

ISSUE No. 22 ★ WINTER 2009
TRACTOR SUPPLY COMPANY
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From December to March, there are for many of us three gardens — the garden outdoors, the garden of pots and bowls in the house, and the garden of the mind's eye.

— Katherine S. White

OUT HERE

Living & Loving
the Good Life

Winter 2009

WINNERS OF THE
TOUGH JOBS,
TOUGH CLOTHES
CONTEST

FEED YOUR FAMILY WITH
\$5 DINNERS

A PIECE OF AMERICANA:
HANDMADE WOODEN
TOY TRAINS

New beginnings

Barn renovation was a labor of love, and 'worth every bit of it'

OUT HERE

★
Living & Loving the Good Life



Gadsby's Tavern Museum and Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum

The Late Harvest Ball, in Alexandria, Va., is held in the same ballroom where George Washington once danced.

LATE HARVEST BALL

Alexandria, Va., Nov. 21
Step back in time to 18th century Alexandria and celebrate the end of harvest season in the same ballroom where George Washington once danced. Features period costumes, live music, English country dances, dessert, and games. At Gadsby's Tavern Museum. Admission charged. For information, call 703-838-4242.

39TH ANNUAL THANKSGIVING POW-WOW

Atmore, Ala., Nov. 26-27
Witness this intertribal dance and drumming competition hosted by the Poarch Creek Indians, descendants of a segment of the original Creek Nation. More than 100 food and crafts vendors. At Poarch Creek Indian Reservation. Admission charged. For information, call 251-368-9136, ext. 2205.

WJ RANCH COWBOY CHRISTMAS

Fordyce, Neb., Nov. 28-29
Round up unique holiday gifts at this annual event, offering Western-themed crafts from more than 45 vendors, including metal art, pottery, baskets, quilts, and more. Also features horse-and-buggy rides, trick roping demonstrations, and pony rides. At WJ Ranch. Free. For information, call 402-357-2101.

Photo courtesy of Poarch Creek Indians



Here & There

Winter events are happening all over America. We can't list them all, but here are some you might find worth attending:



Photo courtesy of Mystic Seaport

Step back in time to Christmas Eve 1876 and visit a Civil War-era family as part of The Lantern Light Tours at Mystic Seaport, Conn.

LANTERN LIGHT TOURS

Mystic, Conn., Dec. 4-5, 11-12, 18-20, 26-27
It's Christmas Eve 1876 and the Gardner family has struggled each Christmas since the War Between the States, when their beloved Captain Gardner became missing in action. Follow your costumed tour guide through Greenmanville, a town hurt by war and healed by the hope and love of family. At Mystic Seaport. Admission charged. For information, call 860-572-5315.

TASTE OF CHOCOLATE EXTRAVAGANZA

Janesville, Wis., Dec. 4
Indulge in a chocolate buffet with drinks and dishes created by local eateries. After dinner, embark on a Winter Wonderland Walk through Rotary Botanical Gardens, as it premieres its annual holiday light show. At Rotary Botanical Gardens. Admission charged. For information, call 608-752-3885.

WASSAILING WEEKEND

Fly Creek, N.Y., Dec. 12-13
Sample and learn how to make wassail, the traditional holiday beverage; then mill around the store for that perfect holiday gift — pies, breads, spices, jams, fudge,

Colorful dress is part of the Poarch Creek Indians' annual Thanksgiving Pow-Wow in Atmore, Ala.

apple wine, and Fly Creek's famous cave-aged cheddar. At Fly Creek Cider Mill & Orchard. Free. For information, call 607-547-9692.

NEW YEAR'S EVE POPCORN POP-N-DROP

Marion, Ohio, Dec. 31-Jan. 1
Usher in 2010 at this family-friendly community event. Warm up around the fire with coffee, hot chocolate, and popcorn, enjoy a clown performance and watch the glowing popcorn ball drop at midnight. At Busby Park. Free. For information, call 740-244-9567.

HOMETOWN HOOTENANNY

Hennessey, Okla., Jan. 9
Visit with friends and tap your toes at this annual event, showcasing live performances by country, bluegrass, gospel, and folk musicians. At Town Auditorium. Admission charged. For information, call 405-853-6212.

SEELEY LAKE AREA WINTERFEST

Seeley Lake, Mont., Jan. 22-24
March in the torchlight parade, enter your creation in the snow sculpting competition, or take to the ice for a game of broomball. Don't miss the Christmas tree bonfire on Friday and Dessertfest on Saturday. Various locations in Seeley Lake. Admission charged. For information, call 406-677-2880.

FROM OUR READERS

From trash to treasure

Out Here reader Margie Younker, of Cambridge, Ohio, had to work harder than most to realize her dream of country living. But, as with most things that take some effort, it turned out to be worth it:

When I decided to move to rural southeast Ohio, well-meaning family and friends predicted that I would have difficulty adjusting to the quiet country life. I'll admit that it is a long drive to town, that our library is small and book selection is limited, and that road crews don't plow our dirt road immediately after a snowstorm.

But these do not trouble me. My trouble is trash!



BEFORE

My husband and I dreamed of owning property in wooded Guernsey County for years. But when our offer to purchase a parcel of land was accepted, I cried tears of grief, not joy. Our dreamland was covered with a layer of trash several feet thick. It would take years to clean it up!

More than 300 tires littered the front yard. The water that collects in discarded tires make them an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes. In 2003 mosquitoes were carry-

ing West Nile Virus across the United States, so we acted quickly.

Next, three trash-filled house trailers were hauled off to a junkyard. Using an ATV, we pulled couches, refrigerators, televisions, roofing materials, truck beds, bumpers, box springs — you name it, it was there — from the bushes and woods. Large metal objects were taken off to be recycled. Hillocks of plastic and glass were sorted and recycled. Mountains of unidentifiable debris were thrown into Dumpsters.

Four years later, we are finally witnessing the land's recovery. Ash, beech maple, pine, and oak trees are growing well. The front yard is now a meadow of tall grasses and wildflowers. Butterfly, deer, and woodchuck can be seen from the front porch.

Over the years our trash troubles led to a treasured tradition. Our neighborhood now recycles together. Folks who live on our country road sort and save their recyclable trash.

Once a month, my husband and I load our trailer with the neighbors' aluminum cans and metal objects that we are still cleaning out of the woods. We trade the trash for cash at a local recycling center and the money we earn is spent on an annual pig roast.

The neighborhood gets together to feast on potluck and locally raised pork. We play corn hole, horseshoes, and Texas Hold 'Em. The annual event ends with a blazing bonfire.

Recycling saves energy and resources. Recycling reduces waste in landfills. And recycling reunited a rural neighborhood!



AFTER

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OUT HERE

Your ideas are important to us, so if you'd like to recommend a story, send in a recipe, submit an event for Here & There, or tell us your opinion of this magazine, we'd like to hear it.

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Out Here Picks

Check out these books; you just might want to find a place for them on your bookshelves.



The Everything Kids' Horse Book

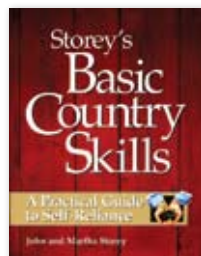
Kathi Wagner and Sheryl Racine
Adams Media

Available at all Tractor Supply stores

Ever hear someone say, “Ah, horsefeathers!” when they thought something was nonsense? Well, it’s not just a silly word; some horses really do have feathers. Horsefeathers are the big tufts of hair on the back of the legs of such horses as Clydesdales, Friesians, and Gypsy Vanners.

Interesting nuggets of information are all through *The Everything Kids' Horse Book*, along with games, puzzles, fun facts, and practical tips, such as, “Because horses do enjoy rolling around as soon as they are turned loose, it is always best to remove their saddles as soon as you are finished riding.”

This book for horse-crazy children presents information on the history of the horse, different breeds, working with horses, and horses of the past in a fun way that will keep them reading.



Storey's Basic Country Skills

John and Martha Storey
Storey Publishing

Available at all Tractor Supply stores and TractorSupply.com

Country living and self-reliance virtually go hand in hand. If a fence needs repair or you want a pond, chances are pretty good that you'll do it yourself.

Storey's Basic Country Skills has been around awhile, but it's a handy primer for those new to country living and do-it-yourselfers.

Interested in building a chicken coop? Feeding your livestock correctly? Repairing a screen? Setting up a productive homestead? This collection of articles from a variety of Storey Publishing's authors shows you how.

It's also filled with lots of extras to help you succeed, such as:

- Alleviate squeaking in hardwood floors by tapping a wood shim, covered with glue, between the subfloor and the joist.
- The best fertilizer for grapes is well-rotted manure, or compost made with large amounts of straw manure, applied as a mulch during the growing season.
- Even when there's plenty of water, chickens can become water-deprived if they don't like the taste. If you suspect your water supply contains a high concentration of minerals, have it tested.



YOUR GARDEN CAN WIN YOU \$500!

What's your secret to a successful vegetable garden? We're looking for tips, strategies, fertilizer formulas — whatever makes your garden a blooming success.

Successful Garden Contest Rules

1. Entries shall be no longer than 500 words and shall include your name, mailing address, and telephone number. 2. All entries must be postmarked by Dec.11, 2009. 3. A recent photo of you, preferably in your garden — high-resolution digital or film print — must accompany your entry. Prints must have your name, mailing address, and telephone number clearly printed on the back. If you want your photo returned, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Entries may be emailed to OutHere@TractorSupply.com (put "Successful Garden Contest" in the subject line) or mailed to: Successful Garden Contest, Out Here magazine, P.O. Box 7005, Brentwood, TN 37024-7005 4. Winners shall be determined by members of Tractor Supply Co.'s marketing staff or their designees. 5. Winners will receive a TSC gift card (1-First Place: \$500; 2-Runners Up: \$250/each) 6. The winners will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Out Here*. 7. Void where prohibited.

Producers Invited to Annual Grassfed Conference

Learn about managing a successful grass-fed operation at the annual Grazing America Conference Feb. 4-7, 2010 in Lexington, Ky.

“Participants will learn the latest in animal husbandry, production recommendations from new research on grass-fed meats, and marketing tips,” says Carrie Balkcom, executive director of the American Grassfed Association, the event host. They'll also be introduced to the association's new 100 percent grass-fed certification program.

“A large segment of today's consumers is looking to buy healthy, locally-raised meat products that are raised by local producers,” says Patricia Whisnant, association president. “The AGA's certification program ensures these consumers they are getting what they are asking for.”

Visit their site at americangrassfed.org or call 877-77GRASS for more information. ★

Feed wild birds responsibly this winter

By Peg Herring

Long, cold winter nights can be hard on wild birds. You can help them out by growing plants around your yard that offer seeds and habitat through the winter or by providing supplemental feed at a bird feeder.

If you choose to feed your backyard birds, please do it responsibly, urges Nancy Allen, Oregon State University Extension wildlife instructor.

- Once you start feeding wild birds, continue throughout the cold season.

- Locate your bird feeder in a sheltered area, out of the pounding rain and howling wind, so feed stays dry.

- Keep your feeder a safe distance — at least eight to 10 feet — from protective shrubbery where marauding house cats might lurk.

- Do not feed birds breads or salty, sugary snacks. Most human

food is unhealthy for birds.

- Clean feeders regularly to prevent diseases. Scrape bird droppings and moldy food off feeders and rinse or wipe clean with a disinfectant solution of one part vinegar to 20 parts water. Allow feeders to dry before refilling.

- Do not build feeders out of plywood, as some birds will eat the glue.

- Store the seed in a tight, waterproof container to keep it dry and out of reach of rodents.

Not all birdseed mixes will suit all wild birds. Some birds, including finches and grosbeaks, eat only seeds and nuts. Others, such as chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers, rely on both plant and animal sources of food.

Birds will often sort through mixed seed and discard what they do not want. Typically, less waste occurs if you provide only one type of food per feeder, rather than mixed birdseed. Experts recommend black oil sunflower seed as



iStockphoto

Once you start feeding wild birds, continue through the cold season, a bird expert recommends.

one of the best single seeds to attract a variety of birds to your feeder.

Insect-eating birds, such as woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches, will benefit from additional suet in the wintertime. ★

Peg Herring is with the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Take care of the birds around your place with a full line of seed and suet from your local Tractor Supply store.

Ancient 'trash' is arrowhead hunter's treasure

By Amber Stephens

When Gary Blessing walks the fallow fields of winter, he's not just stretching his legs — he's looking for pieces of history. For hours, Blessing walks in solitude, head down, litter stick in hand, searching for pieces of flint, coins, and even stone tools, some more than 3,000 years old.

His weekend quests for Native American artifacts have yielded some 1,000 arrowheads or spear points and more than 10,000 broken pieces of historic refuse. For Blessing and other artifact hunters, it is a hobby that requires little more than patience, good walking shoes, and a keen set of eyes.

“I started doing it about 11 years ago, but I never knew how to approach it, how to go about it,” he says.

A friend showed Blessing the tricks to finding field flint and other historic treasures. Soon the sales account representative was scouring thousands of acres in central Ohio, returning most days with a pocketful of history.

Blessing prefers to search freshly turned fields after

a rainfall, but only after knocking on doors and asking permission. “I've met so many nice people, just by doing that,” he says.

Blessing's best discovery, a panel bannerstone, which is a ceremonial piece about 8,000 years old, was awarded the “Best Find of the Year” in the Ohio Archaeology Society's 2006 bannerstone category. It was one of only three such stones found that year.

Blessing suggests searching high knolls, particularly those near creeks and streams where former inhabitants may have hunted game. “Keep your eyes open for anything and everything.”

After a decade, Blessing's hobby has yielded more than a dozen glass cases full of arrowheads, spear points, and other pieces that survived centuries intact, right below the soil's surface.

“There's a lot of arrowheads out there,” he says, “when you've got 14,500 years of Americans throwing their litter on the ground.” ★

New Beginnings

Barn renovation was a labor of love, and 'worth every bit of it'

By Carol Davis
Photography by Greg Latza



Mary Kay Wegener remembers the fun she had as a child in her family's large barn on their northern Iowa farm. "We played in it all winter," she says.

She and her siblings played basketball, raised rabbits, and whiled away the long days of childhood.

But the barn is gone now, a casualty of time, deterioration, and economy. "All that is left of the barn I grew up in is the cupola," she says.

So when she and her husband, Todd, bought their own farm, in Fenton, Iowa, which included a unique barn, Mary Kay knew that her own children would one day know the fun of such a place.

She would make sure of that.

TIME TAKES A TOLL

When Todd and Mary Kay moved onto the 15-acre farm with their growing family, they were able to see the property's potential. "The house was in horrible shape, but the outbuildings were in good shape," she says, listing them off: the barn, a calf shed, two machine sheds, a granary, and three hog houses.

It was the perfect place for their diversified farm. They custom feed hogs ("They're not ours; we just own the buildings."), run a pig manure-hauling business, farm 600 acres of corn and soybeans, raise cattle, and bale hay. "There's always plenty to do here," Mary Kay says, with a laugh.

When they bought the property and named it TMK Farm, the barn was in pretty fair condition, she says. "It had been painted, though some windows were boarded up," she says.

The barn that really needed renovation belonged to her husband's parents, whose farm is just 3 miles away. "I had read an article about the Iowa Barn Foundation and how it will give you a grant for half the cost of renovation," Mary Kay says.

Some renovated barns are turned into restaurants or unique shops, but the Wegeners' barn, like themselves, has a job to do.



Though Mary Kay and Todd Wegener received a partial grant to renovate their barn, they did much of the work themselves.

So she filled out paperwork for her in-laws to apply for the grant. "They were awarded a grant and fixed up the barn," she says. "It turned out really good; it's beautiful."

After Mary Kay and Todd had been on their farm for about eight years, age and weather started to take a toll on their barn. The barn needed repainting, the windows were in bad shape, the cupola was leaning, and the roof of wooden shaker shingles was looking shabby.

It was time to act, she recalls. "We decided that if we didn't do something now, it would get uglier and uglier ... and we'd eventually have to get rid of it," she says.

So she turned to the place that assisted her in-laws years earlier and was awarded a grant with the Iowa Barn Foundation.

A local construction company performed the restoration. They replaced the shaker shingles with tin. "The shingles just fly off in windstorms," Mary Kay says. "My in-laws have to have shingles put on twice a year."

All deteriorating windows and doors were replaced. Rotted wood was exchanged for new. The cupola



In a time when most old barns are being knocked down, young Cole Wegener, 10, will get to grow up with one, thanks to his parents and the Iowa Barn Foundation.

that sat atop the barn was rebuilt. And they painted the entire structure themselves.

Cost to renovate was \$19,000, of which the Iowa Barn Foundation paid half. By accepting the grant, the Wegeners agreed to include their refurbished barn on the foundation's barn tour for several years.

The Wegeners primarily use the renovated barn for feed storage. "The kids used to take care of bucket calves for a neighbor, and they still have 4-H calves, but those moved to the calf shed so they don't use the barn anymore," she explains. "But all the hay for the cows and calves is still in the barn."

Restoring the barn — now decorated with a barn quilt painted by her sister — was a labor of love, and worth every bit of it, Mary Kay says.

"These places are just disappearing," she says. "No one wants to put effort or time or money to fix them up because it's easier to tear them down."

CONNECTION TO THE PAST

There's a reason why the Wegeners and others like them find old barns

to be something special.

"The barn is a tangible connection to this country's agrarian history," says Jim Lindberg, of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "It was primarily a nation of farmers until the turn of the 20th century. That's continued to be such an important part of our national identity, and the barn is a physical symbol of that."

The National Trust recognized that too, particularly after witnessing the 1980s farm foreclosure crisis and its destructive impact to America's agricultural heritage.

"We developed a response to that concern, which became BARN AGAIN," he says. BARN AGAIN encourages and assists in barn preservation for agricultural use, and publicly acknowledges those, such as the Wegeners, who follow suit.

"While it's wonderful when people turn an old barn into a restaurant or residence or recreation center, that's great," he says, "but we believe if you want to save historic barns in any quantity, you have to keep them in use in agriculture, serving agriculture."

So just how did this revered symbol of American agriculture find itself in need of saving?

"The reality is that over the last several generations, especially in the early 20th century, farms started getting bigger and number of farmers declined," Lindberg says.

At one time, about 6.5 million farms existed in the United States; now, they number 2 million, Lindberg says. "There was somewhere around 4 million barns that might have been associated with barns no longer in existence, which means there were more barns than there were farmers or ranchers to use them."

Specialization also impacted the barn population, Lindberg says. "Most farms had some kind of livestock, but now many don't," he says. "They don't have animals; just specialty crops, and livestock are what barns were built for."



The Wegener family uses the renovated barn primarily for hay and feed storage for cows and calves.

There is good news, however.

"We do think the trends are going both ways," he notes. "Specialization is continuing, but with the new movement toward smaller farm operations, people are not farming full time, but they've got an older barn and love it and want to use it.

They're seeing more use of older barns for sustainable and organic farms. "The barn is kind of a universal space, a warehouse in some ways," Lindberg says. "People are finding clever ways to use that space."

GETTING A COUNT

The number of lost barns has never been precisely identified because nobody ever kept track.

That, however, is changing.

"For the first time ever, the 2007 version of the agricultural census includes a question, 'Do you have a barn built before 1960?' That'll tell us where older barns are," Lindberg says. "We'll have that data in the next year or so through the USDA and that's going to be fascinating. That'll be a baseline to see in future censuses how the data changes."

One thing is for sure at the TMK Farm: their barn is here to stay — for the farm, for herself, and for her children.

"They would miss it," Mary Kay says, "if it were gone." ★

Out Here editor Carol Davis would settle for a new barn on her acreage.

Daughter Mallary, 12, gets to have fun in the family barn year 'round, just like her mother enjoyed during her childhood.



INTERESTED IN OLD BARNs?

Visit TractorSupply.com/OutHere for these stories:

- When Barron "Boots" and Robin Hetherington started to plan a renovation of their antiquated, decaying Pennsylvania barn, some advised her to "toss a match on it and burn it down." On the contrary, it's now an integral part of B&R Farm where it's used to pack tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and other vegetables from their large farm.
- After restoring barns for others, Clare Koenigsknecht, 63, of Fowler, Mich., bought and restored one for himself — the very one he played in as a child.
- Find out more about BARN AGAIN and its efforts to keep old barns working in agriculture.

Tractor Supply's customers are a hard-working, resilient bunch, that's for sure.

When we asked about your toughest day for the Tough Jobs, Tough Clothes contest, you told us of getting caught in wild weather; losing livestock to predators or vehicle accidents; working long days that would exhaust most people; dirty jobs; and resuming life after unfortunate incidents.

But despite the challenges of living out here, your love for your rural lifestyle was clear in every single entry.

Our top winner, Laura Ashworth of Orange, Texas, will receive a \$500 Tractor Supply Gift Card to outfit her family in our new C.E. Schmidt Fit for Her and Outerwear for Kids clothing lines.

Runners-up, Sally Harris of Fenton, Mich., and Sandee Farrell Blalock of Millville, Calif., each will receive a \$250 Tractor Supply Gift Card for C.E. Schmidt clothing.



Laura Ashworth, Orange, Texas

TOUGH JOBS, TOUGH CLOTHES ★ CONTEST RESULTS ★

Despite difficult days, our winners treasure living out here

Hurricane can't wash away their determination

Our toughest day happened almost exactly a year ago when Hurricane Ike came ashore and nearly wiped out our place.

Nothing was left unscathed. What wasn't mangled and ruined was blown or washed away, in some cases, never to be found again. Out buildings, barns, shelters, fences, all of our equipment, and even our home was on the "critically injured" list.

I walked around in circles not sure where we should start. We now had no house to live in, most of the basic things we needed, such as clothing, etc., were ruined. Everything we needed for our animals — even some of our animals themselves — was gone. We were lucky to have fresh water for them. The one round bale of hay that was left unscathed would not last long, and with the grass ruined from the storm surge, it was all they had to eat.

It was discouraging to see what we had worked so hard to build be ruined and wasted. What made things worse was the equipment that we needed more than ever now was ruined also. It was kind of like having our hands tied. We knew we had a huge job ahead of us.

What was our toughest day at the ranch would have turned into our toughest weeks or months if not for thoughtfulness and generosity of our family, neighbors, friends, and even complete strangers. I can't imagine trying to overcome this without them.

The neighbors came over as soon as they could after the storm passed and began helping clear out some of the mess. Family came over to help, some driving several hundred miles. Friends brought their equipment over and gave their time helping us and we didn't even ask them to. People from all around donated feed, hay, and supplies and had them shipped in for the animals in the area. With a lot of hard work and determination, we have come back to life.

I think our "tough day" has made us a lot tougher.

Thanks to all the help and thoughtfulness of others, the horrible experience of that day has become an even more distant memory with each passing day and serves to make us even more grateful of what we have. ★



Sally Harris, Fenton, Mich.

Using a hand post-hole digger, I dug three 4-foot-deep holes. I moved the 12-foot, 10-foot, and 8-foot pressure treated 4x4s, installed the post tops, painted each, and tipped each of them into their hole.

I mixed and poured a 50-pound bag of cement for each, then using a corner level, made sure each was standing straight. The next step was to place a ladder in the middle of the large yew shrubs surrounding the area, so I could reach the top of each post to install the copper tubing I ran in a circular pattern from the tops to the ground. That was a day of hard work!

No, maybe even more difficult was the day I ripped out the old

Passing the reins to the next generation

It ended up to be the toughest day of my life, both emotionally and physically. My father, a cattleman through and through, died of cancer in March 2008. My toughest day was the day of his funeral.

It was a cold and rainy day at the end of March. I gathered up enough strength to stand in front of nearly 200 people who loved my father and delivered his eulogy, followed up by a slide show I created to the music of *Should've Been a Cowboy*, illustrating what my father loved best — working his cattle ranch with his family.

When we got home to the ranch later that evening, my mom and brother went out to check the cattle, while I helped my grandmother get some dinner. I knew something was wrong when I saw my brother speeding down the driveway on Dad's 4-wheeler, run into the garage, and come out with the "come-a-long." As I watched him through the window, he held it up and nodded to me. I knew what it meant — a

heifer couldn't deliver her calf, and we'd have to pull it.

Still in my nice clothes from the funeral, I didn't have time to drive several miles down to my house to change. I pulled on a pair of my dad's Wranglers, one of his work shirts, and his rain gear. Luckily, I had my own rubber boots in the truck.

The thunderclouds were threatening, and by the time I got out to the corral, it had started to rain. I saw that the heifer was my son's, and despite my brother's efforts, she wasn't going to be able to have the calf. Emotionally drained, I went back to the house and called the vet.

Our neighbor and vet, Dr. Randy Presleigh, and his daughter, Dr. Jennifer Presleigh, also a veterinarian, arrived in a hurry. The heifer was worn out at this point. We made the decision to do a Caesarean section right there in the corral. Another neighbor helped to put down clean straw while the vets hooked up lights and equipment. By this time, it was



Sandee Farrell Blalock, Millville, Calif.

dark and pouring rain. My brother and I held lights while the vets went to work getting the calf and then stitching up the heifer — a process that took several hours.

Out there in the rainstorm the night of our father's funeral — doing a job he had done himself many times — we felt the symbolic passing of the reins to the next generation as we cleaned up the heifer and put her in the barn for the night, then walked wet, cold and tired back to the house. ★

Perseverance and love for her property gets the work done

As I try to decide which day was the hardest workday for me as a single woman living alone on my small farm, it's a difficult task.

Was it the day I finally finished the installation of the drain pipe around half of the diameter of my horse riding ring? Maybe.

Or could it be the day I installed the support for my rampant honeysuckle vine?

horse stall materials that were in the barn and rebuilt a new stall.

However, the day I was driving my tractor and decided to blaze a new trail through the woods on my property so I could enjoy the woods each morning with my two Golden Retrievers on my Gator was a day of hard work, too. This involved attaching the large brush hog, then finding my way through the woods in the path of least resistance.

Of course, all of these tasks are especially difficult for me because my movement is complicated due to the result of surgery on my left leg for cancer over 25 years ago and extensive radiation therapy treatment. At this point, the leg is non-functional, in a full leg brace requiring crutches. My dogs, horses, and cats don't care one bit about my disability. If I tumble when working on the farm, they wait patiently for me to get back up, hoping I am able to do so before it is time for dinner! The disability is an inconvenience, but it will never be allowed to become a barrier to anything I want to accomplish.

I have spent my entire adult life working toward having a farm of my own, where I can enjoy the beauty of living in the woods, the incredible personalities of Arabian horses, and the devotion and dedication I receive from Golden Retrievers and a variety of cats.

I am thankful every moment that I am home, dressed in my comfortable farm clothes and surrounded by the beauty of nature and the love of animals. ★



Tradition of Trains

Handcrafted wooden railcars still appeal to youngsters

By David Frey

Photography by Benjamin Krain

ers who take pride in the product. Then mix in the enduring romance of trains. Young people reared on Thomas the Tank Engine and the Little Engine That Could carry on an age-old tradition, one that still resonates with their parents and grandparents who haven't forgotten the favorite toy train of their childhood.

"I honestly believe there's a little bit of kid in all of us, and all kids like trains," Whitworth says.

Add to that the element that wood provides that plastic can't duplicate. Whitworth uses mostly hardwoods such as maple and birch, painted with multiple layers of paint to give them their bright colors.

"There's something warm about wood," Whitworth says. "People just kind of nuzzle up to it."



It used to be just the neighborhood kids who flocked to Mike Whitworth's garage for his homemade wooden trains. Each week, he turned out another batch and gave them away by the dozen. Now, kids all over the country reach out for his toys, and his Whittle Shortline Railroad toy company has become the little business that could.

From its factory in New London, Mo., workers handcraft each train, fashioned down to the doors and windows after real working trains. The Whittle Shortline Railroad is the country's top wooden train maker, and the only one that makes realistic wooden trains.

"By sheer, dumb luck we stumbled upon something that kids really like," Whitworth says.

He's modest, though. Add to a little luck Whitworth's close attention to detail and uncompromising commitment to quality. Each of the toys looks like the real thing, and each one is made by hand by work-

Marilyn Richey, one of about two dozen employees of the Whittle Shortline Railroad, carefully applies decals to the handmade and painted toy trains.

KEEPING UP WITH DEMAND

Whitworth got his start in the toy train business back in 1996. His wife had bought him a miter saw, hoping she might get some crown molding out of the bargain. She didn't. The saw stayed in the boxes for two years until she threatened to get rid of it.

"I wasn't a carpenter," Whitworth says. "I'm still not. But being a guy, I couldn't let any power tool go."

Whitworth pressed it into service making toy boxcars. Then came cabooses. Then came steam engines. Kids showed up every Saturday morning looking for his trains, which he designed — and still designs — to fit the popular Thomas the Tank Engine tracks. Soon, Amtrak caught on and wondered if the guy who makes the trains for the kids in the neigh-



Mike Whitworth started Whittle Shortline Railroad in 1996 and is currently the only manufacturer of handmade wooden toy trains in the United States.

borhood could make replicas of its trains, too.

"That's how the company started," Whitworth says. "As soon as the Amtrak cars made it out to the open market, we had everybody and their brother call."

By 1999, the Whittle Shortline Railroad had outgrown its garage and moved into a historic gothic railroad hotel. Then it outgrew that space. Then it outgrew the next space. Now, it's in a 55,000-square-foot factory with a workforce of about two dozen people turning out toy trains for 500 stores across the country. The workforce is set to more than double as it gears up for a new line of wooden puzzles.

"We have a very difficult time keeping up with demand,"

Young customers have fun trying out Whittle Shortline Railroad's merchandise in the manufacturer's company store. The realistic-looking toys are fashioned after real working trains.

Whitworth says. "It's because we're handmade. You can't just turn the machine on and make more of them."

The Whittle Shortline has expanded to build several lines of Amtrak trains, plus freight trains such as Santa Fe and Burlington Northern. It makes a Little Engine That Could train for youngsters smitten with Thomas. It makes tractor-trailers, too, plus school buses, tractors, and postal vehicles.

What has been good for Thomas has been good for the Whittle Shortline. The Thomas craze has helped fuel its sales, Whitworth says. What's been bad for Thomas also has helped.

In 2007, when tons of Thomas toys were recalled after lead paint was found in some Chinese-made toys, including Thomas, Whitworth's sales tripled.

"I kind of thought after that it would die off, but it hasn't," he says. "The consumer in our marketplace

is still very much aware and wants to know where their toys come from. Our toys all come from beautiful downtown New London. We don't have the capacity to make a bazillion toys because they're each handmade."

Whittle's buyers also come looking for something that's hard to find anywhere else: a toy that's lovingly crafted out of wood and keeps alive a love of trains that goes back generations.

"There is nothing like watching a train rumble by," he says. "Even the youngest kids know what a caboose is. Although we don't have a lot of the real ones around anymore, I think it is just a part of Americana. The railroads built this country."

And now — if on a slightly smaller scale — Whitworth's company builds the railroads. ★

David Frey writes in Glenwood Springs, Colo.



Hero dog

Rescued dog became the rescuer

By Hannah Wolfson
Photography by Leita Cowart

The Brentlinger family didn't really mean to get another dog. After all, they already had a grumpy old beagle, two cats, and two horses, plus chickens, goats, a rabbit, and hamsters.

But one look at the scruffy, scrawny pound puppy and Karen Brentlinger knew she had no choice.

"She just looked pitiful, but there was something in her eyes that won me," Brentlinger says. "I don't know; was there a premonition that she was going to save my son's life one day, this sweet little creature?"

The eventful day began about a year after the Schnauzer mix joined the family. Stephen, 11 at the time, decided on this warm winter day to watch a neighbor clear brush with a bulldozer. Although he had been warned to steer clear of the bulldozing area, he had built a secret fort near there and was worried that the big machinery would destroy his hard work.

Stephen hid behind a large stump that suddenly toppled onto him. He screamed as the weight of the stump and its roots crushed his legs and chest, but the bulldozer operator couldn't hear him over the noise of the machinery.

But Cookie, who was up the hill near the Brentlinger home, heard.

As the dozer pulled back for another push, she dashed toward Stephen and scrambled up a pile of debris many times her size, where she stared down the machine and barked her little head off.

The driver recognized Cookie as the neighbor's dog and stopped so he wouldn't run her over. Then he heard the boy's cries.

"Just seconds and he would have been covered and we never would have known," Brentlinger says. "Still, when I think how close we came to losing him ..." her voice trails off.

It took two hours for paramedics to dig Stephen out, and another 90 minutes to drive to the regional hospital in Columbus, Ga. After surgery — the first of six — Stephen learned how Cookie saved him.

"I thought, thank goodness we got that dog from the pound," Stephen, now 12, says. When he came home from the hospital three months later, he gave her a pile of dog treats, a ride in his wheelchair, and "about 17 hugs."

The normally rambunctious dog seemed to know he



Stephen Brentlinger owes his life to his dog, Cookie, who stopped a bulldozer operator from inadvertently burying him in debris.

needed special care. She cuddled gently in his lap, rather than the usual boisterous mauling, and slept with him on the pullout loveseat that became his bed.

"It seems whenever you would find Cookie, she would be with Stephen," Brentlinger says.

Months later, Stephen's walking again, despite a scare early on that he might lose his broken leg. He hopes to soon be running around the family's 9 acres and wants to return to karate, where he has a black belt.

He'll have at least one more surgery first, to take the hardware out of his leg. While he's recuperating, he'll have the opportunity to read the newest novel by a local children's author who befriended Stephen and used a version of his story in her latest book.

But for now, he's content to wrestle on the living room floor with Cookie, who sometimes wears a T-shirt that reads "Pretty Princess."

She's that — and much more — to Stephen, his mother says. "She's his hero." ★

Hannah Wolfson writes from Birmingham, Ala.

Thanks to his no-frost box, innovative Bob Hensler no longer has to trek to the barn to thaw frozen water pipes.

By Michael Nolan
Photography by Jeff Frazier

The call came in not long after Bob Hensler had settled into his warm bed on his farm in Dickson, Tenn.

"Dad, the pipes to the barn are frozen again," his daughter Kim announced, "and I've got to have water for the horses."

Soon Hensler was braving the jarring single-digit January night to investigate. The hydrant and the utility hose that ran to the underground connection were frozen. The line of PVC pipe, which ran between structures, was safely buried below the frost line.

After hauling buckets of water with his daughter to the barn 160 feet away, he fired up the propane torch and set about the delicate task of thawing the hydrant and pipes. With the crisis managed, he was finally able to return to his warm bed. The next day he woke ready to conquer the recurring annoyance.

Fortunately, Hensler is one of those creative types who likes a challenge. Retired after a long career in radio, which took he and his wife Sonja all over the country, he now enjoys staying home and puttering in his cozy workshop behind the house. After devoting three days to "just fiddling with it," he came up with the basic design he christened the "no-frost box."

He began by replacing the freeze-prone rubber hose with schedule 40 PVC. Next he encased the hydrant, connector pipes, and a utility hose in a box measuring 50 inches high x 24 inches wide x 36 inches deep. The structure is made of 7/16 OSB board (sometimes called waferboard) and ripped-down 2x4s.

Elementary electrical skills were



★ NO-FROST BOX ★

Innovative contraption stops freezing pipes cold

required to install a fixture for a 60-watt light bulb, which provides enough heat to sufficiently warm the air inside the box, even on the coldest Tennessee nights.

It had to be easily accessible, so he built a series of entry points. The lid slides open. One side panel sits on a grooved lip held closed by simple wooden latches and can be easily removed to grab the utility hose coiled inside. The light fixture is mounted on a hinged door for simple bulb replacement.

To monitor its operation, Hensler added a Plexiglas window with a view of the hose, hydrant, and pipes. A smaller "porthole" allows him to check the temperature of the thermometer inside. He painted his creation battleship gray because "it came out looking like a submarine."

Since completing his original no-frost box, he has added a few enhancements. He now uses a timer to conserve electricity. He also lined the interior sides and lid with inch-thick Styrofoam panels to provide additional insulation.

"A few bucks, a few hours of sawing and hammering, and you might find your water problem

solved," offers Hensler as a word of encouragement.

If that's not incentive enough, consider this: no more middle-of-the-night roustings to thaw those annoying pipes. ★

Michael Nolan is a Nashville writer.

SEE MORE

Enjoy more photos of Bob Hensler's no-frost box by visiting TractorSupply.com/OutHere

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Out Here readers are a self-reliant bunch. What innovation have you come up with to solve a problem or make something run more smoothly?

Tell us about it. We just might feature you and your idea in a future issue of *Out Here*.



Bonsai Gardening

Create a horticultural work of art

By Jodi Torpey

Photography by Lori Duff

When Michael Levin first started peddling his bonsai trees in Boston's Harvard Square during the 1980s, most people were unfamiliar with this horticultural art form. "What are those things?" they would ask. "Are those alive?"

Despite the size, bonsai is not a species of dwarf tree, but rather the art of growing trees in miniature. The Chinese originated bonsai more than 2,000 years ago, but it was the Japanese who popularized this method of cultivating a "tree in a pot."

"There is definitely a magic in bonsai," Levin says. "People are either struck by it like a lightning bolt or not."

Levin knows what it feels like to be inspired by the sight of finely-sculpted miniature trees. After seeing his first bonsai, he flew to California

looking for someone to teach him this ancient art. He studied with a group of Japanese-American bonsai masters he calls the founding fathers of American bonsai.

Levin purchased their collection of specimen bonsai and grew it into Bonsai West, one of the oldest bonsai nurseries in the country. Located in Littleton, Mass., Bonsai West is an arboretum, museum, gallery, and retail center. The 100-year-old trees in the outdoor display garden attract bonsai lovers from around the world.

'CREATING A WORK OF ART'

Although bonsai involves aspects of horticulture, it's actually closer to sculpture as an art form, Levin says. Each bonsai is grown in a specific style and shaped by careful pruning and wiring throughout the life of the tree. The goal is to

reproduce the look of an aged tree on a miniature scale.

"You're creating a work of art that will be with you for many years and may even outlive you," Levin says. "It depends on your interaction to keep it healthy."

Bonsai is a popular hobby for anyone who enjoys growing and nurturing plants or those who want to build a stronger connection to nature and the outdoor world. Students in Levin's bonsai classes range from information technology specialists to blue-collar workers.

It's inexpensive to get started at the hobbyist level. All you need are a suitable plant, soil, bonsai pot, and scissors.

Most who fail with their first bonsai do so because they select an outdoor tree, such as a juniper, and try to grow it indoors. That's why beginners should first decide if they want to grow their bonsai indoors or outdoors and then select their tree, Levin advises.

Outdoor growing is the traditional bonsai method, as is selecting a tree that does well in the local climate. Evergreen bonsai such as

Bonsai gardening refers to the ancient practice of growing and shaping a woody plant in a shallow pot to imitate an older tree in the wild.

pine, spruce, rhododendron, hemlock, and cedar or deciduous trees such as maple, elm, beech, birch, and wisteria grow best outdoors. Tropical plant species, such as ficus, schefflera, portulacaria, cherry, and serissa, are grown indoors.

Trees for bonsai can be collected from one's own property, dug from a neighbor's yard, found in the wild, or purchased from a nursery.

Keep in mind that not all bonsai are small and that some grow to several feet tall, Levin says. "You can start small with a seedling and grow it larger or you can start with a large tree and grow smaller," he says.

There are five classic bonsai shapes that come from nature and mimic how a tree looks in its natural growing conditions. These include formal upright, informal upright, slanting, semi-cascading, or cascading. Within these basic shapes are categories referred to as broom, windswept, driftwood, exposed root, or literati.

Because bonsai includes all of the tree's components, from its surface roots to its leaves, the pot or container should complement the

Michael Levin, owner of Bonsai West, frequently checks on the growth and health of trees in the garden, which boasts, "the most extensive collection of specimen Bonsai outside of Japan." Bonsai was popularized in Japan.



tree in its size, shape, color, and texture for the most effective presentation.

PROVIDE CONSISTENT CARE

Just like any living tree, bonsai require 5-6 hours of direct sunlight each day, whether they're grown inside or out. Proper watering is essential to the tree's health and the soil should never be allowed to completely dry out.

Unlike houseplants that need little care, bonsai require almost daily interaction, even if it's just a few minutes at a time. This quiet observation allows for the tree's growth patterns to be studied to determine how the branches should be trimmed or wired into new positions.

Bonsai can be grown outside

in cold weather regions, if protected through the winter in a cold frame or other sheltered area, and if watered to prevent dehydration.

After more than 25 years of studying, teaching, and tending bonsai, Levin advises beginners to find a beautiful tree and then learn to care for it.

At its essence, he says, "Bonsai is about loving a tree." ★

Jodi Torpey is a Colorado garden writer who is especially drawn to the look of a bonsai in the rugged windswept style.

READY FOR BONSAI?

Learn more by visiting Bonsai West's website at bonsaiwest.com and check out these websites and books:

absbonsai.org — The American Bonsai Society's website.

bonsaiprimer.com — A beginner's guide by a bonsai enthusiast.

Bonsai (101 Essential Tips) by Harry Tomlinson. One of Europe's leading bonsai artists and instructors breaks down key information on cultivating bonsai into 101 easy-to-understand tips.

Bonsai Survival Manual: Tree-by-Tree Guide to Buying, Maintaining, and Problem Solving by Colin Lewis. Provides the comprehensive information every new bonsai gardener needs, from selecting plants to assessing plant health.



\$5 Dinners

The first ingredient to tasty, budget-friendly meals: shop the sales

By Noble Sprayberry
Photography by John Johnston

Spend no more than \$5 whipping up a dinner hearty enough for four adults. Sound impossible? Well, not for Erin Chase.

She puts healthy \$5 dinners on her family's table nightly, thanks to a dash of planning, a sprinkle of coupons, a pinch of creativity, and equal measures of determination and strategic shopping.

Chase, though, was not always a mom-on-a-mission among the aisles of the grocery near her Dayton, Ohio, home. "When I shopped, I would go in and get what we needed, but I wouldn't pay attention to what was on sale and or how you could match what was on sale with a coupon," she says.

That all changed in the summer of 2008, when spiking gas prices forced Chase, 32, and her husband, Steve, 34, to take a hard look at the monthly budget for a family that includes Ryan, 4, and Charlie, 2. A third child is due in November.

"We were either going to start running in the red, or we needed to cut something else," she says. "I decided to see what I could save at the grocery store."

The weekly food bill tumbled from \$150 to about \$60. She learned from tips on food blogs, and eventually



started her own blog: 5dollar Dinners.com.

Recipes such as Aunt D's Garden Fresh Pasta Dinner or Crockpot Chicken and Cornbread Dumplings include details about the price of each ingredient.

The blog's success led to a book due to hit the shelves early next year: *The \$5 Dinner Mom Cookbook: 200 Recipes for Quick, Delicious, and Nourishing Meals That Are Easy on the Budget and a Snap to Prepare*.

SHOP THE SALES

Any budget-minded shopper can get results in the kitchen. It begins, Chase says, with a simple idea. "I think you could easily shave \$20 a week by just consciously paying attention to what goes into the shopping cart," she says.

She starts by searching for sales in the ads of the Sunday newspaper, particularly on proteins such as meat or chicken that are often the priciest items on a menu.

Price alone never puts an item in Chase's shopping cart, though. Each purchase must fit her family's needs and menus.

She also emphasizes use of the freezer by paying attention to manager's specials or price reductions on

Erin Chase's money-saving strategy includes clipping coupons, which she obtains from her local newspaper and online. She files her coupons in a binder so she can easily find them.



When Erin comes up with new tips and strategies for creating \$5 dinners, she shares them with readers of her blog, 5dollar Dinners.com which has garnered recognition from Food Network star Rachael Ray and other bloggers.

meat nearing its "sell by" date. The meat is either cooked immediately or frozen.

"I plan meals by the month and I plan based on what's in the freezer," she says. "And when I go to the freezer, I know I'm getting something that was purchased at its cheapest. If you go into a grocery and just buy to fit a menu plan, you won't get the sales price."

With a growing family, she also depends on short-term planning to make it through a busy day.

"While the kids are having their morning snack," she says, "I'm looking ahead to lunch, because walking up to the fridge and trying to figure out what we're going to eat is my worst nightmare."

She tries to make meals requiring no more than 30 minutes to prepare, often using slow-cooking crock-pot recipes. The goal is enough food to feed four adults, which means leftovers while the children are small.

"We'll probably adjust the budget as they get older," she says. "I'll do my best to keep dinner at \$5, but I will not deny them what they need."

Balanced, healthy meals also matter. Chase buys fresh seasonal

vegetables at good prices and avoids processed foods. "In the fall, it seems as if we eat squash all of the time," she says.

Her strategy also includes coupons, which she files in a binder for easy retrieval. Websites such as smartsources.com and coupons.com allow visitors to search for printable coupons.

"It took longer when I started, maybe 45 minutes a week at first, but now it only takes maybe 20 minutes," she says.

Chase controls her grocery spending by paying in cash. "Even with a debit card, you can go over budget," she says. "I total up what I think it will cost, and then I give myself an extra \$10 for things that I happen upon in the store that weren't advertised."

Another favorite money-saving tip is to plan a weekly vegetarian dish to eliminate the expense of meat.

Chase keeps all grocery receipts, and calculates how much she spends per ingredient on each meal. She often marks the price on the packaging for items with a long shelf life such as rice or beans. If she buys a whole chicken but uses only a quarter of it in a recipe,

she divides the total expense by the amount used per dish.

"I pretty much can do the math in my head now," she says.

And every week she will check her menu plan and ask the same question: "I will think about what each meal will cost and what I can do to make it cheaper." ★

Noble Sprayberry is a Phoenix-based writer.



Erin eventually will stretch her \$5 dinners even further with the arrival of a new baby, who joins her and husband Steve and sons Ryan and Charlie.

MAKE YOUR OWN \$5 MEALS

Read recipes from Erin Chase's forthcoming book, *The \$5 Dinner Mom Cookbook: 200 Recipes for Quick, Delicious, and Nourishing Meals That Are Easy on the Budget and a Snap to Prepare* by visiting TractorSupply.com/OutHere



Grandpa's Manhattan Clam Chowder

Photography by Mark Mosrie

Food styling by Whitney Kemp

Find comfort from the increasingly frigid temperatures with these soups and stews from *Out Here* readers:

GRANDPA'S MANHATTAN CLAM CHOWDER

Marlene Langenbahn, of Cobleskill, N.Y., serves up this tasty Manhattan chowder when the weather begins to turn chilly.

- 2½ cups diced cooked bacon
- ¾ cup diced fried onions
- 5 cups warm water
- ¾ cup raw carrots
- ¾ cup diced raw celery
- ½ cup diced raw red peppers
- 1 cup diced raw potatoes
- ¾ tsp. ground thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 large can diced Italian-style tomatoes with garlic and oregano
- 3 cans (6½-oz.) chopped clams
- 1¼ cups clam juice from canned clams
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

- ① Fry bacon until crisp. Dice and set aside. Save 2 Tbsp. bacon fat to cook onions in.
- ② Fry onions halfway in the bacon fat. Set aside.
- ③ Put warm water in large soup pot and add carrots, celery, peppers, and potatoes.
- ④ Add thyme and bay leaves.
- ⑤ Boil on low heat for 20 minutes.
- ⑥ Add tomatoes, clams, and clam

juice to the soup pot and simmer for 30 minutes or until veggies are cooked.

- ⑦ Remove from heat and add bacon and onions about 10 minutes before serving.
- ⑧ Season with salt and pepper to taste.

TORTELLINI SOUP

Aimee Davis, of Louisville, Tenn., serves this hearty soup to warm the insides of her 4-year-old son, Robert Moore Davis.

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 or 5 garlic cloves, crushed
- 5 or 6 Italian sausages (hot, mild, or sweet)
- 1 tsp. oregano
- 1 tsp. rosemary
- ½ tsp. basil
- 2 cans stewed tomatoes
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 1 bag (about 12 oz.) fresh pre-washed spinach, chopped
- 1 package fresh or frozen tortellini
- Parmesan cheese, to taste
- Salt and pepper, to taste

- ① Brown onion, garlic, and sausage in olive oil. Drain oil.
- ② Add oregano, rosemary, basil, tomatoes, and chicken broth. Simmer for up to 1 hour.
- ③ Just before you serve, turn off heat, add tortellini and spinach, and cover for about 8-10 minutes.
- ④ Garnish with Parmesan cheese.
- ⑤ Season with salt and pepper.

Favorite Family Recipes

The best recipes are those passed along as family favorites

CREAMY BROCCOLI SOUP

"This soup, made with Minute Rice and fresh broccoli, is wholesome, flavorful, and easy," writes Denise Patterson, of Bainbridge, Ohio.

"Serve with breadsticks and a side salad, and you have a complete meal."

- 2 medium carrots, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 Tbsp. oil
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups water
- 2 small bunches fresh broccoli, trimmed, cut into 3-inch lengths (about 4½ cups)
- ½ cup Minute Rice, uncooked
- 2 cups milk
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste



Tortellini Soup



Creamy Broccoli Soup and Herb Dinner Scones

- ① Stir carrots, onion, and celery in hot oil in large saucepan on medium-high heat for about 3 minutes.
- ② Add chicken broth and water; stir. Bring to boil.
- ③ Stir in broccoli and rice and reduce heat to medium-low; simmer 10-15 minutes or until vegetables are tender, stirring frequently.
- ④ Add mixture in batches, to blender or food processor; cover. Blend until slightly pureed.
- ⑤ Return soup to pot. Add milk and cheese; continue to cook until heated through, stirring occasionally.

Note: Add 4½ cups frozen peas for additional color.

HERB DINNER SCONES

Evvie Marshall, of Helotes, Texas, is just 18, but she enjoys baking, and herb dinner scones are one of her favorites. "It has been requested for when we have company or we need a bread thing quickly," she writes.

- 3 cups of flour
- 1 Tbsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt (optional)

- 2 or more Tbsp. dried or fresh herbs (any of your choice)
- 6-8 Tbsp. butter, to taste
- 1¼ to 1½ cup of buttermilk, yogurt, or sour cream

- ① In a medium-sized bowl, combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and herbs.
- ② Cut in butter using a pastry cutter or your hands. Mix in milk product of your choice, stirring until dough holds together.
- ③ Transfer dough to a floured surface and flatten into a circle. Cut the dough into triangles, or use a cookie cutter.
- ④ Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
- ⑤ Place cut-out dough in a pan and freeze for 30 minutes (Note: you don't have to freeze the dough, but it helps it to rise better).
- ⑥ Take out of freezer and place them right into the oven. Bake 10-15 minutes.

TEXAS-STYLE BARBECUE STEW

Roy and Kathy Cockfield, of Hemingway, S.C., came up with this recipe after a trip to Texas where they ate barbecue stew.

- 1 lb. cooked boneless beef roast, cut into chunks
- 1 lb. cooked boneless chicken breasts, cut into chunks
- 1 lb. cooked boneless pork, cut into chunks
- 1 lb. Hillshire smoked sausage, cut into rings
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 pint of your favorite liquid barbecue sauce
- 4-8 large potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 can whole kernel corn
- 1 can string beans

- ① Put all meats in a large pot, add enough water to cover the meat.
- ② Add onion, and cook until the meat is done.
- ③ Add barbecue sauce and potatoes. Add enough water to cover potatoes.

- ④ Cook 15-18 minutes or until potatoes are tender.
- ⑤ Add corn and string beans and simmer for about 5 minutes, until corn and string beans are hot.

From the *Out Here* test kitchen: If the stew is not as soupy as you'd like, add 2 cups water or broth. Consider adding other veggies such as tomatoes or peas. ★



Texas-style Barbecue Stew



Send us your recipes — if we publish it, you'll get a \$50 Tractor Supply Gift Card!

.....

If we feature your recipe in a future issue of *Out Here*, we'll send you a \$50 Tractor Supply Gift Card!

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IRONCLAD ROOTS

Family foundry is nation's only producer of cast-iron cookware

By Carol Davis

Photography by Robert Smith



Henry Lodge

Henry Lodge's summer job in the packaging and shipping department of Lodge Cast Iron Cookware had been just that — a summer job. The young college graduate was looking forward to becoming a teacher; not working at the foundry started by his great-grandfather.

A telephone call changed all that.

His cousin, Bob Kellermann, who worked at the family business and is now CEO, called to say that the shipping clerk had left and they needed someone familiar with the job to step in immediately.

"I came with every intent of them hiring a new shipping clerk," he says. "It never happened. I never left."

That was 37 years ago. These days, Lodge is president of the 113-year-old South Pittsburg, Tenn., company that is the nation's only manufacturer of cast-iron cookware.

"I liked working here. I liked the people. And I liked walking through the foundry and watching the iron ore go in one end and skillets come out the other," he says. "You can't go many places and see things created literally in front of your eyes."

Indeed, each of Lodge Cast Iron's more than 120 varieties of cookware begins from a mixture of pig iron, recycled cast iron, and scrap steel that is liquefied in a 2,800-degree electric induction furnace.

The molten iron is tested for impurities that could weaken the iron and then injected into sand molds — an ancient, yet still-effective method for casting iron.

Newly-cast skillets, pots, woks, and griddles ride down a vibrating conveyor to shake off burnt sand, and then undergo a methodical process where they're scoured and cleaned with blocks of scrap iron, tiny steel shot,

Just 90 minutes ago, this freshly seasoned cookwear was in liquid form. Here, it's cooled and ready for packaging.



Cast-iron woks ride the conveyor en route to their third and final cleaning. The seasoning process turns cast iron black.

and, finally, a river rock bath.

After drying, cooking oil is applied by spray guns and baked, which is the final step in the 90-minute process. This step, called seasoning, adds a barrier between food and the pan, creating a natural non-stick surface. Cooking with cast iron continues to enhance the non-stick capability, so the more you use it, the better it becomes.

And despite the cooking options available — stainless steel, aluminum, nonstick surfaces — cast iron remains a necessity in most American kitchens. It's even experienced a renaissance in the last few years for a number of reasons, says Mark Kelly, company spokesperson.

- A tough economy. Home cooking has increased by about 18 percent as people save money by staying home.
- An anti-nonstick revolution. Nonstick coatings used in some cookware could be hazardous.
- Television's Food Network. Celebrity cooks such as Paula Deen and Emeril Lagasse have increased the popularity of cast-iron cookware by using it on their shows.

And it will last forever if it's properly maintained, says Kelly, who still uses a skillet and Dutch oven that were given to his grandmother in 1918 as wedding gifts.

"As our CEO says, not everyone can inherit heirloom cast iron," Kelly says, "but now they can buy a piece of history." ★

Out Here editor Carol Davis has become a cast-iron convert.

READY TO TRY CAST-IRON COOKING?

You can find Lodge cast-iron cookware at your local Tractor Supply store and at TractorSupply.com

SEE THE FOUNDRY

See more of Lodge Cast Iron's foundry by visiting TractorSupply.com/OutHere

Create a windbreak

Proper vegetation can keep your property from blowing away

When those winds come sweeping down the plains — or across your pastures or around your house — they can cause erosion, damage buildings, create dust, and generally make things miserable.

A windbreak — rows of trees and shrubs strategically located on your property — can slow, direct, or even block damaging winds, says Paige Mitchell Buck, spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) office in Champaign, Ill.

Landowners interested in establishing a windbreak should spend ample time planning and preparing now, far in advance of spring planting, Mitchell Buck says.

The area you want to protect will determine the location, size, and design of your windbreak, Mitchell Buck explains. For example:

- Orientation. A windbreak must be aligned perpendicular to damaging winds.
- Height. Generally, the wind-

break's mature height multiplied by 10 equals the length of the area to be protected.

- Length. Doubling the length of your windbreak will increase the protected area by four times. Always extend the length 25-50 feet beyond the area you plan to protect.

- Width. This depends on your region and the trees that grow there. Three rows of evergreens and one row of shrubs, for example, work best in Illinois.

- Shape. The path of deflected wind and size of the area you want to protect will determine the windbreak's shape.

- Spacing. The proper spacing between each mature tree varies with each species.

Soil quality is crucial, so plan now to get it tested. Your local cooperative extension service or NRCS office can suggest soil amendments to best suit the windbreak's trees.

They can also help you choose the best trees for your particular situation, taking into consideration:

- Height. Will the tree crowd anything when it is fully grown?
- Canopy spread. How wide will the tree grow?
- Deciduous or coniferous? Will the tree lose its leaves each winter?
- Form or shape. A columnar

By Sarah Beth Aubrey

Illustration by Tom Milner

tree grows in less space.

- Growth rate. How long will it take your tree to reach full height?

- Soil, sun, and moisture requirements. Are water resources adequate to keep trees hydrated, particularly during the first year after planting?

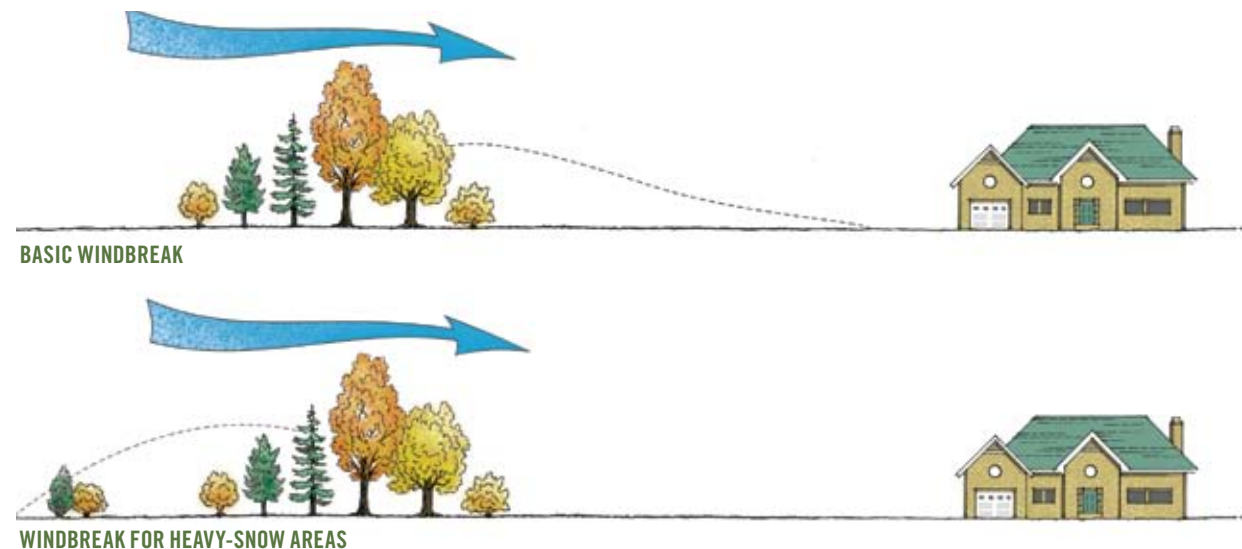
Other factors can affect the health of your trees — salt and pollutants from the road, for example — so heartier varieties may be in order, Mitchell Buck advises.

You also want to begin researching where to obtain quality plants.

That cost may be less than you think. Organizations such as the National Arbor Day Foundation may sell trees for a reduced price. NRCS offers a cost-sharing program to help rural residents who meet the criteria obtain trees.

"Financial assistance helps cover the costs of putting good conservation — like windbreaks — on the land. That cost share can pay for anywhere from 50 to 75 percent of the cost of the windbreak," Mitchell Buck says. "For folks who fit the bill, it can be a relatively small investment on their part that pays off big in the end." ★

Sarah Beth Aubrey is an Indiana writer.





Caleb Spencer carefully trims cattle hooves and closely checks for infections and other problems.

abscess. He'll clean and treat the infected area with an antibiotic, and wrap the hoof with an adhesive bandage.

If the hoof isn't healed when Spencer returns in six months, he'll repeat the treatment then.

He'll finish up by carefully trimming the cow's remaining hooves. "You want to shape the cow's feet so she's balanced and comfortable," Spencer says.

When he's finished, Spencer unties the feet, flips a lever to turn the table, and sets the cow back on its feet. He unbelts her, guides her out of his gate/panel system, and leads in the next cow.

Spencer can trim 50 or 60 cows a day by himself with this setup.

"The most difficult part is getting the farmer to trust me to work on his cows, because of my age," Spencer says. "I tell them, 'I'll trim five of your lamest cows for free. If you're not happy, I'll pack up my stuff.' I've never had anybody tell me to go."

Spencer enjoys the benefits his job offers — working in the country, being around animals — but it has its challenges, too. He gets kicked; sometimes his fingers are numb from tendinitis; and his lanky body understands backaches.

But his passion has not faded. "For now," he says, "I don't see myself doing anything else."★

Dee Goerge is a Minnesota-based freelance writer.

LEARN MORE ON HOOF CARE

Good hoof care contributes to your cattle's overall health. Find out more about hoof care and trimming, and see more of Caleb Spencer's work by visiting TractorSupply.com/OutHere

Hoof Doctor



By Dee Goerge
Photography by Jean Sowders

Trimmer's goal is to keep cows 'balanced and comfortable'

for a travel trailer that took him around the country, including Utah, where he and a six-man crew trimmed 1,600 cows in nine days.

A year later, with used equipment, Spencer was ready to venture out on his own.

Now, three years later and amid bawling cows, Spencer's hands and clothes are coated after just a handful of cows have been trimmed. As messy as it is, Spencer's equipment makes the process much easier — for him and the cow.

Each cow is led into Spencer's panel system and belted to his lay-over table — a hydraulic unit that allows him to safely secure the animal. He tilts the table to move the cow off her feet, then secures each foot individually with a rope attached to the table.

Spencer works carefully to keep each cow calm and safe. Once on the table, most cows tend to calm down.

After cleaning and trimming a hoof with a titanium carbide bit trimmer, he might discover an

Ask Caleb Spencer what his day was like and he'll likely tell you, as he peels off clothing soiled with cow dung and inspects sunburned arms, that he got kicked in the ribs.

But these minor nuisances are all in a day's work for Spencer, 23, who trims cows' hooves for a living.

"I love cows, and I'm really surprised at the number of the people who raise cattle who don't know what trimmers should and shouldn't do," says Spencer, who raised 4-H dairy cows as a youngster.

He began his career at 19 by creating his own yearlong apprentice program with the Hoof Trimmers Association and working with the professionals.

He left his Franklin, Ind., home

HORSE HYDRATION

By Heather Smith Thomas

Horses generally drink less water in cold weather than in summer, partly because they're not sweating and needing to replace that fluid. They also don't feel like drinking when they're cold — especially if the water is cold, chilling them more.

They need a constant and dependable supply of water, however, for good health and proper digestive function. If contents of the gut become too dry, food movement is hindered and the horse becomes impacted.

To ensure that horses drink enough in cold weather, check water sources daily and make sure they don't freeze over. Horses that drink at a pond, stream, or unheated water trough may need ice broken twice daily. Make sure the horse is actually drinking. He may

be afraid to step on ice or down a slippery bank to get to the water. Though he may drink cold water from a stream or trough on a sunny day, he may not drink much during the night or a cold, stormy day. It's better to provide him with warmer water, if you can.

A heated water tank in which water never freezes is ideal. If you use a tub or bucket, put insulating material around it to keep the water warmer longer. An old tire filled with straw works well for this. The tub or bucket can be pulled up out of the tire daily to dump out ice or cold water before adding fresh water. There are also commercial bucket holders made of insulating material, similar to a Thermos jug, to keep water warmer longer.

Mature horses need at least 6 to 10 gallons of fresh water per day.

One advantage of a tub or buck-

Keep your horse's digestive system healthy by warming his drinking water in winter

et is that you know exactly how much water your horse is drinking. If he consumes less than usual, you are immediately aware there's a problem and can do something to correct it — such as encouraging him to drink more water by offering lukewarm (instead of cold) water — before he suffers impaction.

Signs of impaction include poor appetite and less water consumption. The horse consumes less because his stomach and intestines are already "full." There's not enough fluid to keep food moving through the tract and it builds up. Manure will be scanty; the horse defecates less often and the "piles" are smaller than usual. Fecal balls are small and firm, and may be coated with mucus. If the situation is not relieved, the horse becomes more constipated and may show signs of mild colic. He may be dull, paw, look around at his flank or lie down a lot, and if pain worsens he may roll.

Serious impaction requires veterinary assistance, giving fluid and laxatives (such as mineral oil) via stomach tube. This can be prevented, however, by making sure your horse drinks adequate water during cold weather — and warming the water is the best way to entice him to keep drinking. ★

Heather Smith Thomas, of Salmon, Idaho, has authored several books on horses and other livestock.

KEEP IT FLOWING

Find de-icers, tank heaters, and livestock waterers at your local Tractor Supply.



Iris Folding

Spirals add texture and appeal to craft projects

By Sarah Decker

Photography by Mark Schiefelbein

Iris folding, a paper craft technique in which you fold and arrange strips of colored paper to form a picture or design, is fast becoming popular in the United States.

The “swirling paper” technique can be used for several kinds of projects: greeting cards, scrapbook pages, and framed art.

This craft, using a simple paper folding technique, is done using a template, cardstock, and folded paper strips. Folded strips of paper are layered in a spiral pattern behind an aperture opening of a piece of cardstock, resembling the iris of an eye or camera — hence, the name “iris folding.”

Some of the most popular papers used are colored envelopes, gift wrap, origami paper, scrapbooking sheets, and holographic paper.

This Christmas tree project is perfect for making hand-crafted Christmas cards. Use varied festive holiday-themed papers to create one-of-a-kind cards for family and friends.



SUPPLIES:

4½ x 6½-inch piece of white 65# card stock

4¾ x 6¾ inch coordinating piece of paper

7 x 10-inch piece of 65# card stock (folded in half to 5x7 card)

3 colors of paper (scrapbooking paper, colored envelopes, or wrapping paper), Cardstock for the star and tree stand

A very small piece of holographic paper (you can find holographic gift bags & wrapping paper in most hobby stores)

Pencil

Scissors or paper cutter

Tape

Double-sided clear tape

Masking tape

Glue

A corner punch of your choice (I used a holly punch)

① Start by preparing your cardstock for iris folding. You will need to make two copies of the template. One will be used to make your aperture cutout from cardstock. The other will be your template, guiding you how to layer your paper strips.

② Take one of your photocopies and cut out the numbered section, cutting from the inside of the template only. You are creating a stencil, or pattern, used for tracing the design onto cardstock.

③ Center it on a 4½ x 6½-inch piece of cardstock, trace the pattern, and then cut it out from inside the line.



④ Layer the cardstock cutout on top of the second template (you should see the full numbered template through the aperture opening of the cardstock) and secure to both the template and the surface on which you're working with masking tape. You are now ready for iris folding.

⑤ Take the three colors of papers you intend to use and cut three strips of each, ¾ inch wide. You may need to trim them as you are working. Fold a hem along one side of each strip, folding toward the back side. Separate each color, labeling them A, B, and C.



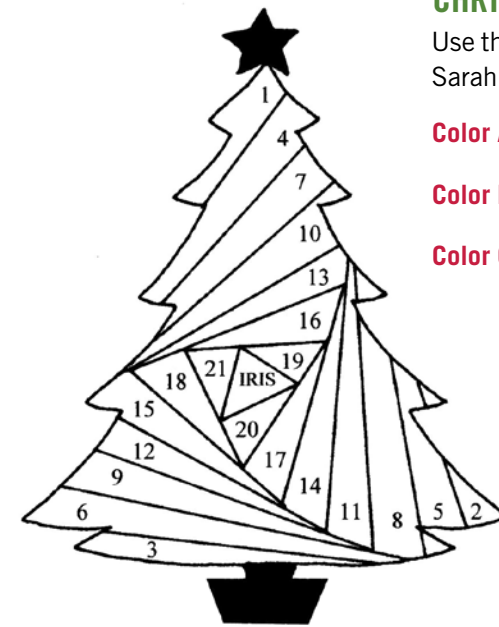
⇨ At least a ¼-inch border around your card must be free of any tape or paper strips. Keep this in mind when layering them.



⑥ Start by taking a strip of Color A and line the folded edge up to the inside edge of No. 1 on the template. The front of the strip will be facing down. Trim the strip to be a little wider than the aperture opening, and tape both ends to the cardstock. Once you have completed number 1, continue to 2 using Color B, and 3 using Color C.



⑦ You have now completed one round of your template. Repeat these steps (4, 5, 6, etc.) until all of the numbers have been layered. Always remember that you are layering in numerical order. To help keep you on track, I have listed all the numbers that make up each color.



CHRISTMAS TREE TEMPLATE

Use this free template, courtesy of Sarah Decker, to try iris folding.

Color A: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19

Color B: 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20

Color C: 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21

⑧ When you are done, turn it over to see the final results of the iris fold. At this time, tape a piece of holographic paper over the back side of the “iris” opening and punch your decorative corners.



Your card will fit in a 5¼ x 7¼-inch envelope or a 5 x 7 picture frame. ★

Sarah Decker is the author of The Simplicity of Iris Folding.

TRY ANOTHER PATTERN!

If you enjoyed iris folding, visit TractorSupply.com/OutHere for another project that Sarah Decker designed exclusively for *Out Here* readers and learn where to get her book and more of her free templates.