

'Teen Click It or Ticket' urges buckling up to save a life

The agony is merciless. The pain cuts deep. Deeper and more vicious than anyone can imagine when you lose a child. Unfortunately, hundreds of parents have had to endure this nightmare after losing their teens in car crashes in which they weren't wearing their seat belts.

With vehicle crashes continuing to be the leading cause of death for U.S. teenagers, TxDOT's "Teen Click IT or Ticket" campaign is urging teens to buckle up in every seat for every ride.

A seat belt offers the best protection in a crash, but sadly, seat belt use remains low among teen drivers and passengers. In 2020, 46% (138 of 300) of teen drivers killed in vehicle crashes were not wearing a seat belt.

"We want to remind teens to take responsibility not only for themselves but also for those who are riding in their vehicle. Everyone must buckle up," said TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams. "One simple click of a seat belt can save a life."

Throughout the month of February, the "Teen Click It or Ticket" campaign will be highly

visible, seeking to reach Texas teens with its seat belt safety message. The outreach will include TV, digital advertising and social media. Additionally, an interactive element will be introduced as the campaign makes visits to 11 high school campuses across the state with its "Teen Click It or Ticket" vehicle.

Teens will also be educated on Texas law which requires drivers and all passengers to wear a seat belt. Unbuckled drivers and passengers - even those in the back seat - can face fines and fees of up to \$200.

"Teen Click It or Ticket" is a key component of #EndTheStreakTX, a broader social media and word-of-mouth effort that encourages drivers to make safer choices while behind the wheel, like wearing a seat belt, driving the speed limit, never texting and driving and never driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Nov. 7, 2000 was the last deathless day on Texas roadways. #EndTheStreakTX asks all Texans to commit to driving safely to help end the streak of daily deaths.

Take a Color-Themed Approach for More Attractive Arrangements

By Melinda Myers

Growing dahlias is a must for anyone who loves cutting and arranging flowers. But there are hundreds of beautiful dahlia varieties to choose from and that can be overwhelming. To make the selection process easier, choose compatible colors that will look good together in the garden and in arrangements.

The combination of peach and burgundy is both striking and sophisticated. Peach-colored flowers add a fresh and soothing feel to the garden. Dahlia American Dawn is a blend of peach, mango, and papaya with plum-purple highlights. Good partners include other varieties in the same warm, sunset tones, such as dinnerplate dahlia Belle of Barmera, decorative dahlia Great Silence and ball dahlia Maarn.

Planting dahlias in a perennial garden ensures non-stop color from July into October. The fluttering, melon-colored blooms of HS Date work particularly well, due to this variety's maroon foliage and open growth habit. Complete your peach and burgundy theme with the dark-hued flowers of Rip City. These large, velvety flowers are almost black in the center and soften to wine-red toward the petal edges. Add ball dahlia Jowey Mirella for blooms that are smaller in size yet equally striking.

For another eye-catching color combination, narrow your selection to dahlias with purple and hot-pink flowers. Historically, purple was associated with royalty, spirituality, and knowledge. While pastel purple evokes a sense of calm and serenity, deeper tones add drama and excitement. Dinnerplate dahlia Lilac Time is an heirloom variety with fluffy, lavender

blooms that can measure eight to ten inches across. Be sure to also include flowers in juicy grape and violet hues such as dahlias Thomas Edison, Cartouche and Purple Taiheijo.

Complement these moody purples with vivid pink dahlias. Burlesca is a cute little pompon dahlia with tightly rolled petals that reveal hints of peach, burgundy and violet. Fascination's rose-pink, semi-double flowers contrast beautifully with the plant's dark foliage and the blossoms are irresistible to bees and butterflies. Ball dahlia Rocco is an all-star variety that is long lasting in both garden and vase.

If you prefer pastels to brights, choose dahlias in shades of pale yellow, soft pink and cream. The enormous flowers of dinnerplate dahlia Café au Lait are a must. Complement them with ball dahlias such as peachy Linda's Baby or buttery Boom Boom yellow. Decorative dahlia Fluffles has taffy-pink petals that fade to white, while Milena Fleur's are a mélange of pink, peach and pale butterscotch.

When you start with flowers in compatible colors, designing floral arrangements becomes so much easier. You'll have all you need to quickly create a centerpiece for any gathering, an impressive bouquet for your own home, or an informal handful of blooms to share with friends.

For more tips about cut flowers, read the Longfield Gardens article How to Design a Cutting Garden (www.longfield-gardens.com).

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Insights on who's producing our nation's food, fiber and fuel

By Gary Joiner
TFB Publisher

A new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report on America's Diverse Family Farms provides some interesting insights on who's producing our nation's food, fiber and fuel.

Keep in mind USDA defines a "farm" as "any place that, during a given year, produced and sold (or normally would have produced or sold) at least \$1,000 of agricultural products" in Gross Cash Farm Income.

Using this definition, USDA counted 2,010,663 total farms in the report. If you do the math, one single farm produces food and fiber for 165 people.

Nearly all of the farms are family operations. Surprised? Ninety eight percent of all farms are classified as family enterprises. So much for the cries of a faceless, corporate agriculture.

The report drills down even further. It says 89% of farms are defined as small farms. These smaller farms tend to be less reliant upon farm income for their living. Small farms operate 48% of the land while accounting for 20% of the value of production.

The remaining 11% of farms are considered mid-sized and large-scale farms. They operate on 52% of the land and account for 80% of production. These farms tend to be comprised of full-time farm families earning their living from the farm.

Americans are blessed with the abundance of what these farms produce. Americans spend less than 5% of average per capita income on food at home - the lowest in the world, according to Farm Policy Facts. We are blessed indeed.

...Courthouse Proceedings

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"The county originally paid nearly \$40,000 to build our courthouse," says Jerry Bearden, the Mason County judge of nearly two decades and a Central Texas Electric Cooperative member. "We're looking at a projected \$21 million to rebuild it."

More than half that amount had been earmarked by June. As part of its Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program, the Texas Historical Commission in 2020 awarded Mason County a \$4.1 million restoration grant, Bearden says. Some funds had already gone toward architectural work, leaving \$3.7 million for rebuilding. Additionally, the Texas Legislature allocated \$6 million for the courthouse, and insurance money from the Texas Association of Counties could contribute up to \$12.7 million. For its part, Mason County will be responsible for more than \$3.3 million.

Providing those funds is the mission of Friends of the Courthouse, a nonprofit founded in April 2021. Contributions may be made via the group's website and three local banks. This spring the organization will host a benefit concert and live auction on the courthouse square.

"Raising enough money will be a marathon, not a sprint," says Curtis Donaldson, board vice president and vice president of lending and business development at the Commercial Bank. "We'll also be applying for private grants and hosting more fundraisers."

Structural engineers examined the courthouse's surviving walls and second-level floor soon after the fire. Their analysis found the century-old bones to be structurally sound for use in rebuilding. From there, demolition crews cleaned up debris and hauled off hazardous materials. CPM Texas, which oversaw the 1990s restoration of the Texas Capitol, was hired to manage the reconstruction project.

"We're hoping to have construction complete by March 2023," says Bearden, who's been officing with county staff in a nearby annex. "It's real hard to understand why this happened to our courthouse."

What happened was a suspected arsonist allegedly first set fire to a family member's house that night. Then he allegedly broke into the courthouse through the north doors, and on the second floor, it's believed he poured gasoline in the courtroom and offices of the district judge and adult probation officer. Nicholas Miller of Mason was caught the next day after a chase south of Waco. Felony charges against him include two for arson.

Meanwhile, townspeople in Mason held fundraisers to help the family rebuild their burned home.

"We take care of each other here in Mason," Martin says. "They're a good family, and it's not their fault. It still hurts that we lost our courthouse. She was the heart of our town. But really, it's the people who are the true heart. We will rebuild and move on."

This article also appeared in the February 2022 issue of *Texas Co-op Power magazine* and online at texascoopower.com.

**Please Pray for our Communities,
Our County, Our State and Our Country**



And Don't Forget to Pray for Rain!