

# Tennessee CONNECTIONS

FALL 2023 | CUSTOMER FOCUSED ⚡ COMMUNITY DRIVEN

## A Unique Brotherhood

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Erwin Utilities  
Lineworkers Dawson  
Gambrell, left, and  
Luke Blackmon  
prepare for their first  
Tennessee Valley  
Lineman Rodeo.  
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# Watch for Back-to-Schoolers

On average, 26 children in the United States are killed every year while getting on or off a school bus, or while waiting at the bus stop. To avoid such tragedies, drivers are reminded to:

**Carefully back out of driveways.** Watch for children walking to the bus stop.

**Slow down.** Watch for children walking in the street and playing or congregating near bus stops—especially in the early morning hours when it may still be dark.

**Be alert.** Children arriving late for the bus may dart into the street without looking.

**Obey the law.** Yellow flashing lights on a bus mean motorists should slow down and prepare to stop. Red flashing lights mean motorists must stop their cars and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the extended stop sign is withdrawn and the bus starts moving again. Unless there is a median, oncoming traffic also must stop. ■



## A Unique Brotherhood

Tennessee Valley Lineman Rodeo offers more than competition

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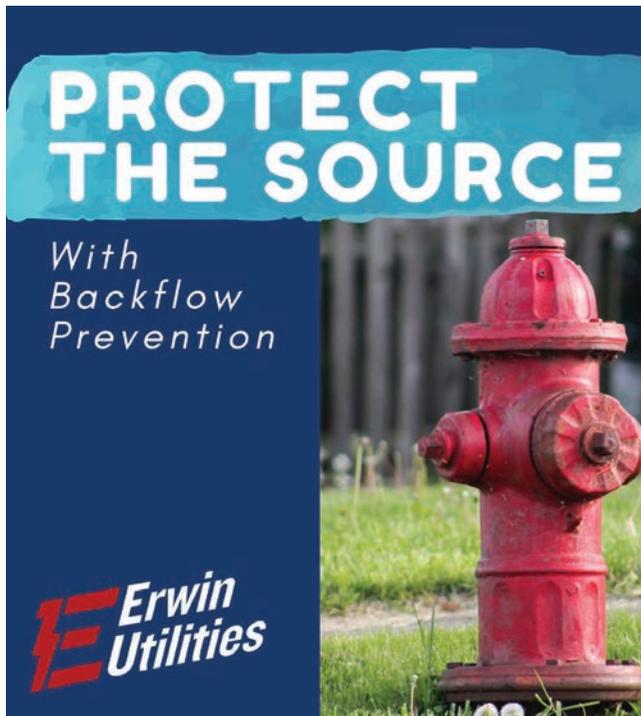
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A connected garden hose submerged in a source of contamination—such as residential pool water—could cause contaminated water to be pulled back into the public water supply, creating a backflow. Backflow could occur if a water main line breaks or a nearby fire hydrant is used. Please don't leave hoses submerged in water.



# Beware: Energy Vampires

Ghosts, goblins and ghouls: Beware! A creature unlike any other is lurking in the shadows this spooky season, and it's looking to bite you where it hurts the most.

Not your neck—your wallet.

Energy vampires are on the prowl and want to suck the energy dry from your home. These vamps aren't like their blood-sucking counterparts. They're not pale, they're fangless and they don't just come out at night. No, energy vampires hide in plain sight. They are anything from your phone charger to the coffee pot.

In simple terms, energy vampires are appliances and other devices that draw power from electrical outlets, even when turned off or idle. These energy suckers can increase your home's energy use and power bills. According to the Department of Energy, these costs can quickly reach \$100 to \$200 a year for the average household.

Because these are no ordinary vampires, a wooden stake and a bit of garlic simply won't do. You must think like an energy vampire to slay one.

- **Unplug.** Hitting an energy vampire where it draws its power is one way to put it back in its coffin. Unplug devices in your home when you're not using them.
- **Sleep mode.** A good nap is great for everyone, including not-in-use electronics. Sleep mode is commonly found in electronics such as computers.
- **Power strips.** Plug common energy suckers into a power strip so it's easier to turn them off when not in use. Smart power strips offer an extra slaying advantage by automatically powering off when devices are not in use.
- **Buy smart.** To put a final nail in the energy vampire's coffin, buy Energy Star-certified products when it's time for an upgrade. ■

**Find more fang-tastic ways to save energy by visiting [energyright.com](http://energyright.com).**



## Fall in Love With Unicoi County

Nestled on the border of Tennessee and North Carolina, Unicoi County offers nature enthusiasts a wide range of adventures year-round. Unicoi County boasts Rocky Fork State Park, more than 50 miles of Appalachian Trail, eight waterfalls, Unaka Mountain Bike Park and the Nolichucky River.

Fall foliage typically peaks in the county around October. One popular spot to enjoy breathtaking views is appropriately named the Beauty Spot. The Interstate Highway 26 Westbound Scenic Overlook also yields excellent glimpses of the vibrant colors. This location includes one of Tennessee's colorblind viewfinders. ■

## GRANDMOTHER MOON'S FRESH APPLE CAKE

### BATTER:

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 3 eggs
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 2 cups self-rising flour
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 cups (or more) diced apples
- ½ cup chopped nuts

Heat oven to 350 F.

Cream the vegetable oil, eggs and sugar, then add the remaining ingredients. Pour into a 13-by-9-inch baking dish, and bake for 45 minutes. If more apples are added, increase the baking time.

### ICING:

- ½ cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup milk

Heat the butter and sugar over low heat. Add milk, then let the mixture come to a full boil. Remove from heat, and pour over the cake. ■



ADOBE STOCK IMAGE BY MISS



SPOTLIGHT

# A Unique Brotherhood

Tennessee Valley  
Lineman Rodeo offers  
more than competition

By Cheré Coen



CDE Lightband teammates  
Jeremy Waters, left, and  
Tyler Snead compete in the  
Crossarm Changeout.

PHOTOS BY APRIL HALL AND  
ALAYNA MIXON

## The clock starts when the two lineworkers enter the circle.

At the judge's signal, one of them gears up with tools, climbs a designated pole to retrieve a downed co-worker portrayed by a manikin and lowers the figure to the waiting partner on the ground, who begins CPR. The entire process must be complete in less than four minutes.

Then there are fine details: which items to include, whether a team member can assist the lineworker making the climb, and which knots can be used. The rules differ every year.



Bryson Brand watches his father, CDE Lightband Lineworker Jason Brand, compete in one of the journeyman events.

All competitors participate in the event known as the Hurtman Rescue, which imitates a real-life rescue of a utility worker and takes place at every Tennessee Valley Lineman Rodeo, an annual competition for electric lineworkers in the Tennessee Valley. About 40 utilities from across the valley gather for the two-day event that tests individuals and teams in a host of job-related challenges.

Competitive categories range according to years on the job, from apprentices

to individual journeymen and seniors ages 45 and older. Three-person teams compete as well, although participants must be journeymen.

Although many participants enjoy the competitive aspect of the rodeo and the chance to meet others in the field, the competition was established to reward excellence in industry skill and knowledge. Still, the bottom line is safety, says Keith Cutshall, CDE Lightband chief operating officer and rodeo vice president.

"The rodeo is for the guys to be trained to do their jobs safely," he says. "It's all about safety."

Take the Hurtman Rescue. Those four minutes may mean the difference between life or death for an injured employee. Rescues are an essential skill taught at the apprenticeship level, and the rodeo allows new workers to practice that skill on a competitive level.

"The idea is to put these guys in the moment of, 'What if this guy is hurt?' and you have to rescue him," says Jake Bailey, team captain at Dickson Electric System in Dickson, Tennessee. "We want the

apprentices to be in a high-pressure situation so they're more comfortable in real situations."

### A Growing Event

The rodeo began in 1998 as a competition for utility members of the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association, Tennessee Job Training and Safety and/or Tennessee Valley Authority. Competitors from Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, as well as affiliate members

outside of the valley, participate in the rodeo.

When the rodeo first started, it was on a small scale, and the awards banquet was held under a tent. Today, the event has grown exponentially to require a large outdoor space for the competition and an event center for the banquet.

"It has grown and really progressed since then," Keith says.

This year's rodeo was at Clarksville's expansive Liberty Park, with an awards ceremony at the Winfield Dunn Center at Austin Peay State University.

The rodeo board plans the rodeo's location three to four years in advance. Many details are taken into consideration, such as adequate event space, hotel accommodations, and banquet location. The goal is to have the competition in early June, when the weather is a little more mild, allowing families to attend when their children are out of school, says Lindsey Pease, rodeo coordinator and CDE Lightband communications manager.

"Typically, it's held in Tennessee because it's central for everyone," Lindsey says. "But we have hosted it in Huntsville, Alabama, and Bowling Green, Kentucky. We have plans to reach other locations in the future."

Similar rodeos are held throughout the country. Florida and Texas have their own, and the International Lineman Rodeo takes place in Kansas. The American Public Power Association hosts a national rodeo next year in Lafayette, Louisiana.

The Tennessee Valley Lineman Rodeo has grown to be one of the largest in the country, Keith says, adding that its growth "is a good problem to have."

### How It Works

In January, the board finalizes the competition's events, sets rules and assigns chief judges. By March, the website for registration opens, and individuals and teams have the months leading up to June to prepare.

It's not all about strength and endurance.

“You can train your body, but the list doesn’t come out for a month or a month and a half before,” Jake says.

The rodeo website goes into detail about what to expect and allows a forum for questions.

“You only have a certain amount of time to learn the events,” Jake says. “Each year is different. Although an event focused on a specific job may seem universal to all utility companies, each year’s events require specific tools or ways to perform the job.”

Companies more familiar with these details may have an edge, he adds, so it’s important to learn specifics and prepare.

Dickson’s Jesse Sears, for example, competed in the journeyman’s Dead Lift event, where he had to lift two 25-pound spools of copper to a roller at the top of a 45-foot pole. Specifications included details about the rope, a Sherman Reilly stringing dolly and how far the drive hook should be from the ground. Jesse placed second in the event.

Everything counts—from the items completed in the regulated events to the timing. Jake’s team received several 100 scores, but one score of 98 moved his overall tally from seventh place to 20th.

Dickson Electric System’s Elizabeth Kuhns says it’s as much mental strength as physical agility.

“If you make one mistake early on and get it in your head, it can throw you off,” she says.

The combination of physical and mental demands draw returning participants. Luke Blackmon, a journeyman lineworker with Erwin Utilities, is already looking forward to the next rodeo.

“I would definitely, without a doubt, participate again,” he says. “I’d go right now if they had it tomorrow.”

For Sevier Electric’s Ronnie Sellars, who’s about to turn 50 and has participated in the rodeo for more than a decade, the event is a chance to practice climbs.

“A lot of us older guys, we don’t climb as much as we used to,” Ronnie says. “It helps me stay in practice.”



Dickson Electric System Apprentice Lineman Brandon James, right, with event judge Michael Simmons, from Tennessee Job Training and Safety, talk during the Apprentice Slack Block Event. PHOTO COURTESY OF DICKSON ELECTRIC SYSTEM

### A Brotherhood

The Hurtman Rescue is always a crowd favorite because lineworkers race to the top and back, hustling for the best time, which was 65 seconds this year.

“A lot of people can do it in a minute and a half,” Elizabeth says. “It’s pretty impressive to see them do it.”

The event also reminds participants and audience members alike of the dangers of utility work. That sober reality was apparent at the opening ceremonies. Lineworkers climbed poles to release the United States, Tennessee and CDE Lightband flags, then paused in staggered poses while the national anthem was performed by Sergeant first class Christine Permenter from 101st Airborne Division Air Assault Band from Fort Campbell. Situated before the procession of poles was a cross with flowers to mark those who have died on the job.

Ronnie finds the rodeo’s networking opportunities invaluable. Over the 12 years he’s competed, he has made friends in other utility companies and shared experiences.

“I get to hear how other utilities do things compared to how we do things,” he says.

Coming together to meet others in the field, network, develop or revisit safety procedures while competing in a friendly fashion is what it’s all about, Keith adds.

“It’s a great experience,” he says.

“Although you’re competing with others, it’s a brotherhood. You’re cheering the other utilities on. You want everyone to do good.”

“It’s even more fun when you get done,” Jake says with a laugh. “It’s a relief, and you can then enjoy watching other people at their events.”

Wrapping up the competition, rodeo competitors and families come together for the awards banquet, where they exchange memorabilia such as T-shirts and hats to commemorate their time at the rodeo.

“It really offers an opportunity to observe and admire a highly skilled trade that’s sometimes overlooked,” Elizabeth says. ■



First-time participants Luke Blackmon, left, and Dawson Gambrell, from Erwin Utilities, snap a selfie.



Family and friends support the lineworker competitors. PHOTO COURTESY OF TENNESSEE VALLEY PUBLIC POWER ASSOCIATION



CDE Lightband Apprentice Kenneth Hogan competes during the Hurtman Rescue Event.



Middle Tennessee Electric Apprentice Lineworker Dylan Parker celebrates a win for his utility at the awards banquet.

**ON THE WEB**  
[tnrodeo.com](http://tnrodeo.com)

**Next year's event:**  
 June 7-8  
 Chattanooga, Tennessee.

# Prioritize Emergency

Create peace of mind with an actionable plan

By Victoria Hampton

Be prepared. These two words of advice can make all the difference when facing severe weather and natural disasters.

While some severe weather events are seasonal, unpredictable conditions can cause natural disasters to strike any time of year. There is no better time than today to start planning for the next emergency in your community.

During National Preparedness Month, take steps to prepare for what Mother Nature has in store by creating an emergency plan.

Emergency plans should account for multiple emergency scenarios. The plan should be developed, discussed and shared with all members of your household.

Take these steps to prepare your emergency plan:

**Communicate.** Because your family or roommates may not be together when a disaster strikes, make sure everyone knows how to contact one another and where to reconnect.

Discuss the types of disasters that are possible in your area and the different precautions for each. For example, wildfires have different evacuation levels, from 1 to 3. Hurricanes are defined by severity categories. Make sure everyone knows recommendations for sheltering in place and evacuation based on the severity of the natural disaster or storm.

Talk about how your family would respond to different types of emergencies. Document the plan and share it with each person in the household. Ready.gov offers an easy family emergency communication plan that can be filled out and exported into a shareable PDF.

Expand your emergency plan to include neighbors. Talk about emergency resources or tasks you may be able to share, how to help neighbors who have disabilities or are elderly and how you will communicate with them during a disaster.

**Build an emergency kit.** A crucial part of creating an emergency plan is building an emergency kit. Emergency kits consist of basic

items your household may need in the event of a shelter-in-place or evacuation emergency. See a list of kit items on page 7.

While building your kit, consider the unique needs of each member of your household, such as medication, dietary restrictions, pet supplies and necessities for specific ages. Depending on the size of the household, an emergency kit may be one water-proof container or multiple bins.

If buying extra supplies for an emergency is not in the budget, start with what you already have at home. Collect items in one area to create a new storage spot. Use this nonperishable storage as an extension of your food pantry. Take and replace items after grocery shopping to avoid food waste, and keep the emergency kit stocked at all times. Consider adding additional, non-food items to your kit on a weekly or monthly basis, as finances allow. For emergency kit tasks listed in manageable weekly or monthly steps, search online for a disaster supplies and preparedness calendar.

Ensure the emergency kit is stored in a dry place that is easily accessible for shelter-in-place and evacuation emergencies, such as a garage or closet near the front door. If you leave home for work, make an emergency kit to keep in your vehicle or at your office. Keep in mind, sheltering in place may mean staying at work or a public place if you cannot safely return home.

**Sign up for alerts.** Finding up-to-date information during an emergency can be stressful. Set up access to emergency alerts beforehand to receive up-to-date information.

Check in with city or county offices of emergency management to sign up for emergency alerts. Signing up for these notifications allows emergency response agencies to text, call or email when a local emergency may require you to shelter in place or evacuate. Local emergency management may also have recommendations for additional alerts and online resources for the most common natural disasters in your area.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency mobile app offers alerts and resources before, during and after a disaster. Get severe



# Emergency Preparedness

weather alerts for your area, find local evacuation shelters and disaster recovery centers, save custom emergency information, and receive safety and preparedness reminders. The app is available in English and Spanish. Download for free in the Google and Apple App stores on your smartphone.

**Prepare for evacuation.** While it may seem unthinkable to have to leave home during severe weather, many kinds of disasters can lead to evacuation. Sometimes there is a day or two to prepare. Other times, a life-threatening situation leads to immediate departure from home.

Prepare evacuation plans by identifying several places to go in an emergency, such as a friend's house, nearby town or motel. Ask local emergency management about available shelter spaces, and include those options in your plans.

Choose a variety of locations in different directions. Some of your top choices may be affected by a storm or disaster.

For pets and livestock, identify places where they can be

temporarily housed. For small pets, check hotel and shelter policies or ask friends about options at their homes. For large animals, check with local fairgrounds for shelter policies during emergencies, and research additional livestock evacuation locations.

In case of immediate evacuation or shelter-in-place orders when away from home, make sure pets and livestock are microchipped or tagged to expedite reunification efforts post-disaster.

During storm season, keep your vehicle's gas tank as full as possible. Along with aiding in evacuation to a safer area, vehicles can be used as temporary shelters.

No one wants to deal with the stress and fear of a natural disaster. Yet having a plan for you and your family is the difference between a life-threatening situation and safely weathering the storm. ■

*Information for this article was sourced from the United States Department of Homeland Security. Visit [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) for free emergency planning resources.*

## Emergency Kit Checklist

An emergency kit is a collection of food, water and supplies that can sustain you and your family for multiple days. When building a kit, choose a waterproof container with a secure lid, such as a storage bin. An emergency kit could be one bin or several, depending on the number of people in your household.

This list is broken into basic items to start a kit and additional recommendations provided by the United States Department of Homeland Security.

At a minimum, your emergency kit should include the following items:

- Bottled water (1 gallon per person per day for several days).
- Nonperishable food.
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio and a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association weather radio with tone alert.
- Flashlight.
- First-aid kit.
- Extra batteries
- Whistle to signal for help.
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air.
- Plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter in place.
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation.
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities.
- Manual can opener.
- Local maps.
- Cellphone with chargers and a backup battery.

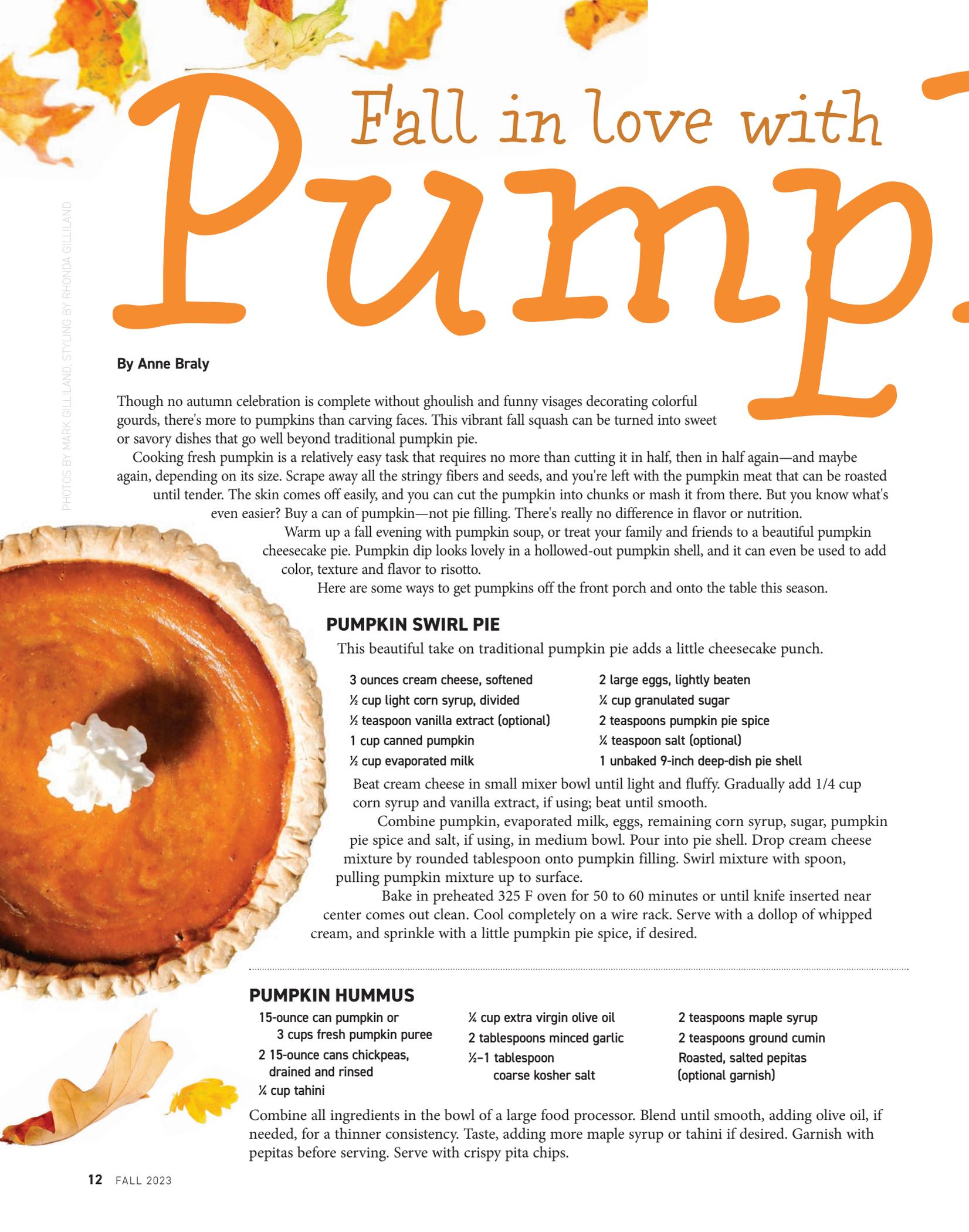
### PET CARE ITEMS

- Pet food and water.
- Proper identification.
- A carrier or portable kennel.
- Collar and leash.
- Food and water bowls.



**For additional recommended items to add to an emergency kit, visit [ready.gov/kit](https://www.ready.gov/kit).**





# F'all in love with Pumpkin

PHOTOS BY MARK GILLILAND, STYLING BY RHONDA GILLILAND

By Anne Braly

Though no autumn celebration is complete without ghoulish and funny visages decorating colorful gourds, there's more to pumpkins than carving faces. This vibrant fall squash can be turned into sweet or savory dishes that go well beyond traditional pumpkin pie.

Cooking fresh pumpkin is a relatively easy task that requires no more than cutting it in half, then in half again—and maybe again, depending on its size. Scrape away all the stringy fibers and seeds, and you're left with the pumpkin meat that can be roasted until tender. The skin comes off easily, and you can cut the pumpkin into chunks or mash it from there. But you know what's even easier? Buy a can of pumpkin—not pie filling. There's really no difference in flavor or nutrition.

Warm up a fall evening with pumpkin soup, or treat your family and friends to a beautiful pumpkin cheesecake pie. Pumpkin dip looks lovely in a hollowed-out pumpkin shell, and it can even be used to add color, texture and flavor to risotto.

Here are some ways to get pumpkins off the front porch and onto the table this season.



## PUMPKIN SWIRL PIE

This beautiful take on traditional pumpkin pie adds a little cheesecake punch.

- |                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 3 ounces cream cheese, softened       | 2 large eggs, lightly beaten         |
| ½ cup light corn syrup, divided       | ¼ cup granulated sugar               |
| ½ teaspoon vanilla extract (optional) | 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice        |
| 1 cup canned pumpkin                  | ¼ teaspoon salt (optional)           |
| ½ cup evaporated milk                 | 1 unbaked 9-inch deep-dish pie shell |

Beat cream cheese in small mixer bowl until light and fluffy. Gradually add 1/4 cup corn syrup and vanilla extract, if using; beat until smooth.

Combine pumpkin, evaporated milk, eggs, remaining corn syrup, sugar, pumpkin pie spice and salt, if using, in medium bowl. Pour into pie shell. Drop cream cheese mixture by rounded tablespoon onto pumpkin filling. Swirl mixture with spoon, pulling pumpkin mixture up to surface.

Bake in preheated 325 F oven for 50 to 60 minutes or until knife inserted near center comes out clean. Cool completely on a wire rack. Serve with a dollop of whipped cream, and sprinkle with a little pumpkin pie spice, if desired.

## PUMPKIN HUMMUS

- |   |                                      |   |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 15-ounce can pumpkin or<br>3 cups fresh pumpkin puree | ½ cup extra virgin olive oil         | 2 teaspoons maple syrup                       |
| 2 15-ounce cans chickpeas,<br>drained and rinsed      | 2 tablespoons minced garlic          | 2 teaspoons ground cumin                      |
| ¼ cup tahini  | ½-1 tablespoon<br>coarse kosher salt | Roasted, salted pepitas<br>(optional garnish) |

Combine all ingredients in the bowl of a large food processor. Blend until smooth, adding olive oil, if needed, for a thinner consistency. Taste, adding more maple syrup or tahini if desired. Garnish with pepitas before serving. Serve with crispy pita chips.

# Autumn

## Pumpkin recipes you'll really crave

### AUTUMN PUMPKIN STEW

This recipe from Taste of Home will put you in the autumn spirit.

- 2 pounds beef stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons canola oil, divided
- 1 cup water
- 3 large potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 4 medium carrots, sliced
- 1 large green pepper, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons beef bouillon granules
- 14-½ ounce can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 pumpkin (10 to 12 pounds)

In a Dutch oven, brown meat in 2 tablespoons oil. Add water, potatoes, carrots, green pepper, garlic, onion, salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 2 hours. Stir in bouillon and tomatoes. Wash pumpkin; cut a 6- to 8-inch circle around top stem. Remove top and set aside. Discard seeds and loosen fibers from inside the pumpkin.

Place pumpkin in a shallow sturdy baking pan. Spoon stew into pumpkin and replace the top. Brush the outside of the pumpkin with the remaining oil. Bake at 325 F for 2 hours or just until the pumpkin is tender (do not overbake). Serve stew from pumpkin, scooping out a little pumpkin meat with each serving.

### PUMPKIN DIP

- 8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
- 2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 15-ounce can pumpkin puree or about 3 ½ cups fresh pumpkin puree
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice

In the bowl of a stand mixer or a large bowl with an electric mixer, beat cream cheese on medium-high speed until smooth and creamy, about 3 minutes.

Turn the mixer to low speed and gradually add powdered sugar. Once the sugar is thoroughly combined, turn the mixer up to medium-high speed and continue mixing for another 2 minutes.

Reduce mixer speed and add canned pumpkin, vanilla and pumpkin pie spice. Mix until thoroughly combined.

Cover and chill for at least 3 hours. Serve with graham crackers, assorted butter cookies, and red and green apple slices.

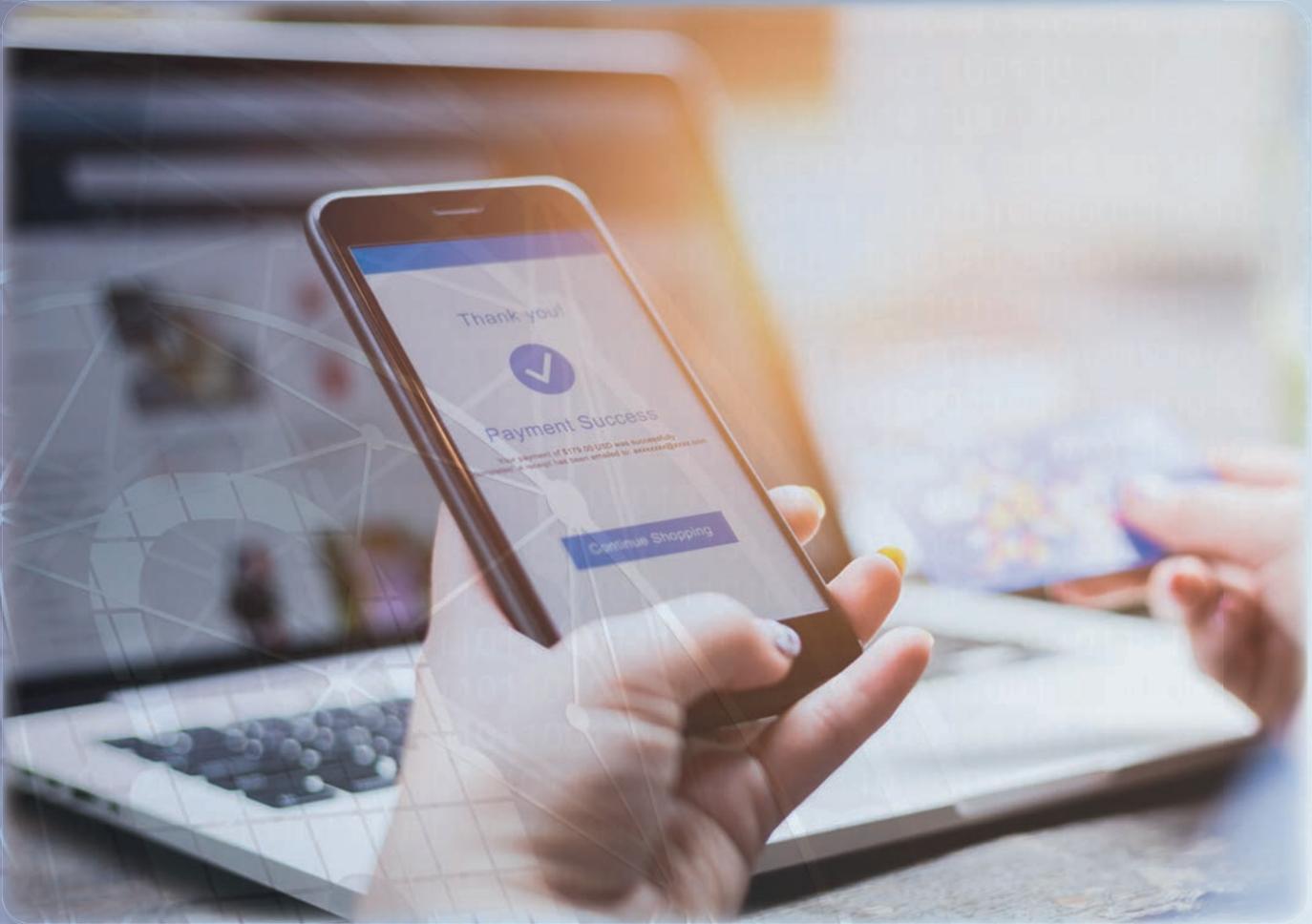


### CURRIED PEANUT-PUMPKIN SOUP

- 2 tablespoons Thai red curry paste
- 4 cups vegetable or chicken broth
- 3½ cups canned or fresh pumpkin puree
- ¼ cup creamy or chunky peanut butter
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons sriracha, optional
- 1 lime, quartered

Heat a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the Thai red curry paste, and stir or whisk as it's heating up. After about 1 minute, it will stick to the pan and become fragrant. Add remaining ingredients and stir or whisk until it's completely heated through. Garnish with lime wedges, if desired.





# Protect Your Online Privacy

By Robin Howard

With Cybersecurity Awareness Month in October, now is a perfect time to review how you can protect yourself online. Online privacy is the ability to keep personal information—or pieces of data that could lead to your identity—private. Private information includes bank accounts, credit card numbers, email addresses, contacts, and your address and phone number.

It also includes information that does not necessarily seem valuable to criminals, such as where you work, where your children go to school and the full names of your family, co-workers or friends.

## What Hackers Can Do With Your Data

Without privacy, anyone with your information can impersonate, exploit or steal from you. Keeping your data private online also protects you from offline dangers such as theft, harassment and extortion.

Some attacks are highly personalized. You may get a

text or email referring to a friend, co-worker, neighbor or organization you are involved with asking for help, which usually involves money. Cybercriminals are particularly good at crafting these messages, so they seem authentic, which is why so many people are victimized.

If a hacker has your email address and password, they can use it to attempt to access your bank accounts and credit cards or send targeted scam emails to your contacts.

Hackers can also take your accounts or personal data hostage and attempt to charge you a fee to get them back. Protecting your data means protecting your finances, peace of mind and the people you care about.

Most of us have weak spots in our online privacy, but even minor issues can add up. People with bad intentions can collect information about you and put it together to form a larger picture. It takes a little time and effort, but making slight changes to protect yourself can make all the difference.

## What Are Your Weaknesses?

### Passwords

The most common flaw is weak passwords. Despite all the advice to use strong passwords, a cyber research company found that “123456” and “password” were among the most used—and hacked—passwords last year. Other easily hackable passwords include familiar words or phrases, pet and celebrity names, and birthdates.

Reusing passwords on multiple websites allows cybercriminals to break into more than one account at once, making you vulnerable to identity theft.

### Oversharing

Think twice about the information and photos you share on social media. For example, if you post videos of your home, you give thieves a map of your valuables. Posting while you are on vacation lets people know you are not home.

Posting pictures of your children along with their names and information such as where they go to school, could make them vulnerable to stalkers.

Every post you make tells people with bad intentions more about you, your habits, what you own and who is important to you.

### Too Many Apps and Internet-Connected Things

Apps and internet-connected devices that listen are constantly collecting data about you, including your shopping habits, upcoming life events and even health data. This information is highly valuable to criminals and marketers.

### Unsecure Browsers

Unsecured web browsers do not have security measures to protect you from unauthorized data collection while browsing the web. These browsers allow websites to track you and gather information. Criminals can access this information via malicious extensions, ads and links to fake websites.

It is not just scammers who want this information. Companies can also use this data to build a profile of you and develop highly effective targeted marketing ads.

## How to Improve

Protecting your online data means knowing what cybercriminals want and how they access it. When it comes to personal attacks, criminals always go for easy targets.

A few minor fixes will make your accounts unattractive because they will be too hard to hack.

### Use Strong Passwords

A strong password is at least 12 random numbers, characters and symbols. Use a password manager such as iCloud Keychain or 1Password to generate and

store strong passwords. As you change passwords, set up two-factor authentication for every account that offers it. When you log in to an account, you will get a second way to verify your identity, such as a text code.

### Protect Your Devices

Many free apps make money by selling your data, so delete old apps and anything you do not need. Browser extensions can be codes that track all your browser activity and can even collect financial and medical data. Delete or limit browser extensions that do things such as block ads, spell check or customize how your browser looks.

Speaking of browsers, use a privacy-first browser such as Safari or Firefox. If you use Google, go to the MyActivity dashboard and delete everything.

Since you have the hood open, set your operating system on all devices to automatically install updates. Most hacks take advantage of known flaws in software. If you use Windows, install antivirus software. Apple’s operating system has sufficient antivirus built in.

Finally, disable message previews on your phone’s lock screen. They can be used to access your two-step authentication codes.

### Be Careful on Social Media

The golden rule for social media is not to post anything you would not want strangers to know, including that you are on vacation, where you live, and full names or details about people close to you. Be picky about what you like, share and comment on. These interactions can appear in public searches, even if the account is private.

For messaging, use an encrypted app such as WhatsApp. Facebook Messenger does not have enough security to prevent third parties from reading messages.

Only connect with people you know in real life, don’t respond to unsolicited messages on social media from people you don’t know, and don’t click links in direct messages or news feeds.

### Check Your Settings

Privacy rules and settings change all the time. Every few months, review the privacy settings on your accounts. Turn off automatic geolocation on social media, restaurant reservation apps and shopping sites. Disable data tracking by clicking “ask app not to track” when you get a pop-up.

Your habits, patterns, information and relationships are valuable information to cybercriminals. Good online privacy habits ensure you stay in control of what is yours. ■

# PLANNER

Fall in love with Tennessee on a scenic hike, a road trip to see trees bursting with color, a family get-together at a pumpkin patch or farm, or through bone-chilling ghost stories at haunted destinations.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL BANANA PUDDING FESTIVAL

## CENTERVILLE

October 7-8

### National Banana Pudding Festival

Started in 2010, this annual event began when volunteers were looking for a way to help area nonprofits earn money. The festival has grown every year since then, but the mission to support nonprofits remains the same. Thousands of people come to RiverPark to enjoy live music, a national cook-off, the Puddin' Path and more from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

[www.bananapuddingfest.org](http://www.bananapuddingfest.org)

## COLLIERVILLE

September 16-17

### Collierville Balloon Festival

Enjoy more than 20 stunning hot air balloons, live entertainment, arts and crafts vendors, food, carnival rides and tethered balloon rides. Balloon flights and displays occur at dusk and dawn, with a magical balloon glow at dark. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$8 for children. Carnival rides and tethered balloon rides are separate ticketed attractions.

[www.colliervilleballoonfestival.com](http://www.colliervilleballoonfestival.com)

## NASHVILLE

September 22-October 31

### Hermitage Ghost Tours

Explore the haunted side of history. Embark on a distinctly spooky voyage at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage as you experience the mansion, grounds and cemetery by lantern light. Along the way, guides in period clothing explore tragedies that befell the Jackson family, Andrew's unusual experiences and unexplained incidents at the site. Hear about strange encounters such as the spirits of the Battle of New Orleans and Andrew's infamous meeting with Tennessee's Bell Witch. Tours also include a discounted wine tasting for guests ages 21 and older in the Natchez Hills Winery tasting room.

[thehermitage.com/nashville-ghost-tours](http://thehermitage.com/nashville-ghost-tours)

## BON AQUA

September 30

### L've, Love, Run 5K Trail Run

September is suicide prevention awareness month. The third annual L've, Love, Run event brings awareness through nature, music, fellowship and a scenic 5K trail run and 1-mile walk/run. The event includes live music, food trucks, resources and family-friendly games at Hideaway Farms—the place Johnny Cash called “the center of my universe.” Registration is at 7 a.m. Race time is at 8 a.m.

[runsignup.com/Race/Events/TN/BonAqua/LveLoveRun5KTrailRun](http://runsignup.com/Race/Events/TN/BonAqua/LveLoveRun5KTrailRun)

## CLARKSVILLE

October 3-7

### Artsville Fest

Debuting in 2021, the festival features a variety of artists creating works in real time for all the community to see. From 3D chalk to mural and sculpture art, the sky is the limit. Throughout the festival, families can enjoy live art, participate in several community art projects and shop artisan vendors. Other activities planned this year include an old-Hollywood-style themed art gala, art walk, fashion show and virtual art instruction workshops so you can join the fun from anywhere.

[Artsvillefest.com](http://Artsvillefest.com)

## SPRINGFIELD

October 6

### 1st Friday Night Market and Sunset Concert

Join us on the first Friday night of each month through October on the historic Springfield Town Square. Enjoy the Sunset Concert Series with a live performance from Ten Year Town on the courthouse steps. This event features live music, food trucks, a kids' zone, a specialty vehicle cruise-in, and shopping with local farmers, artists, makers, boutiques and downtown merchants from 6 to 9 p.m.

[springfieldtn.gov](http://springfieldtn.gov)

## ERWIN

October 6-7

### Unicoi County Apple Festival

The Unicoi County Apple Festival, coordinated by the Unicoi County Chamber of Commerce, is a premier two-day festival with than four decades of tradition in Erwin. With an annual attendance of more than 110,000 people, the festival includes hundreds of food and craft vendors, two entertainment stages, contests, activities and much more. Join the fun from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. each day.

[unicoicountyapplefestival.com](http://unicoicountyapplefestival.com)

## HUMBOLDT

October 7

### Downtown Fall Festival

A fun-filled day for the entire family includes food vendors, activities for children, music, artisans, craft booths, merchandise vendors, information booths and more from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

[humboldtchamber.com/fallfestival](http://humboldtchamber.com/fallfestival)

## MURFREESBORO

October 14

### STEAM-a-Palooza

Science, technology, engineering, art and math come to life at this free outdoor event, featuring local artists, scientists and engineers for all-ages, hands-on fun. People ages 1 to 100 can travel from booth to booth and learn about the processes behind robotics, composting, cosmetics, creative arts, physics, environmental conservation, mathematics, meteorology and everything in between from noon to 4 p.m.

[www.explorethcdc.org/events/steamapalooza2022-yp7ln](http://www.explorethcdc.org/events/steamapalooza2022-yp7ln)

## SPARTA

October 14

### A Lester Flatt Celebration

A Enjoy a day of bluegrass music, crafts, classic cars and food in downtown Sparta. Bring your own chairs for this free event from 11:15 a.m. to 7 p.m.

[spartatn.gov/lesterflatt](http://spartatn.gov/lesterflatt)

## SPRINGFIELD

October 27

### Trick-or-Treat on the Square

The city of Springfield's annual trick-or-treat event in downtown Springfield is fun for area youngsters from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Bring your preschool-aged children downtown to enjoy a free, fun-filled day of

trick-or-treating with merchants and businesses on the square. Connect with the city of Springfield on Facebook and Instagram to learn more.

[springfieldtn.gov](http://springfieldtn.gov)

## DICKSON

November 4-5

### 48th Annual Christmas in the Country

Shop this annual craft show featuring more than 140 booths filled with handmade goodness and gifts at Dickson County High School, sponsored by the Dickson County Woman's Club. Stop by and pick up your unique Christmas present Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. A \$2 entry fee benefits the scholarship fund and other community projects.

[www.facebook.com/CICGFWDICKSON](http://www.facebook.com/CICGFWDICKSON)

## COLUMBIA

November 18

### A Very Maury Christmas

Get an early start on your holiday shopping at the Factory at Columbia. Find more than 40 vendors with Tennessee-made goods and crafts for sale at the market. \$5 entrance fee; a portion of the proceeds benefit aMuse'um.

[www.averymaurychristmas.com](http://www.averymaurychristmas.com)

## SPRINGFIELD

December 7

### Christmas Parade

Visit downtown to enjoy the Springfield Christmas Parade. Numerous floats will travel down Main Street, including one holding Santa Claus himself. The parade starts at 7 p.m.

[springfieldtn.gov](http://springfieldtn.gov)



PHOTO COURTESY OF  
HOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

## FAYETTEVILLE

### HOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

November 10-11

This 31st annual Christmas-themed street festival is centered around historic downtown Fayetteville. Enjoy Santa and reindeer, live music, shopping, food, carriage rides, a candlelight walking tour, a cemetery stroll, a kids' zone and more. Hours are from 5 to 8 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday.

[hostofchristmaspast.com](http://hostofchristmaspast.com)



PHOTO COURTESY OF  
LAUDERDALE COUNTY FAIR

### Include Your Upcoming Event

Want to share a family-friendly event with the readers of Tennessee Connections?

Please visit [tinyurl.com/TennesseeEvents](http://tinyurl.com/TennesseeEvents) to submit the details. Thank you.

## HALLS

### LAUDERDALE COUNTY FAIR

September 13-16

Celebrating its 20th year, the fair features the county's agricultural heritage, including contests, livestock shows, main stage entertainment, kiddie derby, community church service and midway carnival rides, Pick TN products, truck and car shows, antique tractor shows, petting zoo and free gate admission. Join the fun Wednesday through Friday from 5 to 10 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

[lauderdalecountyttn.org/tourism](http://lauderdalecountyttn.org/tourism)

ADVENTURE AWAITS

Marvel at the  
Wonders of Nature at  
**Fall Creek  
Falls State  
Park**

**What Is It?**

Fall Creek Falls State Park in Central Tennessee contains nearly 30,000 acres of forest, gorges and waterfalls, including the titular Fall Creek Falls.

**History**

In the 1930s, the National Parks Service saw the potential beauty and began buying land. The Works Project Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps worked to restore the forest and build the park. Ownership was transferred to the state in 1944.

**Go Chasing Waterfalls**

The park's name-sake waterfall tumbles more than 250 feet. There are many waterfalls in the park, including Piney Falls, Cane Creek Falls and Cane Creek Cascades, among others. While the hikes to see some of the falls can be difficult, they're also rewarding.

**Canopy Challenge**

Tucked within the park is the Canopy Challenge Course. This aerial ropes course offers fun, laughs, and treetop views of the park to families and children of all ages. The course includes bridges, rope swings and ziplines, all with a smart-belay safety system.

ADOBE STOCK PHOTO  
BY JAYNES GALLERY/  
DANITA DELIMONT

**More Info**

There are multiple lodging options within the park, including a new hotel—the Lodge at Fall Creek Falls. To start planning your trip, visit [tnstateparks.com/parks/fall-creek-falls](https://tnstateparks.com/parks/fall-creek-falls).

# Prepare Your Trees for a Long Life

A popular topic with homeowners is tree health, especially in newly planted landscapes. Trees are tough, although—as with other plants—improper care can shorten their lifespan.

Not only does a dying tree affect the long-term sustainability of your landscape, but it also affects your wallet. With so much on the line, it is important to ensure trees are established and cared for properly, especially when young. Planting depth, proper mulching and irrigation are all vital to preparing your tree for a long and healthy life.

## Preparing to Plant

Preparation is everything when planting your tree. While it may be tempting to rent an auger, drill a hole in the soil and drop in the tree, this planting method can lead to many avoidable issues.

When digging the planting hole, it is best to make it two or three times wider than the plant's root ball. This will give the roots a place to grow away from the tree and reduce the chances of them circling in the planting hole, eventually girdling the tree.

It is equally important to get the depth of the planting hole right. You will want to make sure the tree's root flare—where the trunk ends and the root begins—is at, or slightly above, the soil surface.

Avoid adding soil amendments, such as compost or peat moss, to the planting hole. They essentially create a pot in the ground, encouraging roots to stay in the amended soil.

## Mulching

A 2- or 3-inch layer of mulch extending to the tree's dripline will decrease competition from weeds and turfgrass for resources, reduce water loss and help maintain soil temperatures.

It is crucial to keep the mulch from contacting the tree. It can cause the bark to decay over time as the mulch breaks down. It is also helpful to break up old layers of mulch before

adding more, as it can create a layer difficult for water to move through.

## Irrigation

Properly irrigating your newly planted tree is essential to ensure its survival in your landscape. The amount of water needed will vary based on your location.

A good rule of thumb is at least 1 inch of water weekly. It is best to have a five- to seven-day irrigation schedule in which you water deeply one day to ensure the entire root system is wet. It is important to avoid frequent, light watering, which will encourage shallow roots that easily stress during drought.

There are a few irrigation methods, and most work well if done properly. One of the easiest is a water hose with water running slowly. Sprinklers also work, but you should avoid getting water on the trunk and foliage. Remember to primarily water outside the initial planting hole to encourage outward root growth.

Trees serve many important functions in the landscape, so preparing them to grow strong and healthy is important.

Now that you know some basics, check out the UT Extension publication “PB1621-Best Management Practices for Planting Ornamental Plants” for detailed information on home tree plantings. If you have any questions on this or other horticulture topics, contact your local UT-TSU Extension office. ■



*This article was written with information from UT Extension publication PB1621-Best Management Practices for Planting Ornamental Plants.*

**Rylan Thompson** is a Tennessee State University Agriculture and Natural Resources/4-H Extension agent in Knox County. He specializes in residential/consumer horticulture and 4-H and is the Knox County Master Gardener coordinator.

# The Power of Teamwork:

## Lineworkers Reflect on First Tennessee Valley Rodeo

### On your mark, get set and go!

With a stopwatch counting the seconds, it was time to grab the gear and climb. Climbing a 40-foot pole, cutting down the manikin, and making it back down in record time became a weekly routine for Luke Blackmon and Dawson Gambrell.

The pair spent the better part of two months meeting each week to practice a variety of exercises for the Tennessee Valley Lineman Rodeo. It was the first year Erwin Utilities participated in the annual event. Luke and Dawson volunteered to represent the company after their supervisor, Kip Lemmon, mentioned the idea.

“It felt great to get the company’s name out there,” Luke says.

What started as tough practices eventually became easier. The lineworkers attribute this to their teamwork.

“We pushed each other to get better and made each other go on,” Luke says. “We work well together.”

One of their most practiced exercises was Hurtman Rescue. All lineworkers perform this maneuver annually, but for Luke and Dawson, it became part of their regular routine in preparation for the upcoming rodeo. The exercise demonstrates real safety techniques used in the field in case a lineworker becomes injured.

“The Hurtman Rescue is very important,” Dawson says.

“You have a man’s life on the line. It should be done as fast as possible. But then again, it’s never something you want to have to do.”

After two months of practice, it was time to compete. The pair traveled to Clarksville June 1 for the 26th annual Tennessee Valley Lineman Rodeo. Dawson says he was excited not only to participate in the rodeo but also to learn.

“I was excited to learn something from the other guys there,” he says. “The rodeo is something I feel like every lineman should do at least once. It was an awesome experience, especially just watching those other guys do their thing.”

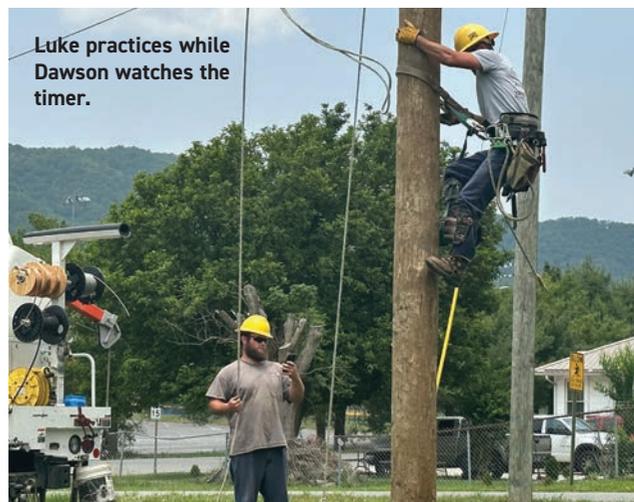
Besides the Hurtman Rescue, both lineworkers competed in several other events. Luke participated in the B1 tie-in, the wooden brace change-out and the deadlift. Dawson participated in the cross arm brace change out, arrester change out and slack block tie up.

With their first rodeo now in the books, the lineworkers are already looking to the future.

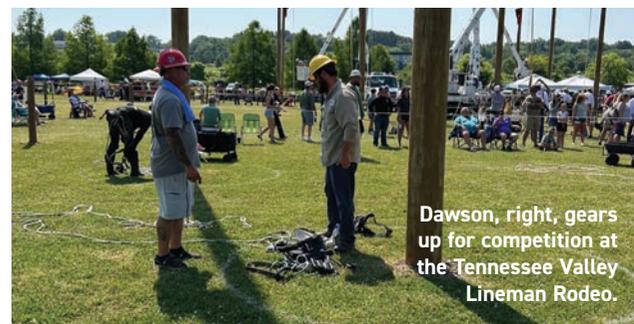
“I would definitely, without a doubt, participate again,” Luke says. “I’d go right now if they had it tomorrow.” ■



Dawson Gambrell, below, and Luke Blackmon set up for Hurtman Rescue practice.



Luke practices while Dawson watches the timer.



Dawson, right, gears up for competition at the Tennessee Valley Lineman Rodeo.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

**Jo Cole**

**Job Title:**  
Director of Office Services

**Years at EU:**  
32 years

**Favorite part of job:**



Customer service. Service is at the heart of what we do and who we are here at Erwin Utilities. At the end of the day, it's gratifying to know that I'm part of an organization where the employees and the services we provide truly make a difference for our customers and our community.

**Clay Hepburn**

**Job Title:**  
Water Treatment Supervisor

**Years at EU:**  
26 years

**Favorite part of job:**



The company culture. I'm fortunate to be surrounded by co-workers that go out of their way to help when difficult situations arise.

**Chuck Edney**

**Job Title:**  
Water Crew Foreman

**Years at EU:**  
24 years

**Favorite part of job:**



Working with field crew on construction projects.

**Steven Smith**

**Job Title:**  
IT/Network Manager

**Years at EU:**  
24 years

**Favorite part of job:**



I have always enjoyed working with and supporting all four departments. My job is always changing and offers a lot of variety. No two days are ever the same. I also enjoy being part of an organization that contributes so much to the community.

  
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# Small & Scenic

Some of Tennessee's loveliest—and most frequently overlooked—hiking trails can be found among the state's natural areas.

Tennessee's Department of Environment and Conservation launched a natural area program in 1971 to protect natural communities that best represent the state's diverse landscape. While some natural areas have close ties to state parks, others are managed primarily to facilitate scientific research and protect sensitive species.

One of the most charming natural areas I've had the pleasure of visiting is Colditz Cove State Natural Area, near Allardt, in Fentress County. Tucked in the geologic folds of Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau, Colditz Cove packs a lot into 165 acres. The area is open to hiking—no hunting allowed—along a 2-mile loop trail that begins and ends at the parking area.

The trail leads to the area's most celebrated landmark: a 60-foot waterfall named Northrup Falls that plunges over an overhanging rock ledge and empties into a narrow gorge carved through the rock.

From the parking lot, the early stage of the hiking trail passes through a forest dominated by oak and hickory trees. Closer to the gorge, when you can barely hear the waterfall, the forest transitions from hardwoods to tall eastern hemlocks, and the air beneath the evergreen canopy smells like Christmas.

The trail splits at the edge of the gorge. Either direction leads down to Northrup Falls at the head of the gorge. As the trail descends, you'll hike past rock shelters and cliffs carved in the sandstone. The changes in vegetation are comparable to what you see as you gain elevation in the Smokies: dense thickets of rhododendron, along with white pines and hemlocks that appear to sprout out of solid rock.

The hike takes you behind Northrup Falls. Over eons, the erosional forces of flowing water carved a semicircular amphitheater in the sandstone caprock at the bottom of the falls. There's sand underfoot, and the boulder fields at the base of the gorge are a great place to have a bite to eat and soak in the sights and sounds of one of Tennessee's unsung natural treasures.

Once out of the gorge, the trail reconnects for a short trek that leads back to the parking lot.

Northrup Falls is named for a local family that operated a sawmill upstream from the falls during the 1800s. In 1973, the natural area was established to protect 30 acres. Another 42.5 acres was added in 1984 when the Colditz brothers, Arnold and Rudy, donated land to The Nature Conservancy. In 2001, the state of Tennessee bought an additional 93 acres to complete the natural area.

One of the nice features of Colditz Cove is its easy access to other outdoor areas. Historic Rugby is only 10 miles to the east, and Pickett State Park and the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area are about an hour to the north.

To reach Colditz Cove State Natural Area from Rugby, head west on State Route 52 to Allardt, and turn left onto Northrup Falls Road at the small state natural area sign. The Colditz Cove parking area is 1 mile up the road. ■



More information on Tennessee Natural Areas can be found online at [tstateparks.com/parks/division-of-natural-areas](https://tstateparks.com/parks/division-of-natural-areas).

**Morgan Simmons** is the former outdoor editor for the Knoxville News Sentinel and seven-time winner of the Tennessee Outdoor Writer of the Year award. He lives on a farm in Clinton, Tennessee, with his wife, a donkey, six goats, two dogs and several chickens.



**SAFETY IS IN YOUR HANDS.  
EVERY DIG. EVERY TIME.**



Don't forget to have your utility lines marked before you dig this weekend.

I'm not digging very deep.

My neighbor dug through his fiber line when he forgot to call 811!

Want to be the person that cuts the power on your street?

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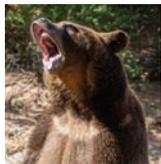
Yikes...okay, I will.

Did you know you can take care of it online at [www.tenn811.com](http://www.tenn811.com)?

That was easy. Looks like they'll have it done in a few days!

## I 'Bearly' Made It Out Alive

**A 12-inch stainless steel knife for only \$79**



Our Grizzly Hunting Knife pays tribute to the call of the wild. Featuring stick-tang construction, you can feel confident in the strength and durability of this knife. And the hand carved, natural bone handle ensures you won't lose your grip even in the most dire of circumstances. I also made certain to give it a great price. After all, you should be able to get your point across without getting stuck with a high price. But we don't stop there. While supplies last, we'll include a pair of \$99 8x21 power compact binoculars **FREE** when you purchase the Grizzly Hunting Knife.

### Knife Specifications:

- Stick tang 420 surgical stainless steel blade; 7 1/4" blade; 12" overall
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**MISSION STATEMENT:**

Making a difference through safe, reliable, and efficient service.

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Tell us what you think about our first edition of Tennessee Connections magazine!

TN-200

# More Communication? Yes, Please.

## Welcome to the first edition of Tennessee Connections.

At Erwin Utilities, we believe communication is key to fulfilling our mission of making a difference through safe, reliable and efficient service and achieving our vision of building a brighter future for our community.

Our goal this year is to improve our communications with you—our customers. While we will continue to share information through social media, our website and our local media resources, Tennessee Connections will serve as a new avenue to help us achieve our goal. This publication gives us an opportunity to share important information about the activities, plans and goals at Erwin Utilities, as well as the utility industry at-large.

You will find important information about Erwin Utilities on pages 4–5 and 20–21 with other articles of interest throughout the magazine.

Take a few minutes to look through and read your new magazine and let us know if you enjoy it and have any suggestions for future topics.

As always, we are here to serve you.

*Lee H. Brown*

Lee Brown  
President and CEO



## OFFICE CLOSURE THANKSGIVING

(Thursday, November 23,  
and Friday, November 24)



We are proud to serve you—our neighbors, family and friends—and look forward to another successful 78 years!