Tennessee CONNECTIONS

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Turn Your Garden Into a Pollinator Paradise

Attendees learn to make brooms at a Cumberland Folk School workshop. PHOTO COURTESY OF CUMBERLAND FOLK SCHOOL

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Tennessee CONNECTIONS

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Plant Smart, Save Energy

Strategic landscaping for lower utility bills

Spring is the perfect time to plan landscaping projects that will pay dividends on your energy bills for years to come. Strategic tree and plant placement can significantly reduce your home's heating and cooling costs while beautifying your property.

Plant shade trees for summer savings. Deciduous trees planted on the south and west sides of your home provide natural air conditioning during Tennessee's hot summers. These trees block intense afternoon sun from heating your home, reducing your air conditioning workload by up to 25%. The bonus? They lose their leaves in winter, allowing warming sunlight to reach your home when you need it most.

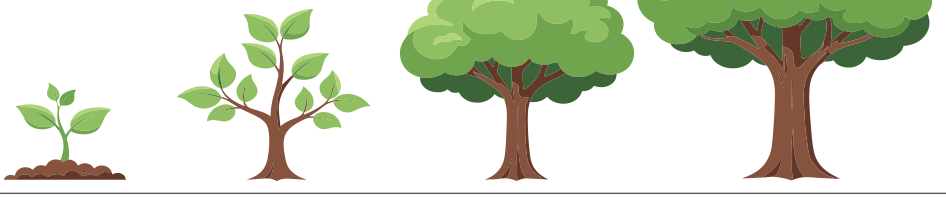
For maximum benefit, plant trees 15 to 25 feet from your home so mature canopies will shade walls, windows and your roof. Smaller trees and shrubs planted near windows and air conditioning units provide more cooling benefits.

Plant windbreaks for winter comfort. Evergreen trees and shrubs planted on the north and northwest sides of your property create effective windbreaks, reducing winter heating costs by blocking cold winds.

Call before you dig. Before starting any landscaping project, protect yourself and your community by calling 811 or visiting tn811.com at least three business days before digging. This free service marks underground utility lines, preventing dangerous accidents and costly damage to electric, gas, water and communication lines.

Plan for growth. Remember to research mature tree sizes and keep plantings away from overhead power lines. Trees growing into power lines create safety hazards and can cause outages.

With thoughtful planning and proper safety precautions, your spring landscaping investment will provide comfort and savings for decades to come. ■





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AI-GENERATED ILLUSTRATION
BY FREEPIK/BRANDON POMRENKE

Unplug and Play

Use family fun to teach kids the power of energy conservation

By Drew Woolley

Everyone likes finding ways to save on their energy bill. But watching the thermostat like a hawk, turning off lights behind everyone in the house and sweating an investment in energy-efficient appliances isn't much fun, especially when you're trying to get the kids to play along.

Fortunately, your electric utility has been working to make energy savings more approachable for many years.

After decades of educating kids of all ages, utilities have learned a few helpful tricks to resonate with younger audiences. Hands-on activities, such as asking kids to look through their backpacks for electronic devices and calculating how much energy they use, can drive home just how much electricity they use in their daily lives. Meanwhile, avoiding technical terms like "energy efficiency" can help saving energy feel less daunting and more fun.

Even so, some of the most effective ways to drive home the importance of energy conservation are the routine reminders consumers may have heard from their parents growing up. Luckily, there are still plenty of ways to teach your kids the importance of energy conservation while having fun as a family.

Here are some fun ways to encourage energy efficiency and conservation at home:

Cook a family-powered dinner. Have the whole family help cook dinner with one rule: No electricity is allowed. Avoid using major kitchen appliances like electric ovens, blenders, mixers or microwaves to teach kids about common ways your family uses electricity during peak demand times. Top it all off with some no-bake treats.

Take turns on power patrol. Every child enjoys being in charge from time to time. Take turns letting everyone in your family be responsible for enforcing good energy habits around the house for a week. You can even set up a point system for every time they notice a light left on in an empty room, unplug unused electronics chargers or adjust the thermostat to a more efficient setting. Offer prizes and rewards to encourage them to be mindful of energy use every day.

Build an energy-efficient dream home. Encourage everyone to design their dream home with energy-saving features in mind. This is a great way to introduce ideas like solar panels, efficient appliances and sustainable building materials. Break out the crayons and art supplies to bring their homes to life, or use household crafts to build models.



Play energy-saving bingo. Make bingo cards with squares for energy-saving actions like using natural light instead of lamps or ceiling lights, unplugging devices, turning off lights and cooling off the temperature by opening a window. Kids can cross out each square as they complete each task, and the first one to bingo gets a prize.

Have power-free fun. Designate one night a week as power-free time when everyone in the family turns off phones, computers and TVs together. Play a board game, spend time reading your favorite books or enjoy some outdoor activities technology-free. Save on your electric bill, teach the importance of reducing energy use during peak periods and get some valuable family time all at once.

Make an energy-saving scavenger hunt. Make up a list of energy-saving practices, such as updating light fixtures with LED bulbs, turning off lights in empty rooms and unplugging unused devices. Challenge your kids to search the house and check off an example of each scavenger hunt item. You can celebrate with small prizes or treats for each energy-efficient discovery they make along the way.

Create energy-efficient art. Kids enjoy seeing their artwork displayed, so put those creative skills to work on energy-efficient reminders around the house. Spend arts and crafts time teaching your kids about some of the steps they can take to save energy around the house. Make fun signs to serve as daily reminders to close the fridge quickly, turn off lights and only change the thermostat as a last resort.

Keep "phantom power" waste bottled up. Phantom energy—the electricity devices use even when they are turned off—can be a tricky concept for kids to understand. Illustrate it in a fun way by adding marbles to a glass bottle or jar every time someone spots an unused device still plugged in. Set a goal and reward yourselves when everyone keeps phantom energy use down.

No matter what you do to keep energy savings fun around the house, the most important part of instilling good habits is reliably reminding your family of the little steps they can take to be more efficient. Consistency is key. ■



ADOBE STOCK ILLUSTRATION BY CIRODELIA

Underground Utility Safety

Every excavation project starts with 811

Every year, thousands of utility lines are damaged by excavation accidents that could have been prevented. Whether you're a homeowner planting trees, a contractor installing a new fence or a municipality upgrading infrastructure, one critical step protects everyone: calling 811 before breaking ground.

Underground utilities, such as electric cables and gas and water lines, keep our communities running. But what you can't see can hurt you. That's why Tennessee law requires anyone planning to dig to contact the state's one-call system. It's not just smart. It's your legal obligation.

Understanding the 811 Process

The 811 service exists to prevent excavation damage and keep workers and residents safe. Here's how it works: Once you submit a locate request—either by phone or online—utility companies send representatives to your property. These professionals use specialized equipment and detailed maps to identify buried infrastructure.

Each utility type gets marked with a standardized color code. Electric lines appear in red, gas in yellow, telecommunications in orange, water in blue and sewer in green. These color-coded markers, whether flags, paint or stakes, create a visual guide showing where crews should exercise extra caution.

Planning is essential. Since utility companies need at least three business days to complete locates, factor this waiting period into your project timeline. Rushing to dig before locates are finished puts lives, infrastructure and project timelines at risk.

Why Caution Still Matters

Having utility lines marked doesn't eliminate all risks. Markers indicate approximate locations based on the best available information, but they're not perfect. Underground conditions change over time, and what lies beneath the surface can surprise even experienced professionals.

Multiple factors affect line placement over time. Soil erosion can expose lines once buried at safe depths. Ground settling and temperature fluctuations cause gradual shifts in position. Previous excavation work may have altered the landscape in ways old maps don't reflect. These variables mean you could encounter utilities several feet from where markers are placed.

This uncertainty is why markings come with tolerance zones. When you see flags or paint, treat the surrounding area—typically within 18 to 24 inches on all sides—as a high-caution zone. Switch to hand tools when working in this space. A shovel takes longer than a backhoe, but it gives you control and feedback that prevents catastrophic strikes.



ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY KARRASTOCK

A Hidden Risk: Private Service Lines

One critical limitation of the 811 system: It typically only covers lines up to the meter or service connection point. Everything beyond that—the wiring from your meter to your house, the gas line to your garage, the electrical service to your outbuilding—falls outside the one-call system's scope.

Property owners bear responsibility for knowing where these private lines run. If you're unsure about service lines on your property, consult installation records, previous survey work or hire a private locating service. Don't assume the 811 locate covered everything beneath your yard.

Best Practices

Safe digging requires more than following locate markers. It demands a methodical approach that accounts for uncertainty. When operating near marked utilities, reduce your equipment's power and speed. Consider having a spotter watch for signs of buried infrastructure as you work.

Hand excavation techniques, though time-consuming, provide the best protection in sensitive areas. A shovel gives you tactile feedback mechanical equipment can't match. You'll feel resistance when your tool encounters something solid, giving you a chance to investigate before causing damage.

Even when taking all precautions, accidents can happen. If equipment or tools strike a utility line, stop work immediately. Don't attempt to assess damage yourself or fill in the excavation. Contact the affected utility company right away, even if the line appears undamaged. What looks like a minor nick could weaken the line's integrity or create a delayed failure point.

> "Hand excavation techniques, though time-consuming, provide the best protection in sensitive areas. A shovel gives you tactile feedback that mechanical equipment can't match."

A Community-Wide Responsibility

Utility safety extends beyond individual property owners. Contractors, landscapers and municipal crews share the obligation to protect underground infrastructure. When a utility line is severed, the consequences can ripple through the community: power outages affecting businesses and homes, gas leaks creating evacuation zones and disrupted telecommunications hampering emergency services.

Municipal utilities invest significant resources in maintaining accurate records and responding to locate requests. But technology and diligence can only reduce risk, not eliminate it. The final layer of protection comes from excavators who treat every dig site with appropriate caution and respect for what lies beneath.

Safe excavation starts with a phone call and ends with careful execution. By making 811 your first step and caution your constant companion, you protect yourself, your neighbors and the vital infrastructure that powers modern life. The few extra minutes spent requesting locates and the additional effort of hand-digging near utilities are small investments compared to the cost of a damaged line or, worse, a preventable injury. ■



Heart and Hand

Folk art combines form and function

By Trish Milburn

Danielle McDaniel is living proof that a single moment of recognition for a job well done can create a path of joy and meaning that lasts a lifetime.

When she was in ninth grade, Danielle won first place in a 4-H art show for a clay baby shoe she made. The memory of being awarded for her artistic talent led her to take a clay class as a young adult.

"I remember my first pottery class with Metro Parks and the experience of taking a failed pot, reworking the clay and having another chance to make a better pot," Danielle says. "This was like magic to me. Having spent the last 43 years making and teaching clay, I can say it still feels like magic."

Known as "The Clay Lady," a name given to her by the children she began teaching in 1982, Danielle now spends most of her time teaching adults on The Clay Lady campus in Nashville. The campus is an art community of 75 on-site artists with private studios, around 700 pottery and sculpture students, and a variety of workshops and community events held each year.

Though Danielle loves teaching, her favorite part is making pottery.

"Hands in the clay, wheel spinning, releasing the energy of the clay to make a pot that will outlast my lifetime," she says. "When I teach others to make pots, I watch my students experience this moment and know how important art is to the human spirit."

Danielle is one of hundreds of folk artists across Tennessee creating functional, beautiful handiwork. From the misty ridgelines of the Smoky Mountains to the riverside back roads of West Tennessee, these artists work in many materials, including clay, metal, leather, wood, paper and yarn.



Danielle McDaniel, right, works with a pottery student on The Clay Lady campus in Nashville. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIELLE MCDANIEL

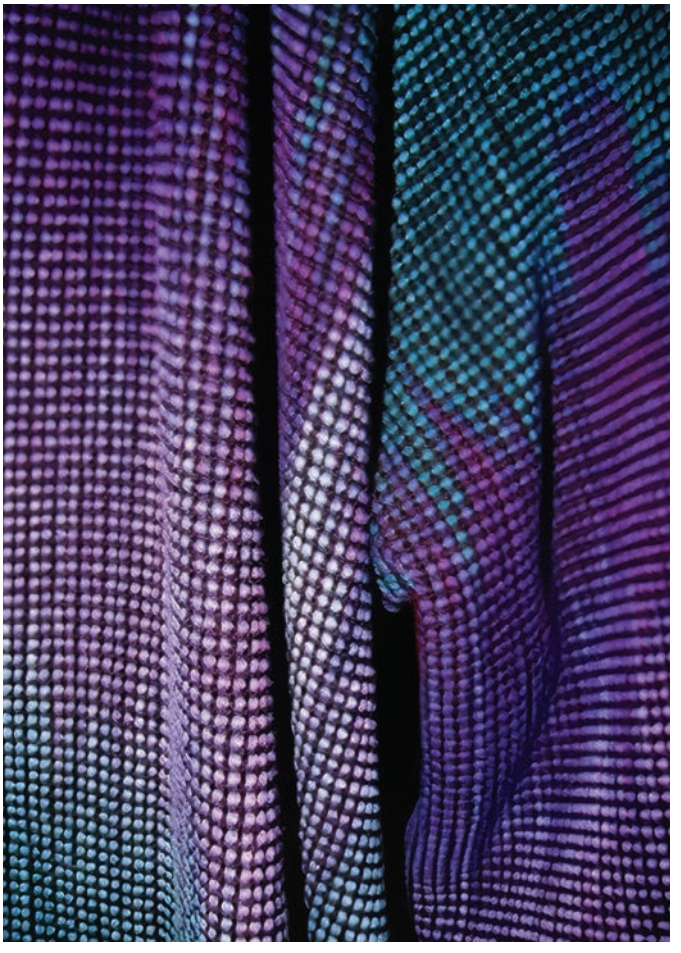


Danielle loves creating beautiful pottery and helping others find joy in folk art.



LEFT: Vickie Vipperman demonstrates how weaving is done on a loom. PHOTOS COURTESY OF VICKIE VIPPERMAN

BELOW: Vickie's fabrics are dyed and woven by hand, promoting sustainability.



What is folk art?

Long before "handcrafted" became a marketing term, Tennessee artisans made what they needed out of what they had. The state's folk art emerged from Appalachian, African American and rural Southern traditions, blending function with creativity.

Today, these art forms remain a vital link between Tennessee's past and present, preserving cultural memory through the artists' preferred materials. A handmade patchwork quilt can tell the story of a family while also keeping family members warm on a cold winter night.

As opposed to fine art, which is typically created for its aesthetic value by trained professionals, folk art is often utilitarian and learned informally, expressing shared culture preserved through items such as wrought-iron gates, furniture, woven rugs and handmade tools. The distinction, however, does not mean folk art cannot be equally as beautiful. Beauty and function can coexist, as in the fabrics woven by artist Vickie Vipperman.

Vickie is part of a movement called "slow cloth," which promotes sustainable practices and values high quality over quantity. Using silk, cotton, bamboo and dyed hemp yarns, Vickie creates functional fabrics she uses to construct clothing and accessories. A perusal of the shawls, scarves, wraps and other wearables she has made is like looking at a rainbow painted by Claude Monet.

Vickie's interest in fiber arts began early. She sewed her first dress from a bed sheet at age 8.

"Unfortunately, I didn't understand seams or buttons yet," she says. "Later, I began weaving potholders and made so many that I went door to door in the neighborhood selling them. In high school, I made clothes for myself, other people and our local hippie shop. But in college, at the University of Georgia art department, I discovered fiber arts as a specialty and began a lifelong passion with weaving, having no idea that it would lead to a career."

Mixing folk art with fine art, Vickie also creates beautiful contemporary wall art. These pieces include woven landscapes and interesting word weavings that entice viewers to step in close to see all the details.

One such piece—a mixed media depiction of newspaper headlines from the Nashville flood of 2010—is in the permanent collection of the Tennessee State Museum. Another showcases text from seven spiritual faiths.

"The use of our hands to produce functional items goes back to the beginning of time," Vickie says. "Even computer systems are based on the same binary system as weaving. Preservation of the skills that have led to our modern times must never be forgotten.

"What happens when the electricity goes off? I can still weave. The potter can still manipulate clay. Craft is the essence of creation, the satisfaction of a job well done and the magic of something new made with the human touch."

Visit vickievippermanweavingstudio.com to see more of Vickie's work. Her handwoven clothing and accessories are also available at Shimai Gallery of Contemporary Craft behind Loveless Cafe in Nashville.

Art for Everyone

One does not have to be a working artist to enjoy learning folk arts. Fun and community are why Fritsl Butler Padgett has traveled from her home in Chattanooga to Cumberland Folk School in Sequatchie to take a number of workshops—from Japanese cooking to candlemaking and kudzu basket weaving.

"It's so important to me to learn to do things with my hands," Fritsl says. "These crafts are such important links to our shared culture, and in a time when we can click and tap and have things simply appear in our lives, it's important to me to be reminded that they can be and are created by human hands. They aren't esoteric skills. Anyone can do it, whether you're an accomplished artist or not."

Cumberland Folk School was started in 2021 by friends Carroll Candler and Ashley Keener on Ashley's family farm, Sequatchie Cove Farm. The school focuses on self-reliance with classes in natural dyeing, quilting, mending, sewing, basketry, broom-making, woodworking, spoon carving, woodworking, textile design, cooking, baking, breadmaking, butchering, fermentation, food preservation, mushroom foraging, bird-watching, herbal medicine, bookmaking and other farm-based skills.

"It is important to us from so many angles to preserve and teach traditional crafts and skills," Carroll says. "In one way, we are simply fascinated by the variety of aesthetics developed by different groups of people over time. It tells a story of people and places through the unique styles and the natural materials specific to a craft tradition. Our classes celebrate traditional crafts and practices from all over the world, which demonstrates the diversity and beauty of humankind, which we find so enriching."

From another angle, Carroll says the school exists as a space to engage in the tradition of passing down skills and knowledge in person, from one community member to the next.

"This is an effective way for individuals to gain skills, but it is also a community-strengthening activity—to gather those who have knowledge to share and those who want to learn, and to connect individuals who have common interests and goals," she says. "We hear again and again from our students that the classes are a nourishing experience, a refreshing way to connect with others."

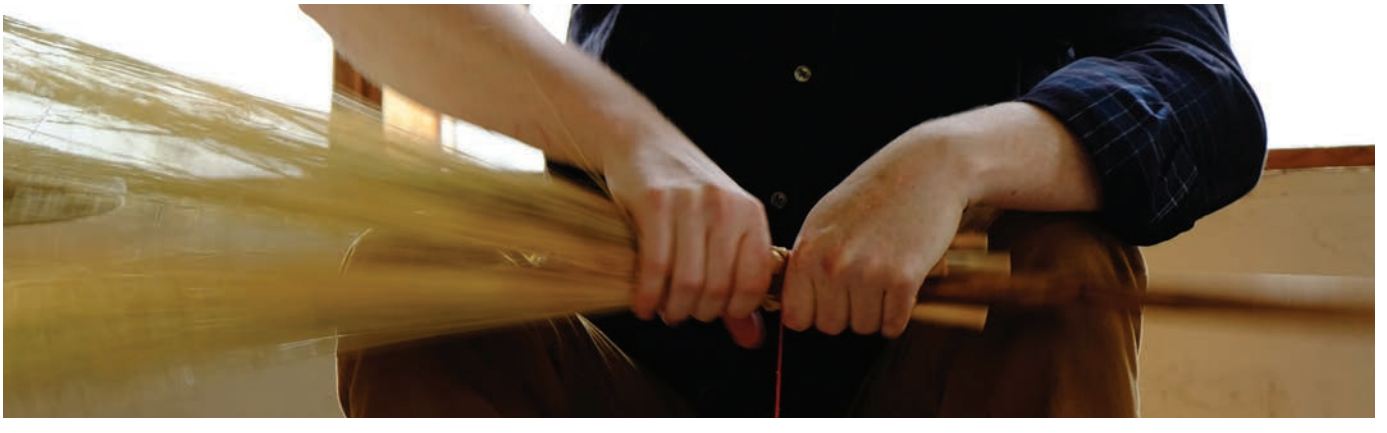
That connection was one of the reasons Mary Morrow, of Lookout Mountain, Georgia, started taking classes at Cumberland Folk School. She was going through a difficult time in her life and was looking for a positive, creative way to connect with others. She found it through classes on broom-making, candlemaking, basket weaving, birding by ear, and building wooden Shaker boxes and baskets.

"I love folk art and the enrichment from the classes," says Mary, a self-taught painter specializing in acrylic and watercolor oceanscapes. "I value something that doesn't value perfectionism. Folk art is particularly unique because it's for anyone and everyone."

> "I value something that doesn't value perfectionism. Folk art is particularly unique because it's for anyone and everyone."
>
> —Mary Morrow

Carroll points out that in a society where the standard is to purchase mass-produced items, often factory-made at the expense of environmental and social health, the folk school's classes provide an opportunity for individuals to reclaim the slow satisfaction of making something unique with their own hands, while considering the natural resources and knowledge required to make it.

"We hope to provide the skills for individuals to make utilitarian objects, food and other items for themselves, but also to instill an appreciation for the skill and time required by others to create handmade items, encouraging people to support community craftspeople and handmade, ethically produced products," she says. ■



WHERE TO LEARN

If you have ever thought of trying your hand at folk art, there are a lot of options for workshops and schools across the state.

The following are places where you can learn from folk artists, explore various types of art and begin a journey to keeping these art forms alive and well.

- **Appalachian Center for Craft at Tennessee Tech:** This major hub near Center Hill Lake offers academic programs, workshops and exhibitions blending Appalachian and contemporary crafts. **tntech.edu/fine-arts/craftcenter/index.php**

- **Appalachian Arts Craft Center in Clinton:** This nonprofit center promotes such traditional crafts as blacksmithing, pottery and weaving through classes, studios and a market. **appalachianarts.net**

- **Cumberland Folk School in Sequatchie:** The school is a place to preserve, teach, celebrate and commune around traditional crafts and skills. **cumberlandfolkschool.com**

- **Tennessee Folklife Institute, run by the Tennessee Arts Commission:** Students participate in immersive workshops for documenting and preserving Tennessee's diverse cultural traditions, often held in the Upper Cumberland area of the state. **tnfolklife.org/programs/tennessee-folklife-institute**

- **Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg:** This national center for craft education offers workshops in a beautiful Smoky Mountain setting. **arrowmont.org**

- **The Clay Lady campus in Nashville:** Each week, hundreds of students and artists of all ages and levels enhance their creative endeavors. **theclaylady.com**

- **Tennessee Craft:** This network of more than 500 craft artists and craft art communities is dedicated to uplifting the past and present of handmade crafts.

  Members practice a variety of art forms, including leatherwork, basketry, jewelry, printmaking, furniture building, woodworking and metalworking. There are seven active chapters across the state. **tennesseecraft.org**

- **Tennessee Craft Week:** The first week of October each year is designated Tennessee Craft Week. Events are held across the state to celebrate traditional and contemporary craft arts.

  These events provide the opportunity to meet artists and buy their handmade crafts and folk art. Among the events is the popular annual Tennessee Craft Fair, held in Nashville. **tennesseecraft.org/tennessee-craft-week**



OPPOSITE PAGE AND LEFT: Broom-making and basket weaving are two popular workshops offered at the Cumberland Folk School. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CLOVERLAND FOLK SCHOOL

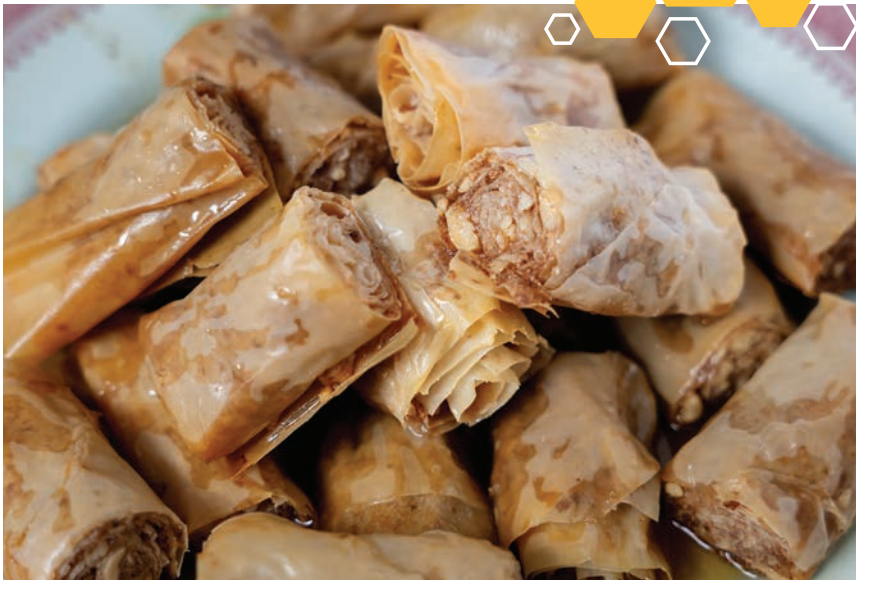
RIGHT: A view out the window overlooks the tranquil Sequatchie Cove Farm, where Cumberland Folk School's craft workshops take place.



As Sweet as Honey

Spring brings buzzing bees and blooming flowers, making it the perfect season to celebrate nature's golden treasure: honey. This versatile ingredient adds natural sweetness and depth to sweet and savory dishes while offering a touch of wholesome goodness. From breakfast treats to satisfying dinners, honey enhances flavors in unexpected ways. These recipes showcase honey's incredible range—proving this ancient sweetener is as relevant in today's kitchen as ever.

HONEY CINNAMON ROLLUPS



2 cups ground walnuts, toasted
¼ cup sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon
12 sheets frozen phyllo dough, thawed
½ cup butter, melted

SYRUP

½ cup honey
½ cup sugar
½ cup water
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Heat oven to 350 F. Mix walnuts, sugar and cinnamon. Place one sheet of phyllo dough on a 12-by-15-inch piece of wax paper. Brush dough with butter.

Place another phyllo sheet on top, and brush it with butter. Keep remaining phyllo covered with a damp towel to prevent it from drying out.

Sprinkle dough sheets with ¼ cup of walnut mixture. Using wax paper, roll up tightly jelly-roll style, starting with a long side and removing paper as you roll.

Cut roll into four smaller rolls. Line rolls in a greased 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Repeat with remaining phyllo dough and ¼ cupfuls of walnut mixture.

Bake until golden brown, 14 to 16 minutes. Cool dish on a wire rack.

Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, combine all syrup ingredients. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes.

Drizzle cinnamon rollups with syrup. Sprinkle with remaining walnut mixture.

PHOTOS BY MARK GILLILAND, STYLING BY RHONDA GILLILAND



ORANGE, HONEY AND THYME SQUARES

⅔ cup nonfat buttermilk
2 tablespoons clover honey
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
2 teaspoons grated orange rind
10 ounces spelt flour
5 teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
5½ tablespoons chilled butter, cut into small pieces
Cooking spray

Heat oven to 425 F.

Combine buttermilk, honey, thyme and orange rind in a small bowl, stirring with a whisk. Combine flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl. Stir with a whisk.

Cut butter into flour mixture with a pastry cutter or two knives until mixture resembles coarse meal. Add buttermilk mixture to flour mixture, stirring just until moist. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Pat into a 7½-inch square, and cut into 12 rectangles.

Place dough on a foil-lined baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Bake for 13 minutes or until lightly browned on edges and bottom.



OATS AND HONEY GRANOLA BARS

3 cups old-fashioned oats
2 cups unsweetened crispy rice cereal
1 cup all-purpose flour
⅓ cup chopped walnuts
⅓ cup miniature semisweet chocolate chips
⅓ cup raisins
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup honey
¼ cup butter, melted
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Cooking spray

Heat oven to 350 F. In a large mixing bowl, combine first eight ingredients. In a separate bowl, combine honey, butter and vanilla. Pour over oat mixture, and mix well.

Press into a 13-by-9-inch baking pan coated with cooking spray. Bake 14 to 18 minutes or until set and edges are lightly browned. Cool on a wire rack. Cut into bars.



ADOBE STOCK IMAGES BY NATASHA, POLINART, ALESMUNT, MARKRADEMAKER

HONEY LIME CHICKEN KABOBS

1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut into 1-inch cubes
2 teaspoons grated lime rind
2 teaspoons minced garlic
1 teaspoon chili powder, plus extra for sprinkling
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 tablespoon honey
Cooking spray

Heat broiler to high.

Combine first five ingredients, and toss to coat. Thread chicken onto skewers. Place kebabs on a broiler pan coated with cooking spray. Broil 4 minutes on each side or until done.

Mix juice and honey in a small bowl. Arrange kebabs on a platter. Drizzle with honey mixture, and sprinkle with chili powder.



9 Ways to Turn Your Garden Into a Pollinator Paradise

By Jodi Helmer

Sure, asters, salvia, coneflowers and lavender add curb appeal, but a garden full of colorful, nectar-producing flowers also attracts bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinators.

Pollinators are critical to the ecosystem: More than 85% of flowering plants—including two-thirds of our food crops from almonds and apples to pumpkins and zucchini—depend on pollination to reproduce.

Despite the essential role of pollinators, their populations are at risk—and gardeners are taking action. Increased awareness about the importance of protecting pollinators has led more gardeners to transform their landscapes into pollinator havens.

Here are nine ways to turn your yard into a pollinator paradise.

Choose native plants. Native plants are adapted to certain geographic regions and thrive in those specific climates. Cardinal flower, blazing star, phlox, buttonbush and verbena are among the native pollinator plants recommended for Tennessee gardens.

Unlike non-native species, which might not have enough nectar or pollen to support pollinators, native plants provide the perfect resources for bees, butterflies and other pollinators to thrive. For more inforation, visit tnyards.utk.edu.

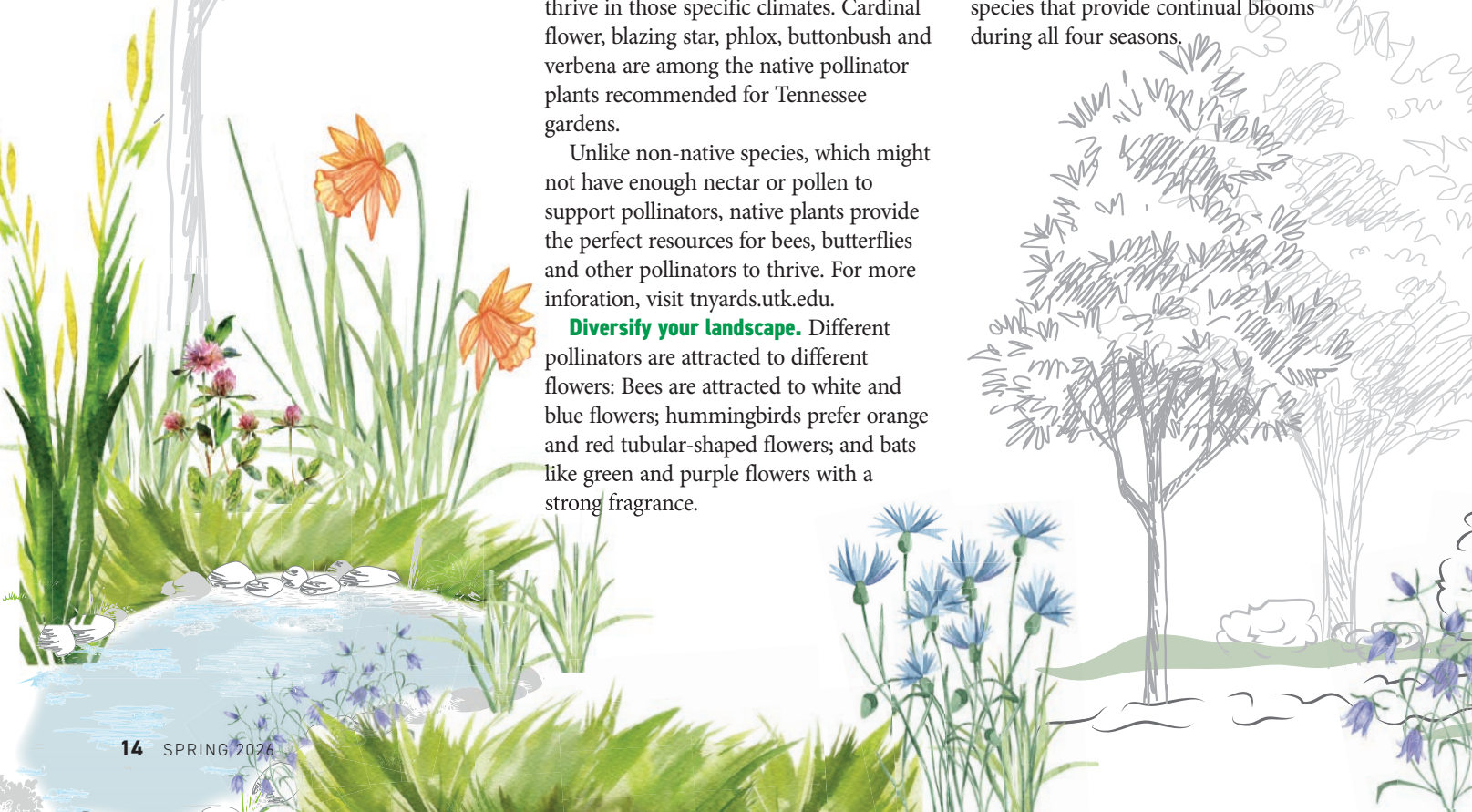
Diversify your landscape. Different pollinators are attracted to different flowers: Bees are attracted to white and blue flowers; hummingbirds prefer orange and red tubular-shaped flowers; and bats like green and purple flowers with a strong fragrance.

Choosing plants with a greater diversity of colors, shapes and scents in your garden will help attract different kinds of pollinators.

Plant patches of flowers. A diversified landscape is important, but it's also a good idea to group several of the same flowers in one area of the garden. It's easier for pollinators to spot nectar-rich blooms when there are larger masses of flowers.

Consider creating several larger clumps of flowers rather than scattering single plants around the landscape to make it easier for pollinators to see your garden as an abundant food source.

Think beyond summer. A lush garden in the spring and summer is great, but pollinators need food all year. Look for species that provide continual blooms during all four seasons.



In Tennessee, sneezeweed, swamp sunflower and wild bergamot bloom through the fall, and the seed heads on plants like black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower and coreopsis provide food for birds. Not a green thumb? Ask your local nursery professional for advice.

Offer water. Pollinators need fresh water. A shallow dish or birdbath are great options—but be sure to place some half-submerged stones in the water to give insect pollinators a place to perch while they quench their thirst; if the water is too deep, pollinators will drown.

Grow less grass. Replacing some of your lawn with a garden or wildflower meadow—or over-seeding with clover—can boost pollinator food supply.

Replacing the lawn with native plants also requires less maintenance because it never needs to be mowed. If your homeowners association or city code requires you to have a manicured lawn, let clover go to flower before mowing; it's one small action that can help pollinators.

Use less mulch. Mulch is ideal for controlling weeds and retaining moisture, but it can prevent certain bee species from finding suitable nesting spots. Several native bee species nest in the ground and need access to bare soil to dig nests and raise their babies. Leaving some "mulch-free" zones in the garden can ensure these bees will call your yard home.

In areas of the garden covered in mulch, skip cedar mulch because it can be toxic to some bees.

> Choosing plants with a greater diversity of colors, shapes and scents in your garden will help attract different kinds of pollinators.

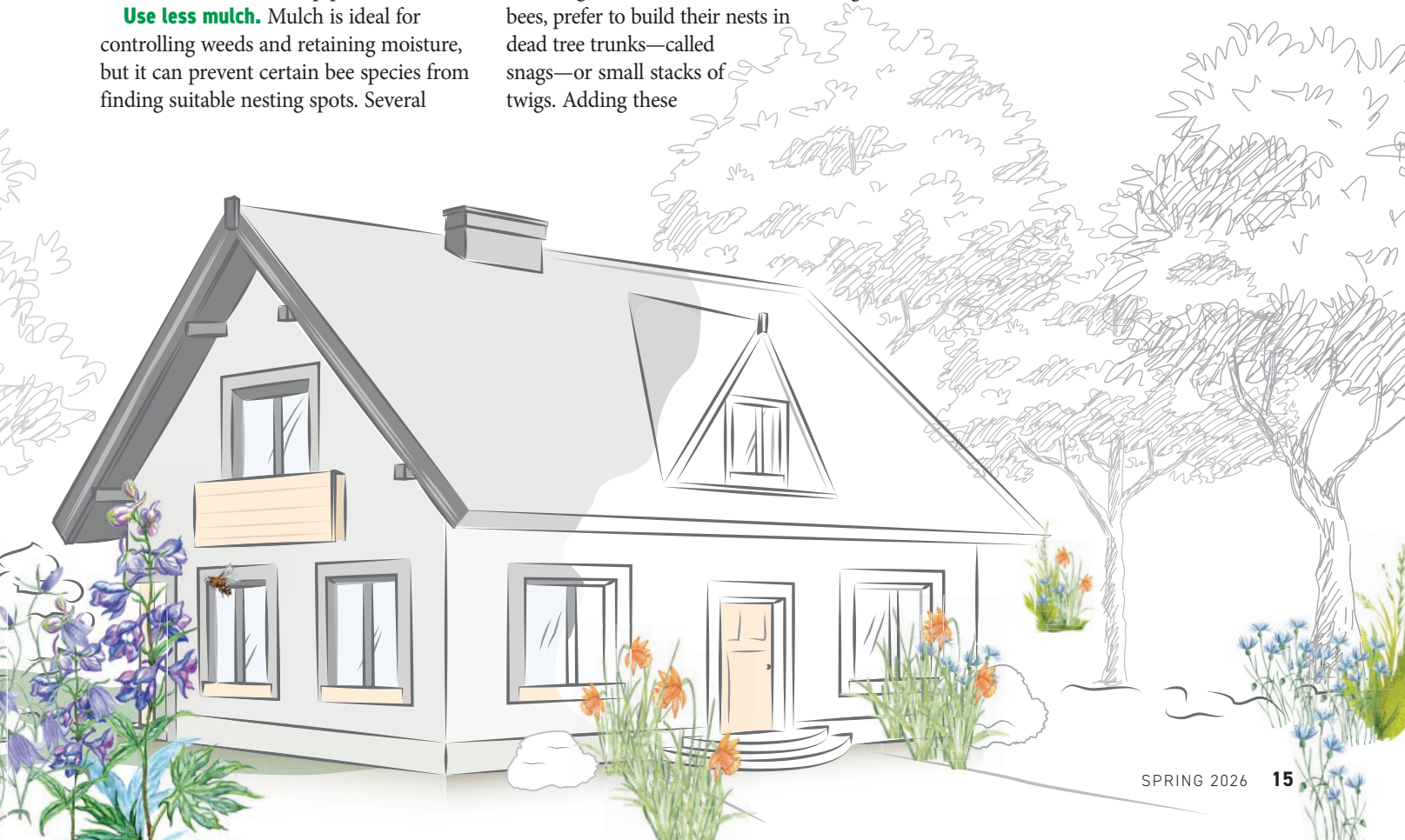
Provide nesting spots. Other pollinators, including birds, beetles and wood-nesting bees, prefer to build their nests in dead tree trunks—called snags—or small stacks of twigs. Adding these features to your garden gives pollinators suitable places to nest and reproduce.

Bee hotels are another option. You can make these small structures, which offer a series of nesting spots, or purchase one online and watch pollinators move in.

Embrace organic pest control. Insecticides were designed to kill insects—and that includes pollinators. Using beneficial insects or other natural and organic pest-control methods helps keep pollinators safe.

If you must spray, choose an organic product and only apply it to infested plants. Selective spraying—rather than treating the entire garden—helps limit the amount of chemicals used and reduces the impact on pollinators.

Taking a few small steps to make your garden more welcoming for bees, butterflies and birds can greatly impact pollinator populations. ■



TENNESSEE CONNECTIONS

PLANNER

From art-forward music festivals and sweet small-town traditions to smoky barbecue and spring craft fairs, Tennessee's spring calendar is packed with reasons to get outside.



SEVIERVILLE

May 15–16

Bloomin' BBQ Music & Food Festival

Downtown Sevierville fills with smoky barbecue, live bluegrass, arts and crafts, and kid-friendly fun during this two-day celebration. Enjoy barbecue competitions, toe-tapping music and a lively festival atmosphere. Admission and concerts are free.

bloominbbq.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLOOMIN' BBQ MUSIC & FOOD FESTIVAL



MORRISTOWN

March 19

Live at Rose Center Presents: Interval

A free, all-ages concert is from 7–9 p.m. Formed in 2022 by members of the Sequatchie River Band, Interval explores an indie/alt-rock sound rooted in original compositions and early-2000s favorites, with a few classics mixed in for good measure. The band rehearses and records at its off-grid home studio, Vibe HQ, tucked into the Sequatchie Valley mountains. Concertgoers are encouraged to bring their own beverages and settle in for a laid-back evening of live music.

rosecenter.org

MONTEREY

April 4

Fifth Annual Banana Pudding Festival

Downtown Monterey's spring sweet celebration features banana pudding tastings, artisan vendors, pony rides, food trucks and a petting zoo. The public judges its favorite pudding in a friendly competition—a tasty outing for all ages. Admission is free, and banana pudding tastings on the Puddin' Path are $5.

centerhillevents.com

COLUMBIA

April 9–11

Mule Day

A beloved tradition since the 1840s, Mule Day began as a livestock show and mule market and has grown into a multiday festival drawing thousands each year. Events include square dancing, mule-driving contests, horse shows, crafts, flea markets, and traditional Appalachian food and music. The signature Mule Day Parade steps off at 11 a.m. Saturday.

visitcolumbiatn.com/events/mule-day

MURFREESBORO

April 25

Tennessee Apple Festival

Bring the whole family for a full day of spring fun featuring apple-themed treats, live music, a kids zone and more than 150 vendors from six states. Guests can browse vintage finds, handmade goods, art, clothing and garden decor while enjoying food from more than 15 food trucks.

centerhillevents.com

SHELBY FOREST

April 25–26

Shelby Forest Spring Fest

Shelby Forest State Park welcomes attendees to a free, family-friendly spring celebration. The celebration includes live music, outdoor activities, nature exhibits, a hillbilly costume contest, mechanical bull, face-painting, a hot sauce eating contest and local vendors. Attendees are invited to bring their pups for a dog show.

shelbyforestspringfest.com

SPRINGFIELD

May–October

First Fridays

Springfield's free downtown events return the first Friday of each month starting in May. Expect live music, food trucks, local vendors, a kids' zone and a specialty vehicle cruise-in—all designed to bring families together for relaxed spring and summer evenings.

springfieldtn.gov/703/1st-Fridays

For a complete list of what's happening in Tennessee, visit tnvacation.com/calendar.

NASHVILLE

May 1–3

55th Annual Spring Tennessee Craft Fair
One of the state's premier craft events, this free festival fills Centennial Park's Great Lawn with artisans offering pottery, jewelry, textiles, woodwork and more. Meet the artists, shop one-of-a-kind pieces and enjoy a family-friendly spring tradition.
conservancyonline.com/events/tennesseecraftspring

SMITHVILLE

May 16

Sixth Annual Middle TN Cornbread Festival & Car Show
One of Middle Tennessee's favorite spring outings returns with cornbread cook-offs, artisan vendors, classic cars, live music and plenty of free family fun. Held in downtown Smithville, the festival celebrates local food culture and community spirit.
centerhillevents.com

MORRISTOWN

May 30

Between the Lakes Blues Festival
The festival returns to the historic Rose Center grounds for an afternoon of live music from noon to 6 p.m. Headliner Wayne Baker Brooks joins regional favorites for a family-friendly outdoor celebration featuring local vendors, food and a welcoming atmosphere.
rosecenter.org



ADOBE STOCK IMAGES BY ECCO, ELENAVECTOR44, YARM, DESIGNERTHC



FRANKLIN

April 11

Nashville Cherry Blossom Festival
Each spring, Nashville celebrates the blooming of its cherry trees and the long-standing friendship between Japan and the United States. The festival begins with a cherry blossom walk and continues at Public Square Park with Japanese cultural demonstrations, exhibits, children's activities and live entertainment.
nashvillecherryblossomfestival.org

PHOTO COURTESY OF NASHVILLE CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL



HUMBOLDT

May 3–9

West Tennessee Strawberry Festival
Now in its 88th year, Tennessee's largest and longest-running festival celebrates community, tradition and—of course—strawberries. The weeklong event features parades, carnival rides, pageants, recipe contests, live music, fireworks and plenty of sweet, seasonal treats.
strawberryfestivaltn.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF WEST TENNESSEE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

Include Your Upcoming Event

Want to share an event with the readers of Tennessee Connections? Please visit **tinyurl.com/TennesseeEvents** or scan the QR code to submit the details. Thank you.



A Word About Water

Tap Into Water Heating Savings

If your home is like most, you and your family use about 64 gallons of water each day. If your water heater is electric, that probably accounts for about 18% of your power bill.

That makes your water heater the second-largest energy expense in your home. Why not use less electricity to heat it?

Today's high-efficiency water heaters use much less energy than older models, so you don't need to give up comfort for energy savings. That's good news for your power bill.

There is a newer option to consider: an electric heat pump water heater. These units give you the hot water you need by pulling heat from the surrounding air to heat the water—like a refrigerator in reverse. Because they do not directly produce heat, electric heat pump water heaters are two to three times more energy efficient than standard units.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, a family of four can save about $550 a year on water heating costs, which adds up to $5,610 over the lifetime of the unit.

A heat pump water heater may cost a bit more upfront than other models. However, according to the DOE, most people see a payback in less than three years due to the unit's lower operating costs and energy savings. Look for the Energy Star label when shopping for a water heater.

Check with your utility to see if a rebate is available to help you make the switch.

Tankless electric water heaters are another option, but carefully weigh the benefits and drawbacks. These smaller units quickly heat water to provide it when called upon, but can use eight times more electricity than a standard water heater.

This high demand increases your utility's cost of purchased power, which plays an important role in how much you pay for electricity. In some cases, people who use electric tankless water heaters must upgrade their home's wiring to support the greater demand for electricity.

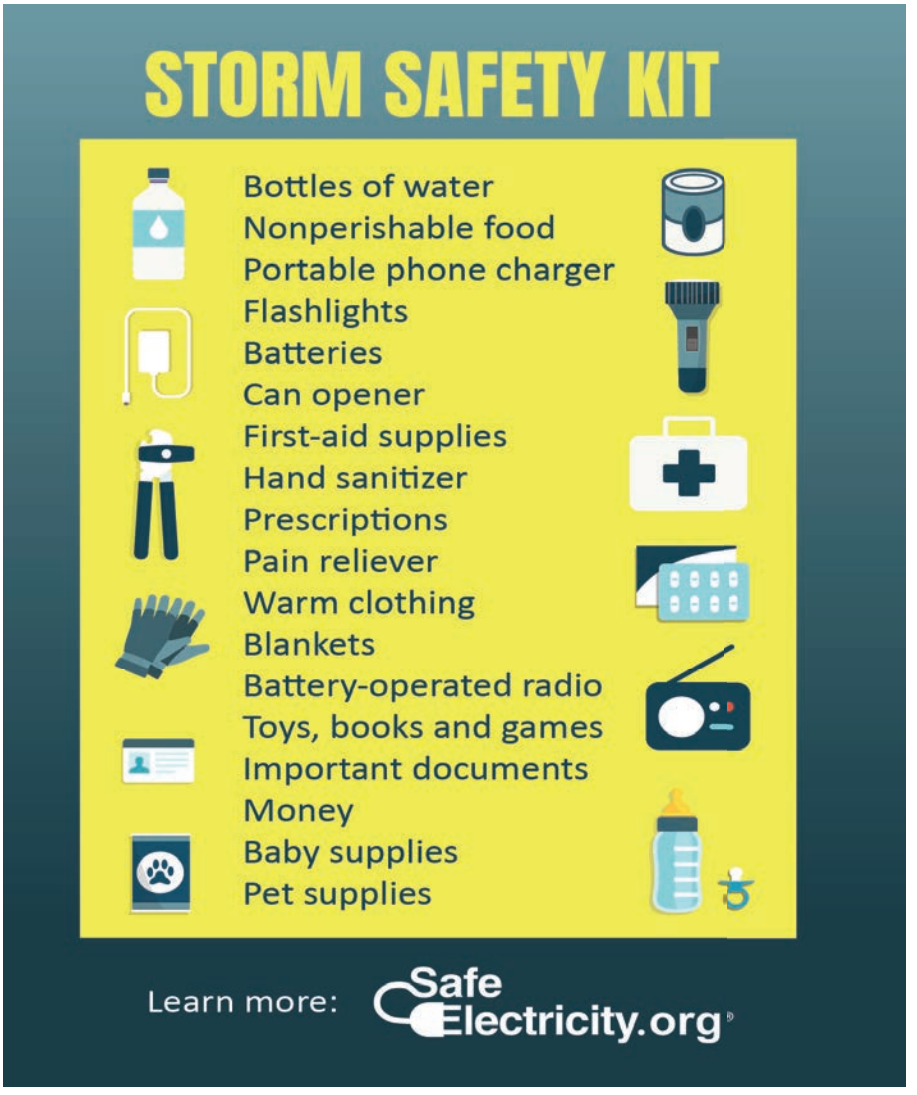
Other ways to lower your energy costs include setting your water heater's thermostat to no higher than 120 degrees, fixing leaks, installing low-flow fixtures, and using energy-efficient dishwashers and washing machines.

Helping you save energy and money is another way your utility is always here for you. ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF RHEEM MANUFACTURING CO.

Safety Before and After Storms

Severe storms are more common in the spring and summer, but they can occur any time of year. Be prepared for storms year-round and know how to stay safe.



Before the Storm

- Assemble a kit of essentials, such as water, battery-operated flashlights and radios. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers, including Sparta Electric and Public Works'. Be prepared for the possibility of a prolonged outage due to power line and equipment damage.
- If severe weather is on its way, pay attention to local weather reports and recommendations. A tornado or severe storm watch indicates conditions could enable such weather. Warnings mean dangerous weather conditions are developing and imminent.
- Lightning can travel 10 miles or more away from a storm, so seek shelter when you hear thunder.
- Consider installing ground fault circuit interrupters or purchasing portable GFCIs, which detect dangerous electrical situations and cut off power before a person can be shocked. GFCIs should be installed in bathrooms, laundry rooms, kitchens, basements, outdoors and anywhere else water and electricity may meet.
- If power goes out, switch off lights, large electronics and appliances to prevent overloading circuits and damaging appliances when power is restored. Leave one lamp or switch on as a signal of restored power.

After the Storm

- When venturing outside, stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility tree limbs or debris are hiding electrical hazards. Assume any dangling wires are energized and dangerous. Warn others to stay away and contact Sparta Electric. If you are driving and come upon a downed power line, stay in the vehicle, warn others to stay away, and call 911 or Sparta Electric.
- When driving, be careful at intersections where traffic lights may be out. Stop at all railroad crossings and treat road intersections with traffic signals as a four-way stop before proceeding with caution.
- Before reentering storm-damaged buildings or rooms, be sure all electric and gas services are turned off. Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so. If you can't reach your breaker box safely, call Sparta Electric to shut off power at the meter.
- Never step into a flooded basement or other area if water is covering electrical outlets, appliances or cords. Be alert to any electrical equipment that could be energized and in contact with water.
- Never touch electrical appliances, cords or wires while you are wet or standing in water.
- Do not use water-damaged electric items until a qualified electrician has inspected them and ensured they are safe.

To help you through a storm, have a storm safety kit prepared. Use the ideas above to get started. Keep the kit in a cool, dry place, and ensure all family members know where it is. ■



Find Southern charm and big thrills at Dollywood

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOLLYWOOD

What Is It?

Dollywood is a 165-acre theme park in Pigeon Forge that blends high-energy rides with Appalachian culture, live music and Southern foodways. Co-owned by country music legend Dolly Parton, the park is known for world-class roller coasters alongside crafts, storytelling and seasonal festivals celebrating the Smoky Mountains. Spring brings fresh blooms and a packed entertainment lineup.

A Bit of Background

The park opened in 1986 on the site of the former Silver Dollar City Tennessee and was renamed Dollywood when Dolly became a partner. Since then, it has grown into one of the most awarded theme parks in the world, often recognized for customer service, cleanliness and food. Dollywood's mission is rooted in honoring the people, traditions and music of the Southern Appalachians.

What to Do

Thrill-seekers can tackle headline coasters like Lightning Rod, Wild Eagle and Big Bear Mountain, while younger riders gravitate to family-friendly attractions in Wildwood Grove. Live shows run throughout the day, featuring gospel, bluegrass and country music performed by award-winning musicians. Craftsman's Valley is a must-stop, where blacksmiths, glassblowers and woodworkers demonstrate traditional skills. In spring, the Festival of Flowers fills the park with thousands of blooms and larger-than-life floral sculptures—perfect for photos.

Beyond the Park

Just a few minutes from Dollywood, families can start the day with a classic Smoky Mountain breakfast at The Old Mill Restaurant, known for hearty Southern staples. Nearby, The Pancake Pantry in Gatlinburg is a longtime favorite for made-from-scratch breakfasts. For a slower-paced break, a drive through Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers scenic overlooks and short hikes. Back in town, The Island in Pigeon Forge provides shopping, dining and evening entertainment.

More Info

Dollywood opens for the season Friday, March 13, and operates 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. for most of spring. Ticket prices vary by date and demand, with discounts available for multiday passes and children ages 4–9. Parking is available on-site for a daily fee, with complimentary tram service to the entrance. For current hours, festival dates, ticket options and accessibility information, visit dollywood.com or call 800-DOLLYWOOD.



ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS BY ROMAN TIRASPOLSKY, SVETLANA GLAZKOVA, SERGIU

SCOUTING for Pests

For gardeners, few things are more exciting than the onset of spring. The warm weather brings a flurry of activity to gardens across Tennessee. From trees leaving their winter slumber to vegetable transplants going in the ground, the wonder is seemingly endless.

Unfortunately, spring also brings a lot of unwanted visitors, as well. From insects to fungal pathogens, pests begin their activity almost in unison with your plants. When it comes to garden pests, though, there is one strategy that can, and should, be constantly used—scouting.

Scouting is the process of a gardener going into their garden to look for and evaluate potential problems. Good scouting helps catch problems early and ensures they are properly identified before spending time, money and energy correcting them. Here are some tips to get you started:.

Symptoms & Signs

Before you start scouting, it's important to understand symptoms and signs. While symptoms and signs often go hand in hand, they are two very different things.

Put very simply, a symptom is the effect that a pest has on a plant's growth or appearance. A few examples of symptoms include leaf yellowing, or chlorosis, abnormal leaf drop and wilting. In contrast to a symptom, a sign is the physical presence of a pest. Some examples of signs include powdery mildew, honeydew, egg masses and larvae.

Now that symptoms and signs have been defined, it's time to talk about scouting for them. When scouting for symptoms and signs, it helps to be slow, methodical and thorough. Look at plant stems, under leaves, in the soil and even in areas outside your garden. It is also a good idea to look under eaves, rocks, lumber and firewood, as these areas can provide ideal habitats for pests. Some problems, such as feeding damage, may be pretty obvious, but others, such as a bacterial or viral infection, can be a little tougher to identify.

Take Pictures

There are many great tools for scouting in the garden, but perhaps the best is a high-quality camera. While it does take some practice, a clear, detailed and high-quality picture will go a long way. As you are out and about in your garden, you may see several new pests, and having a good photo will provide a reference on what was seen. Additionally, many phone apps, such as Google Lens and iNaturalist, can search and compare images. These apps are a wonderful resource, though they can be finicky at times. The clearer the image, the better chances that the apps will be able to identify the pest.

Take Samples

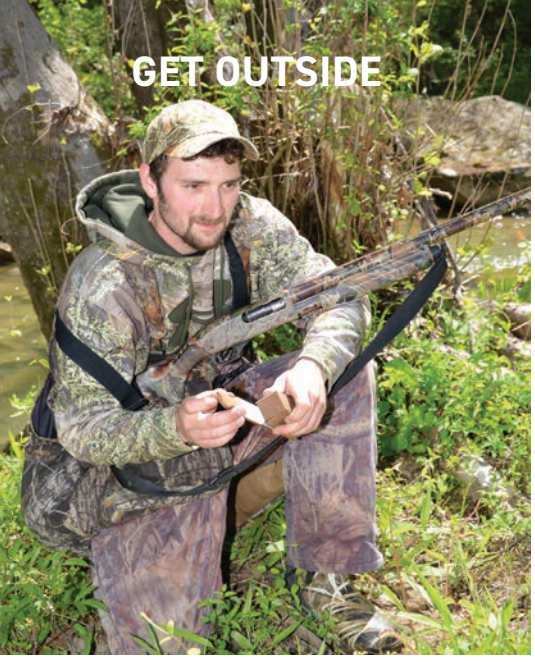
If a picture is worth 1,000 words, an actual insect or disease sample may be worth 10,000. If you find a problem in the garden, remember that both the University of Tennessee and Tennessee State University have extension agents and specialists across the state who are available to assist the community.

Stop by any extension office with your photos and a few samples of the pest or disease. These offices are equipped with the resources to identify a number of plant issues. Additionally, the UT Soil, Plant and Pest Center will process plant submissions for minimal cost. ■

Visit tinyurl.com/ControlGardenInsects for more information.



Rylan Thompson is a University of Tennessee Agriculture & Natural Resources agent in Franklin County. His responsibilities include Production Agriculture, Nursery Production and the Master Gardener program.







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Jake Mardis uses a box call to bring in turkeys while hunting near LaFollette. Bob Hodge sets a decoy for a turkey hunt. Former world champion turkey caller Eddie Salter serves as emcee at a turkey-calling contest. PHOTOS BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Tomfoolery

Bring in the wily birds with these turkey-calling tips

Many sportsmen turn to turkey hunting in spring. Tennessee sportsmen ages 6 to 16 can hunt turkeys April 4-5. For everyone else, the season runs April 11 through May 24. Regulations and season dates may vary across some public hunting areas, so always check the rules.

To hunt turkeys, most sportsmen pretend to be a turkey to call real birds into range. In the spring, a tom turkey, or gobbler, booms out his signature call to summon his harem of hens or warn other gobblers to keep away from his territory.

Toms might also gobble as they go to roost at sunset, telling everyone goodnight. Turkeys also gobble reactively when startled by loud sounds, such as a crow or owl calling.

In turkey hunting, more doesn't always mean better. Many novice hunters think if they call more, they will bring in more gobblers. That's seldom true.

"I think many turkey hunters call too much," says Eddie 'The Turkey Man' Salter, a legendary turkey hunter and former world champion turkey caller. "When the turkey is coming to the call, shut up to avoid making a mistake. One sour note and that bird is gone."

Because toms always want to breed with as many hens as possible, imitate a hen he hasn't met yet. Just after first light, make three or four soft yelps. If a gobbler answers, play hard to get. Answer with a single yelp. Then, stay silent and still. That gobbler won't know exactly where the sound originated, but it might arouse his curiosity enough to investigate.

"I use two different calls at the same time," Eddie says. "I use a slate call and a mouth call or a box call and a mouth call to make two different tones to sound like two different hens. With one mouth call, I can make a clear call and then make a really raspy call. I might mix in a box call or a slate call. I want that wily old gobbler to think he has four or five girlfriends waiting for him."

Sometimes gobblers come running to calls, but typically one cautiously approaches to determine where the sound originated. It might "hang up," staying some distance away, watching and listening intently to locate the hen and check for danger.

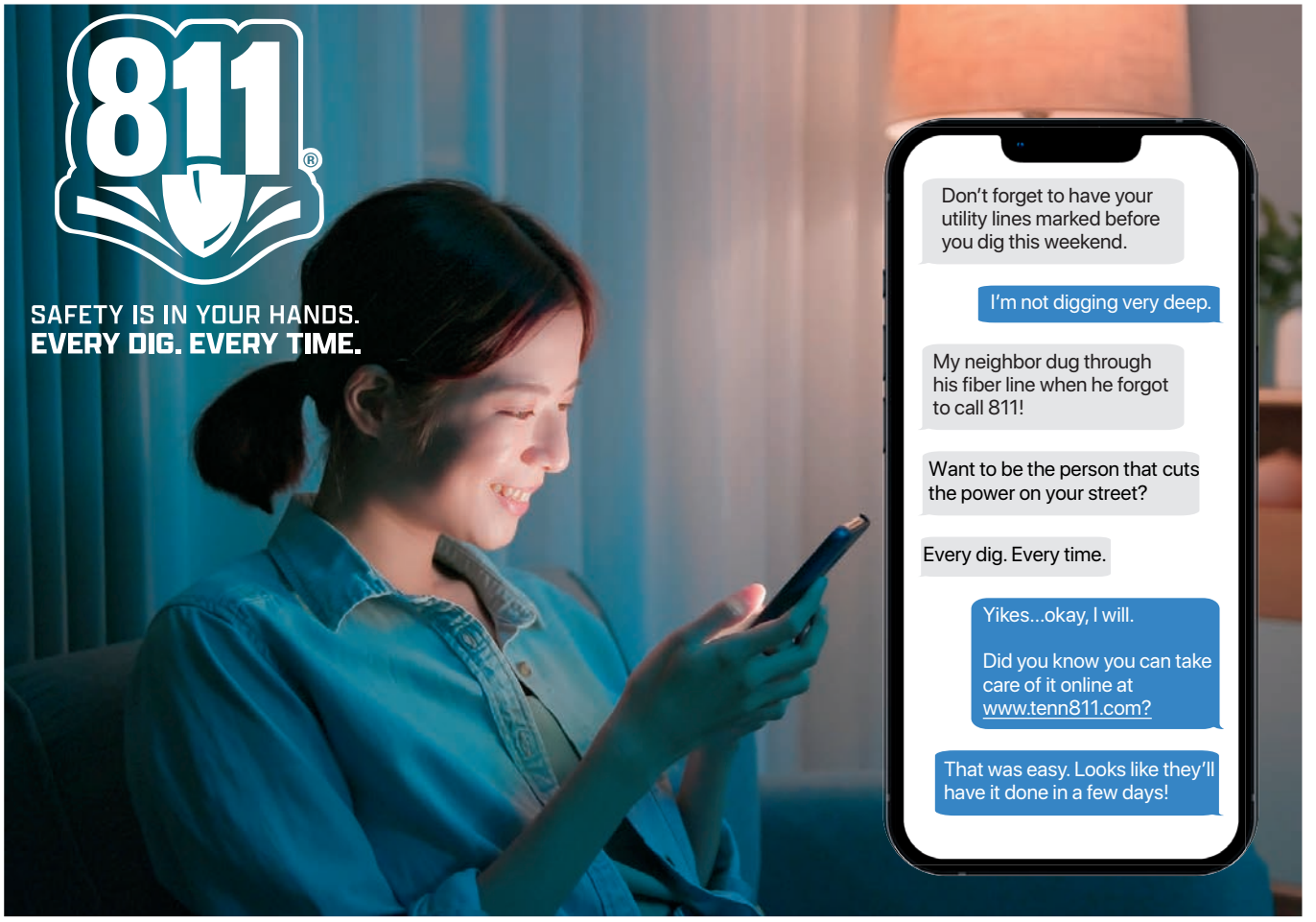
"When a gobbler hangs up, I'll run the mouth call and a slate call to sound like two different turkeys," Eddie says. "Then, I'll pop my hat on my leg to sound like turkeys fighting. When I've done that, I've had gobblers hung up 75 or 100 yards away break and come in running. If that turkey hangs up in thick cover or behind a hill, which is common in Tennessee, people can get away with a little movement."

Sportsmen can learn to call turkeys by watching videos from master callers. Eddie suggests attending calling competitions. Most competitors enjoy talking about turkey calling after the contest ends. ■

For more about the Turkey Man, see theturkeyman.com.



John N. Felsher is a professional freelance writer, broadcaster, photographer, editor and consultant. An avid sportsman, he's written more than 3,600 articles for more than 170 different magazines on a wide variety of outdoors topics. He also hosts an outdoors tips show for WAVH-FM Talk 106.5 radio station in Mobile, Alabama. Contact him at j.felsher@hotmail.com or through Facebook.



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Erwin Utilities Authority
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Greeneville Energy Authority
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Mount Pleasant Power System
Nashville Electric Service
Newbern Electric Department
Newport Utilities Board
City of Oak Ridge Electric Department
Paris Utility Authority
Pulaski Electric System
Ripley Power and Light Company
Rockwood Electric Utility
Sevier County Electric System
Shelbyville Power System
Smithville Electric System
Sparta Electric & Public Works
Springfield Electric Department
Sweetwater Utilities Board
Trenton Light & Water Department
Tullahoma Utilities Authority
Union City Energy Authority
Weakley County Municipal Electric System
Winchester Utilities



When Thunder Roars, GO INDOORS

As the sun heats the air, energy is generated by air movement, and lightning typically forms in towering storm clouds.

Fortunately, accidents involving lightning are avoidable.

Safe Electricity has the following suggestions to stay safe from lightning:

There is no safe place from lightning when you are outside. Be aware of weather forecasts and watch for developing thunderstorms, which occur more often in spring and summer.

Lightning can strike many miles ahead of a storm front. If you hear thunder, seek shelter immediately because it indicates lightning is within 10 miles. Safe shelters include inside a building or in an enclosed metal-topped vehicle.

Stay off corded telephones and away from electrical devices. These items could carry an electrical surge indoors, as lightning can enter your home through wiring. Turn off or unplug appliances, stay away from television sets and do not depend on surge protectors to absorb a lightning strike. Conductors can also include the plumbing in your house.

Wait. You can resume outdoor activities 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder.

If a person is struck by lightning, call 911 and provide immediate care. You are not in danger of being shocked by the victim.

ADOBE STOCK IMAGE BY HEALEYPHOTO