in a magazine. I would clip the story out and save it. Through the years I ended up with several of them, mostly folks in East Texas and in the southern states. I think I am just drawn to some of the old traditions that people on farms did back in the early 1900s. I had an interest in mules and farm wagons and all that went along with the corn patch and the grinding of cornmeal. It was just neat to me to grow something here on the place, just like my grandfather did, and make something useful out of it. For him, it was something to use and eat.

"Anyway, back in the mid-'70s or so, a series of books started coming out called the Foxfire series about many of the old traditions and things done on the farm. In one issue, there was a story of sorghum syrup making that told me more than the other stories. But I still had no idea where to get the proper seed and equipment. Then, in about 1983 or so, an old friend told me about a guy in Carbon who had a syrup mill and was interested in selling it, as he was getting too old to do it anymore. I went right down and bought it. That is the year that I



The strained juice is poured into a 60-gallon stainless steel vat and cooked over a three-burner propane cooker for approximately six hours. It is never stirred but must be constantly strained to remove the foam that cooks off the top.



It takes everyone working (and resting) together to make the one-day syrup making a true success.

tried and ended up with the ‘green glue.’ That was all of the syrup making for a while.”

Three years ago, Mike decided to try his hand at planting some cane seed. He purchased his first seed start from Mississippi State in 2007 and planted about a half acre of it. That year brought a record rainfall in Flatwood, and Mike had a bumper crop of cane. “I knew I had to do something, so I got the old mill running, and that was the start of my syrup making,” he says.

Mike does everything the old-fashioned way—by hand. He picks the cane and strips it by hand, a grueling but rewarding task. By the time his friends and neighbors show up on syrup-making day, Mike has the cane stripped and laid out for squeezing, has all his utensils washed and laid out ready to be utilized, and his wife, Sharon, has the tables ready for lunch. While I’ve never actually observed an old-fashioned barn raising, my day on the Siebert farm made

me feel like I was witnessing something very similar. Neighbors, as well as friends and family from far away, showed up at the break of dawn to squeeze, strain and cook and bottle the amber liquid. They brought food to feed the crew and stayed as long as it took to finish the job and clean the grounds.

Syrup making is not Mike’s only hobby. He also extracts honey from his beehives and makes cornmeal from corn grown right there on the farm. “Frankly,” says Mike, “it’s pretty amazing to look at a jar of syrup or a bag of cornmeal and think that it was made right here on the farm. It’s pure independence! Maybe that’s what really appeals to me—the self-sufficiency thing.”

You can find a video of last year’s syrup making on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVKQ-SOL5IQ. I look forward to venturing back out to the farm in the coming months to witness more of Mike’s amazing hobbies!



For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

—LUKE 2:11-14

MERRY CHRISTMAS

from Comanche Electric Cooperative

Our offices will be closed December 23, 24 and 31 for the holidays.