



# THE TEXAS GOURDZETTE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE KAPPA CHAPTER OF THE  
AMERICAN GOURD SOCIETY

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2023



## Presidents Message

Happy Spring! What a great bluebonnet season we have been having this year, so I hope you have had the chance to take a road trip and be inspired by the beauty.

Saturday, April 29, TGS will hold the annual Spring Membership Meeting from 9:00am to 3:00pm at the Dallas Elks Lodge #71 located at 8550 Lullwater Drive, Dallas, TX 75238. *You do not need to be a TGS member to attend.*

Please RSVP via email at [texasgourdsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:texasgourdsociety@hotmail.com) with the name of attendees and if you would like to purchase a \$10.00 meal ticket. Lunch will be grilled chicken breast or thigh, appetizers, salad, vegetable casserole, BBQ beans, fruit salad, deviled eggs, desert and sweet or unsweet tea. If you would like to sell supplies or do a demonstration, please let us know so we can set up a table for you. A list of nearby hotels is available at [www.texasgourdsociety.org](http://www.texasgourdsociety.org) under the 2023 Annual Spring Meeting tab. We want to thank the Dallas Patch for hosting this year.... See you there!

The 2023 Lone Star Gourd Festival will be held September 29 & 30 at the Gillespie County Fairgrounds in Fredericksburg Texas. For the past couple of years, the festival has been held the same weekend as the Oktoberfest which caused hotel rates to be extremely high. Starting this year, this will no longer be the case so hotel rates will be significantly lower. TGS needs volunteers to help with the planning, set-up and staffing at the festival. If you would like to volunteer a couple of hours or more, please give me a call at 512-964-5540 or send me an email at [texasgourdsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:texasgourdsociety@hotmail.com) Your help will benefit the entire Texas Gourd Society and will be greatly appreciated.

Don't forget to renew your membership for 2023. Dues are \$15.00 per year and can be paid via PayPal from the TGS website. You can also print a membership form off the TGS website and mail it to Cathy West. You can find her address on the membership form. While your are at it, why not invite a friend or member of your Patch to join. TGS is a great society, they will be glad if you ask them to join. Membership dues help with the costs to promote, sustain and host the annual Lone Star Gourd Festival and expand our outreach programs by introducing gourd art to all ages by teaching at city libraries, retirement communities and art guilds.

See you at the Spring Meeting,  
Becky Klix

# TGS PATCH HAPPENING'S

## Capital of Texas Gourd Patch

Howdy all!

Seems spring is supposed to be here, but like always, likes to play tricks

The last patch meeting was going to be in my garage and the temp. got up to 65\*!!

So, we worked at the kitchen table. We worked on learning the technique of teneriffe's- similar to dream weavers. At least when we did the Tree of Life, the temp. was nice – again in my garage!!

Oh well, this is Texas!



We had our annual Christmas gift swap and planning for this year's calendar of projects in January. It was at Rona's and again, just lovely with her Christmas tree and decorations.

We will be working on rain sticks, masks just to name a few of the projects.

Well, hopefully will see ya'll up in Dallas for our spring meeting.

Nice to have the patch join us again.

So, until we meet again,  
Keep gourding,

Debbie



## Dallas Gourd Patch

The Dallas Gourd Patch is hosting the annual TGS Spring Meeting this year. April 29th, 9am- 3pm at the Elks Lodge in Dallas. We hope everyone can make it to the meeting.

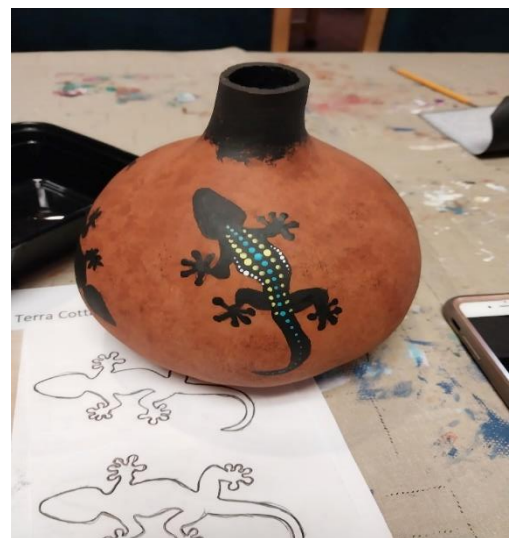
We have our calendar of events planned out for the year, from monthly demos, Festivals in different areas, demos at the Dallas Arboretum, classes, and such.

February's demo was a Terra cotta pot with a gecko. Everyone's looked awesome. Here are a few pictures.

If you want to keep up with what DGP has going on keep up with us on Facebook.

Do you belong to a patch? If you're in the DFW area, please come join us.

Marla Garber



## Guadalupe Gourd Patch

The Guadalupe Gourd Patch met on March 11 at the home of Sharon Harrison. The project for the month was twinning on the rim of the gourd. We had some beautiful results with the help of our patch leader, Judy Richie. We had 11 members present and all enjoyed a great potluck lunch. Our meetings are held on the 2nd Saturday of the month in the Kerrville area and visitors are always welcome. For information contact Sharon at [shardou@aol.com](mailto:shardou@aol.com).



## Community Outreach Events - Imagination Station on the Road

By Rona Thornton

To close out 2022, there were two classes at the Bee Cave Arts Foundation in the Hill Country Galleria. On Friday it was adults only and Saturday it was family friendly. Everyone got an education about gourds, had fun painting on their gourd, and brought home their unique creations.

I've only had one event so far in 2023 and that was at the Austin Yacht Club. My family has been members for 25 years and it's also a volunteer organization like TGS. During the winter months they have Fun Friday events and I offered to do an Intro to Gourds crafting class. The turnout was smaller than I expected but was very impressed with the talented people that attended.

There are no other scheduled events yet for 2023 but I've contacted a few local Austin garden clubs about a program called "Growing Gourds in Your Garden."





## TGS ARTISTS FEATURED IN THE TEXAS COOP POWER MAGAZINE

Written by: Julia Robinson

Roy and Blanche Cavarretta along with other TGS artists are featured in the April 2023 edition of the Texas Coop Power Magazine. Just in case you missed it, we wanted to share.

### Fruits of Their Labor

How passionate artists turn gourds into richly embellished works of art.



With one hand, Wimberley artist Michael Ford grips what looks like a glossy beige birdhouse shaped like an hourglass and etched with black tendrils. Then he gives it a shake. Boom, boom—BOOM. The deep rumbles startle passersby at the [Lone Star Gourd Festival](#) in Fredericksburg. Like me, they're dumbfounded.

"This is a [thunder gourd](#)," says Ford, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. When shaken, a spring vibrates a drumhead, creating ominous notes that emanate through holes in the gourd.

"It's very functional. If your company stays too long, just duck into a hallway with your gourd," Ford says, grinning, then shakes it again, setting off more thunderous booms. "Then tell your guests, 'Uh-oh, storm's coming. Better leave while you can!'"

Ford's joking, of course. But he's dead serious about the art form that he calls his passion—much like his fellow gourd artists all over Texas. Using an array of techniques, they create bowls, holiday décor, birdhouses, masks, sculptures, jewelry, lamps and miniature hobbit homes, to name a few examples. There are simple designs, like painted gourds, and richly embellished pieces that can sell for thousands of dollars.



Michael Ford's pieces sometimes incorporate multiple gourds.

Julia Robinson





Ford, a former graphic artist for the Texas Department of Transportation, has been turning gourds into art since 2013.

Julia Robinson

But wait—what is a gourd? Is it just a smooth pumpkin? Well, close. Gourds and pumpkins, along with squash, melons and cucumbers, are members of Cucurbitaceae, a plant family that produces hard-shelled fruits that humans have used for food, ornaments and utensils over thousands of years. Experts believe gourds are the only plants that have been grown around the world since prehistoric days.

Historians in Peru have unearthed ancient gourd fragments associated with early humans. For generations, Peruvian artist Ana Poma and her neighbors in Cochabamba have passed down the tradition of carving and burning intricate designs onto gourds as a way of storytelling. “Families teach their children,” says Poma, a vendor and teacher at the Fredericksburg festival. “I learned as a child from my mother, uncles and grandparents.”

For some artists, though, not just any gourd will do. Forget using our thin-skinned Texas natives, such as buffalo and balsam gourds. Instead, many artists prefer hard-shelled and decorative gourds available in endless shapes, sizes and thicknesses. Thicker shells (three-eighths of an inch thick or more) are sturdier for carving and burning. Standard gourd shapes, designated by the American Gourd Society, include cannonball, basketball, martin house, dipper, club and banana.

Many artists order their gourds from professional growers, such as the [Wuertz Gourd Farm](#) in Arizona and the [Welburn Gourd Farm](#) in Southern California. Some grow their own. John and Rickie Newell, Central Texas EC members near Llano, grow gourds. At the festival, Rickie—an artist who displays her work at the [Llano Art Guild and Gallery](#)—has a bin piled high with gourds for sale, ranging from 50 cents to \$12. Typically, gourds are priced according to their widest diameter. Those that have been cleaned on the outside and/or had their seeds and pulp scraped out cost more.

## Get a Gourd Look

See for yourself at these 2023 shows in Central Texas.

[Southwest Gourd & Fiber Fine Art Show](#), May 18–July 1, Kerrville

[Lone Star Gourd Festival](#), Sept. 29–30, Fredericksburg

[Hill Country Collectables](#), year-round, Wimberley

“We plant our gourds around April 15,” Rickie says. “Then we harvest when they’re dead in the field from October up to Christmas and dry them in a metal cage.”

Choosing a gourd is just the first step for many artists, and gourd shows are an ideal place to learn about the craft and expand skill sets. This Texas show is one of a handful of annual events held across the U.S. that attract hobbyists and professionals alike. Artists and vendors welcome questions, and many sell basic supplies. The Texas Gourd Society, the nonprofit organization that sponsors and organizes the annual Lone Star Gourd Festival at the Gillespie County Fairgrounds, is also a resource for crafters. Across Texas, the society has regional chapters called “patches.”



Standing Tall by Roy Cavarretta. Courtesy Roy Cavarretta



Chasing Dreams by Jill Robinson    Courtesy Jill Robinson

“We learn techniques from each other, like leather stitching,” says Sherry Nelson, a member of the Guadalupe Gourd Patch in Kerrville. “In the gourding world, though, you never copy someone’s work. Instead, you can use their technique as an inspiration to create something new.”

On her gourds, Nelson, a Central Texas EC member, uses various methods, such as burning; carving; painting; applying alcohol dyes; and attaching horns, beads and cactus fibers. “Pyrography is my favorite,” she says. “I can draw with my wood burner for hours. It’s very relaxing.”

Like many gourd artists, Roy and Blanche Cavarretta, who live in Hallettsville and are members of San Bernard EC, started out by growing gourds and turning them into birdhouses. Then, while traveling in New Mexico, they viewed a gourd art exhibit at an art festival. “We had no idea so many things could be done with them,” Roy recalls. “It set us on a journey we never could have imagined. There’s not a day goes by that we’re not working on a gourd.”

That was 11 years ago. The Cavarrettas still grow gourds. They’ve also become master gourd artists who’ve won countless awards. “At art shows, you enter at the novice level,” Roy explains. “When you win at that level, you advance to intermediate, then advanced and master.”



James Medders spiraling piece. Courtesy James Medders

Together, the couple market their work as [Gravel Road Arts](#). On her urn-style gourds, Blanche primarily uses pyrography, transparent dyes and a weaving stitch called closed coiling. Flowers, hummingbirds, dragonflies and inlaid gemstones adorn many of her pieces. Similarly, Roy uses pyrography and dyes along with chip carving using a gouge. His designs lean toward contemporary and Southwestern themes, such as his Spirit Doll that won Best of Show at the Fredericksburg festival.

The People's Choice award went to Chasing Dreams, a large kettle gourd intricately crafted by Austin's [Jill Robinson](#). "I use a lot of random techniques," she says of her striking designs. "On this one, I used enameling, woodburning, stipple carving and alcohol inks along with real cactus fibers and carved cactus fibers."

Visit with Robinson and other gourd artists, and you'll quickly pick up on their camaraderie and deep love for the craft. When artist James Medders of Morgan Mill lost the use of his left hand, Roy Cavarretta rigged a carving vise that could hold a gourd in place for his friend. Soon Medders, a United Cooperative Services member, was back to woodburning, carving and painting on his gourds. Using a method called pine needle coiling, he also stitches longleaf pine needles into elaborate designs.

"Once I got started in gourd art eight years ago, I had a passion," says Medders, who has also won awards. "Why? I don't know. I just do. Sometimes my wife tells me, 'Put that gourd down! We've got somewhere to go.'"



Rickie Newell continues work on her angel with wings.

Julia Robinson

Meanwhile, across the exhibit hall at the festival, a hands-on art area called the Imagination Station beckons newbies of any age. From a big pile of gourds, I choose a little one cut open like a bowl. Then I plunk down at a table with metallic paints, rhinestones, a paintbrush and a sponge.

“One of our goals is to pass on gourd art to young people so it won’t die out,” says Rona Thornton of Austin, who’s overseeing the area. “I take the Imagination Station to garden clubs, schools and military bases. It’s fun to see people who think they’re not artistic create their own piece.”

That would be me—I’m definitely no artist. But wait! Before long, my plain gourd has transformed into a sparkly urn. Wow, I *am* an artist.

Thornton smiles. “Anything’s possible with a gourd,” she says.

Artist: Jill Robinson



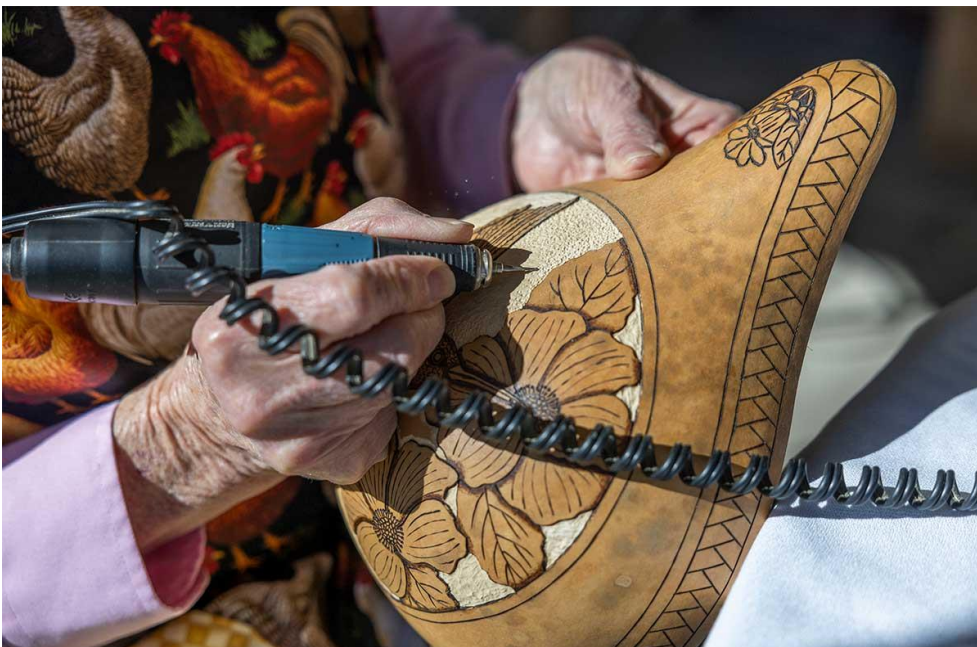
Green Goddess by Jill Robinson Courtesy Jill Robinson

Artists: The Cavarrettas



Blanche and Roy Cavarretta’s hobby has them “on a journey we never could have imagined.”

Julia Robinson



Blanche Cavarretta uses a drill to create a stipple pattern.

Julia Robinson



Drill bits that the Cavarrettas use to shape and embellish their gourds.

Julia Robinson



Roy Cavarretta gathers pine needles into coils to finish a piece.

Julia Robinson





Blanche Cavarretta uses waxed thread to create coils atop a gourd.

Julia Robinson



Above left: Hearts of Stone by Roy Cavarretta won people's choice at the 2016 Southwest Gourd & Fiber Fine Art Show and first place in the masters division at the 2016 Lone Star Gourd Festival. Above right: The Iris Dance by Blanche Cavarretta won best in class at the 2020 Ruidoso Art Festival.

Hearts of Stone Courtesy Roy Cavarretta. The Iris Dance: Courtesy Blanche Cavarretta



The Cavarrettas' gourd patch.

Courtesy Blanche and Roy Cavarretta

Artist: Michael Ford



Michael Ford first tried gourd art in 2013 and started winning awards for his sculptural pieces.

Julia Robinson



Pyrography creates veining in the skin of the gourd that Ford has inlaid with turquoise.

Julia Robinson



Ford carves tiny homes out of several gourds. Some of the homes have removable roofs and tiny furniture inside. One gourd provides the roof and another the small house.

Julia Robinson

Artist: Sherry Nelson



Sherry Nelson used an illustration from a *Texas Co-op Power* story to create her prizewinning work. Courtesy Sherry Nelson

Artist: Rickie Newell

Rickie Newell started growing gourds for birdhouses in her garden in Llano in 2010. She hosts monthly meetings of gourd artists to socialize and create art on her front porch.

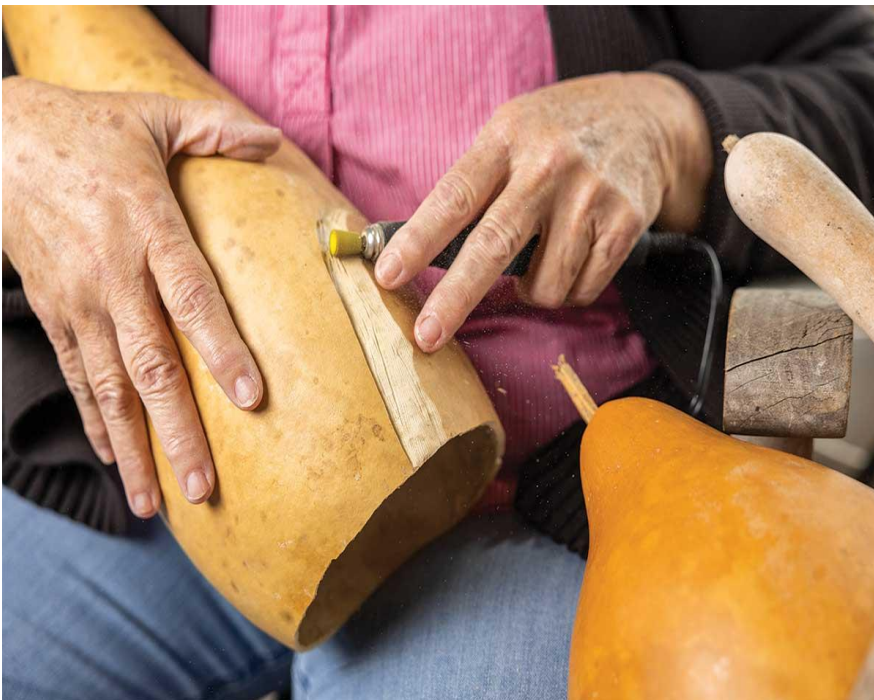
Julia Robinson



Newell stores gourds from her garden and others collected from friends or bought in Arizona in a storage container to keep them dry until she's ready to work on them.

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Julia Robinson



Newell uses a drill to create a relief design in a gourd.

Julia Robinson

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