

CEC inside your co-op

Published for members of Choctaw Electric Cooperative

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A supplement to Oklahoma Living.

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Co-op Trustees 'Step Up' By Stepping Down

Resignations allow Choctaw Electric district elections to take place this year

To allow co-op members to elect trustees for their districts in 2016, three Choctaw Electric Cooperative (CEC) trustees officially resigned from their positions at a special meeting of the board on January 6, 2016.

The resignations of Joe Silk-District B; James Woods-District C; and Danny Antwine-District G will allow official elections to take place at the 2016 CEC annual meeting, rather than at the end of their terms of office, as stated in CEC bylaws.

Praised by fellow trustees for stepping down to allow elections to take place more immediately, CEC's remaining

trustees quickly moved to reappoint Silk, Woods, and Antwine to serve until the 2016 elections.

"These three members went beyond the call of duty," said George Burns, president of the CEC board of trustees. "They should be commended for understanding the issues raised by the membership. They made sacrifices to show that Choctaw Electric Cooperative is sensitive to member concerns."

The eligibility of trustees appointed to the board following the resignation of CEC's entire board of trustees in December 2014 troubled co-op members from the beginning. The actions

"They should be commended for understanding the issues raised by the membership. They made sacrifices to show that Choctaw Electric Cooperative is sensitive to member concerns."

—GEORGE BURNS, PRESIDENT
CHOCTAW ELECTRIC BOARD OF TRUSTEES

of the three appointed trustees puts the question of eligibility to rest and clears the way for members to democratically elect trustees at the CEC Annual Meeting in September, 2016.

CEC bylaws include details on trustee nominations and elections. Copies of the CEC bylaws are available online at www.choctawelectric.coop, or at CEC locations in Hugo, Antlers and Idabel.

\$5^{.00} off
your electric bill!



Go Paperless and Earn a \$5 Bill Credit (One Time Only)

Lower your electric bill by five bucks this month by signing up for paperless billing using Choctaw Electric's Smarthub. Members who go paperless love the convenience! Instead of receiving a bill in the mail, your bill is delivered electronically for quick, easy viewing. The process saves your co-op thousands of dollars in printing, mailing and administrative costs—and it's good for the environment.

To sign up for paperless billing, please visit www.choctawelectric.coop and click on Smarthub. If you're already registered on Smarthub, simply log in and click "Go Paperless."

A monthly newsletter of
Choctaw Electric Cooperative.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

George Burns, *President*

Joe M. Silk, *Vice President*

Mike Brewer, *Secretary Treasurer*

James Woods	Bill Woolsey
Danny Antwine	Norman Ranger
Marcia Wright	Becky Franks

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

Jon K. Miles, *Chief Executive Officer*

Susan G. Wall, *Executive Assistant*

Jia Johnson, *Director of Public Relations*

Craig McBrain, *Chief Financial Officer*

Jim Malone, *Director of Operations*

Darrell Ward, *District Supervisor*

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24 Hour Outage Hotline

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MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Choctaw Electric Plans For the Future

A new year is underway and your cooperative is looking to the future. Some might think Choctaw Electric's system runs by itself; nothing could be further from the truth. It takes involvement from the employees, key staff, management and the board of trustees to make certain the system is well taken care of. Like your car or truck, CEC's electrical grid must be properly maintained along the way, or in time we will find ourselves on the side of the road with the hood up.

To stay on top of system requirements and ensure the utmost reliability, CEC recently completed its 2016 budget and the 2016-2017 construction work plan. Your co-op board held firmly to its fiduciary responsibility by adopting the new budget and the two-year construction plan. Both will provide CEC with the necessary road map to meet its financial and operational goals.

Dealing with the dollars and details of these matters is not an easy task, but CEC trustees carried out their responsibilities for the good of the cooperative. The board heard reports regarding line maintenance, as well as growing concerns over tree clearing across the system. CEC has fallen behind on line clearance issues and will need to become aggressive in keeping lines clear within the prescribed right of ways.

Membership agreements allow the cooperative to keep lines clear of trees, shrubbery or other debris within the prescribed footage to minimize the number

and duration of outages. If you plan to plant trees in your landscape this year, please respect these distances for your sake and that of your neighbors.

BY JON K. MILES
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CEC experienced a good year in 2015. Current rates are providing the necessary revenues, and energy sales coupled with numerous cost cutting measures helped produce solid margins to end the year. In January, two auditors representing the accounting firm of Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert, and Moss, L.L.P. began the process of checking physical inventory that are categorized as assets on the cooperative's balance sheet. The inventory of materials and reconciliation of assets went extremely well. The auditors will return again in a few months to complete the review of CEC financial records.

In December, CEC crews helped two Oklahoma electric cooperatives restore power after devastating ice storms. CEC sent crews to Alfalfa Electric Cooperative to assist in recovery efforts. Later, another crew traveled to Kingfisher to assist Cimarron Electric Cooperative.

This winter has dealt a harsh blow to co-ops in Oklahoma. We are grateful for the mutual aid program here that allows co-ops to make a single phone call and quickly receive the human and material resources needed to restore power safely. I know the systems receiving assistance appreciate our help. In return, they will travel our way if we are ever in need. That's the "Cooperative Difference."



FIND IT ONLINE

■ *The electric grid connects us all.* Check out the short video on CEC's Facebook page for insight into how the electric grid works, why grid reliability is important, and how homeowners benefit from this complex network.

■ *Know your bylaws.* CEC bylaws are the rules that govern your co-op. Download and/or view your co-op bylaws at www.choctawelectric.coop.



Choctaw Electric linemen prepare to ford the frigid waters of the Glover River following storms in December. Crew members raised 680 feet of submerged wire and reattached it to poles on either side of the stream. PHOTO/NORVIN GRAHAM

To Our Members:
 Your patience and concern for the safety of CEC crews during recent storms are dearly appreciated.
 Thank you!

It Pays To Be a Better Driver



Reduce your chance of an auto accident—and lower your insurance premium—by enrolling in an AARP defensive driving course.

The eight-hour course is designed to help drivers of any age become more aware of potential hazards and correct bad driving habits that tend to occur over time. Participants receive a certificate which may be presented to their insurance

agent for a possible reduction in premium costs.

Classes will begin at 9 am on the following dates:

- February 17 • CEC Idabel
- March 16 • CEC Antlers

The course is open to the public. The cost is \$15 for AARP members; others pay \$20. Price includes a course handbook and other materials. To enroll, please call **800-780-6486**, ext. 209.

Sealed Bids Returned

The results of Choctaw Electric's sealed bid auction for properties in Haworth and Rattan are as follows:

- Haworth - Richard Perry, \$5,872.40
- Rattan - Karen Hunt, \$15,000.

The properties previously served as CEC community broadband centers. Local residents used the centers to access the Internet, enjoy free use of computers and receive technical help.

Careful Where You Plant Those Trees

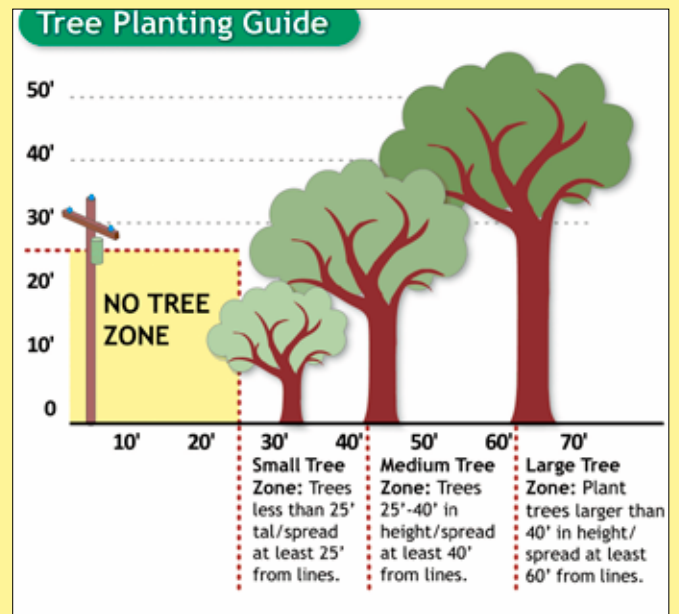
Everybody likes trees—until they crash into power lines and knock out power to hundreds of

households. Do yourself and your neighbors a favor: If you plan to plant a few trees or shrubs in your landscape this year, please locate them at a proper distance from all overhead power lines.

Use the diagram printed below to help you determine where to plant trees and shrubs based on how tall and wide they are expected to grow. If you purchased your tree from a nursery, please refer to the growing instructions for expected growth rate.

Be sure to check this before you place them in the ground. Remember, a tiny seedling can become a giant in no time. Even tall trees growing outside the "no tree" zone can become problematic when toppled by wind or heavy ice.

If you have questions on right of way policies or where to plant trees, please contact your co-op at **800-780-6486**, ext. 224.



OFFICIAL



MINUTES



Scan this code with your smartphone or tablet to read the monthly minutes of your co-op board meeting. Minutes are also available at any CEC location. Members requesting hard copies must sign a non disclosure agreement.

To scan the code, install a Bar Code Scanner app, available at the App Store.

Learning The Ropes

For CEC trustees, 'taking the plunge' might be more accurate.

Engineering, construction, finance and accounting; government and private lending, environmental regulations, safety regulations, emergency management and response, power generation, transmission and distribution, electricity prices and rate setting, cooperative management and administration, communications and advanced technology, non-profit policy setting and governance, legal and liability issues, federal and state legislation, and more.

Within each of these fields lies another world of specialty knowledge with its own unique terms and jargon. On any given day—not just the last Tuesday of every month—Choctaw Electric Cooperative (CEC) trustees must delve into these topics and read, learn and prepare themselves to make the most informed decisions possible for an organization that provides electricity for some 13,000 households and businesses in southeast Oklahoma.

The responsibility is not taken lightly. While a board of nine free-thinking individuals will never see eye to eye on all decisions, on one point CEC trustees are unanimous: Within the world of electric co-ops there is a lot—a lot—to learn.

“It’s a bit like an iceberg,” says Marcia Wright, CEC District-I trustee. “Each subject just goes deeper and deeper.” Wright, of Nashoba, has served on the board for a little over a year. Like her peers, she had no hidden agenda when she accepted her position, only the desire to set a troubled co-op on the right track.

What she and other trustees stepped into was a colossal mess: an ongoing investigation into potential wrongdoing by previous CEC management, an irate membership demanding change, and employee moral and member trust at absolute rock bottom. Add to that the all-important task of providing electricity 24/7. “It was overwhelming to say the least,” Wright recalls. “We had to take the wheel and then learn how to fly the plane.”

Wright also serves as CEC representative on the Western Farmers Electric Cooperative (WFEC) board of directors. WFEC generates electricity and sells it to electric co-ops in four states. The transmission side of the business, Wright added, is another aspect of the industry she is coming to understand.

For co-op directors of all experience levels, education, training and the willingness to learn are key to being effective trustees. In the past year, Wright and fellow board members devoted countless hours to educating themselves by attending workshops, lectures and online courses, and reading numerous utility industry bulletins that arrive in their email boxes daily.

The Choctaw Electric bylaws require trustees to complete the National Rural Electrification Association (NRECA) Certified Cooperative Director program within three years of assuming office. The 44-hour program includes sessions on cooperative financing, director duties and liabilities, board operations and process, understanding electric co-ops, and strategic planning. Trustees are encouraged to earn further accreditation with NRECA’s Board Leadership Certificate, which provides courses with greater depth in industry, governance, risk management, rate making and policy development.

Norman Ranger, CEC-District F trustee, represents CEC on the board of the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives (OAEC). The retired Redland poultry grower admits the scope of the cooperative industry surprised him. “It’s been a big eye opener to me. CEC is so much more than people realize,” he says. “It’s very big and it’s very complicated and it takes a lot to keep it going.”

Training, Ranger points out, is crucial. “In order to make the best financial decisions for this co-op we must have training,” he says.

The course work also provides an opportunity to learn from others in the industry. “By meeting with other board members from across the country, we aren’t forced to reinvent the wheel on some matters,” Ranger says. “We’re learning what works, and that’s what we as a board are trying to do here. We’re trying to make this co-op work.”

Mike Brewer represents CEC members in District-H and is president of First Security Bank in Hugo. He completed the full CCD program this year. The crash course, he says, “taught me how much I did not know about the not-for-profit organization called an electric co-op.

“Private businesses look for that opportunity to make a profit, but co-ops are looking for that comfort zone where rates are affordable, they have enough money and assets to grow the cooperative, keep a strong equity position and return credits to their members,” Brewer explained.

Finding that perfect balance in co-op finances or other matters, is challenging. Then again, CEC trustees know a bit about challenges—and controversy. “We are the frontline for this co-op,” Wright says. For her, the headfirst dive into turmoil early on only served to solidify her commitment to restoring faith and confidence in CEC.

Regaining that member trust, Ranger points out, is one of the biggest hurdles the co-op faces. “My hope is that one day our members will trust that this board—all of us—want what is best for our members and this co-op,” he says.

“Sitting across from someone for 12 hours, you can tell how sincere they are,” he adds. “This board is unified. We’re all reading off the same sheet of music, and we’re all working hard to do what’s right. Let’s move forward.” ■

Changes In Co-op Policy Includes Deposits

The following story was originally published in the October 2015 issue of Inside Your Co-op. This article is a summary of changes. Copies of the complete Terms and Conditions of Service are available by request at any CEC office.

The Choctaw Electric Cooperative (CEC) board of trustees approved several changes to CEC's Terms and Conditions of Service at their board meeting on August 25. The changes became effective September 1, 2015.

Most changes affect applying for and connecting a new service. The most notable change lowered the standard connect fee from \$250 to \$25, and incorporates a refundable deposit for applicants connecting a new service that do not meet the established credit standards. The membership charge remains \$5.

Applicants for non-commercial service that have a good pay history with CEC, a letter of credit from another electric utility, or adequate utility credit as evidenced by a consumer utility credit report collected by CEC may start basic service for \$30, (Membership Fee \$5 + Connect Fee \$25). This does not include cost for the construction of facilities or extra items such as lights or added poles.

To protect the interest of all member-owners, non-commercial applicants that lack standard credit requirements will be required to place a deposit with the cooperative, or enroll in CEC's prepaid billing program. The deposit will be equal to two times the estimated monthly bill for the new service. The deposit is refundable and will be returned to the member with interest once an adequate pay history is established, or applied to the final billing when the account is closed.

Applicants for commercial service must place a deposit equal to two times the estimated bill. Deposits for commercial accounts will be held until the account is closed.

Another change to the Terms and Conditions of Service allows commercial accounts the ability to select the Average Monthly Payment Plan when mutually agreeable between the cooperative and the member, and subject to all other terms of the program.



Community Events

Help us promote your event by sending event details in advance. Please send event information to Jennifer Boling/Inside Your Co-op/ PO Box 758, Hugo, OK 74743; or e-mail info to jboling@choctawelectric.coop. Events and dates are subject to change.

FEBRUARY

- 1 Pine Seedlings available from the Idabel Chamber of Commerce at 7 SW Texas, Idabel
- 2 Groundhog Day
- 14 Valentine's Day
- 15 President's Day
- 18 Broken Bow Chamber of Commerce Banquet

MARCH

- 16 Beavers bend Kayak Classic, Broken Bow
- 25-26 Grant's Earlybird Bluegrass Festival, Hugo

APRIL

- 2 Dogwood Days Festival, Idabel
- 2 American Indian Youth Leadership Spring Pow Wow, Broken Bow Sports Complex

\$ Lucky Account # 38850175 (\$25 Bill Credit). If the account number above belongs to you, contact your co-op by the 10th of the month to claim your \$25 bill credit. Call Jennifer Boling at **800-780-6486**, ext. 207, or contact CEC via email or in person.



DANGER!
Outlet Overload

Every year, U.S. fire departments respond to an estimated **25,900 home electrical fires**. These fires cause an estimated **280 deaths, 1,125 injuries** and **\$1.1 billion in property loss**.

Thirty-nine percent of home electrical fires involve outlets and receptacles, and other electrical wiring.

To ensure safety, you should only use about 80 percent of the available current for each electrical outlet in your home.

Are you overloading outlets?
Use this formula to find out:

WATTAGE/VOLTS=AMPS

Example:
Let's say you are using 2,000 watts of power (for one outlet). Divide the watts by the volts in your home (typically 120), and you come up with 16.6 amps of current being used. With a 20 amp electrical outlet, you are using about 80 percent of the available current.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration, Home & Garden

FREE WORKSHOP for CEC Members



February 24, 2016
9 am - 11 am
CEC Office in Idabel

Are you ready to get serious about saving energy, but aren't sure where to begin? If so, join Choctaw Electric and fellow co-op members for a free half-day workshop on fast, easy and effective ways to save energy in your home. Taught by CEC energy specialists, the class is designed to help you find low-cost and no-cost ways to shave dollars off your electric bill. Participants who attend will:

- Learn real world solutions to typical energy loss problems.
- How to reduce usage without spending a dime.
- Discover how even small changes can create savings.
- Learn how to use their Co-op Connections card to find discounts on caulking, weather stripping, curtains and other inexpensive items that make your home more efficient and comfortable.

Sign up today at www.choctawelectric.coop, or call your co-op at **800-780-6486**.

What's Burning A Hole In Your Household Energy Budget?

Finding those energy hogs is the starting point for savings

Most co-op members would like to be more energy efficient and save money, but where do you start? To begin, it's useful to know what's consuming the most energy in your home.

Together, home heating and cooling take the biggest bite out of your energy budget. On the bright side, you can achieve at least 10 percent savings by taking a few simple low-cost steps.

- During cold weather, set your thermostat to 68°F. In the summer, leave it at 78°F.
- Clean the filters and coils of your HVAC system.
- Caulk and weather-strip around windows and doors.

Take a fresh look at the lighting in your home. Replacing your home's five most frequently used bulbs with Energy Star-certified LEDs could save you \$75 per year.

It also pays to wrap your hot water heater with an insulating blanket. This is even more important if you have an older unit. For additional savings, insulate exposed hot water lines and drain one to two gallons of water from the bottom of your tank annually to prevent sediment build-up.

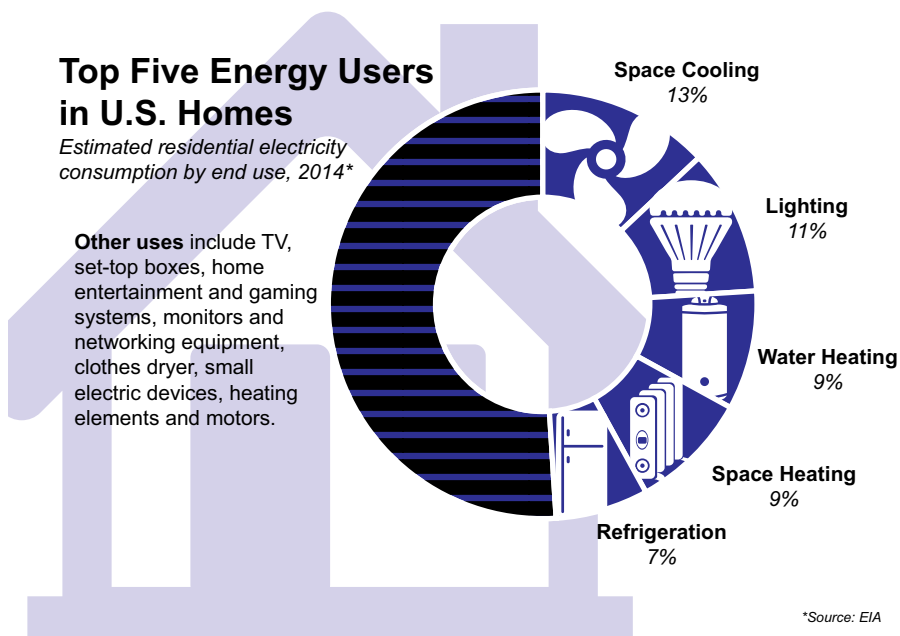
If your refrigerator was purchased before 2001, chances are it uses 40 percent more energy than a new Energy Star model. New Energy Star refrigerators use at least 15 percent less energy than non-qualified models and 20 percent less energy than required by current federal standards. If you think a new fridge is too pricey, remember that CEC offers energy efficiency loans to help members pay for more efficient appliances.

Choctaw Electric offers energy saving services for members. To visit with your co-op energy experts, please call CEC at **800-780-6486** or visit www.choctawelectric.coop.

Top Five Energy Users in U.S. Homes

*Estimated residential electricity consumption by end use, 2014**

Other uses include TV, set-top boxes, home entertainment and gaming systems, monitors and networking equipment, clothes dryer, small electric devices, heating elements and motors.



*Source: EIA

YOUTH POWER

ENERGY CAMP

EXPERIENCE LEADERSHIP AND ENERGY IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT!



**2016 CAMP:
MAY 31 - JUNE 3**

- Learn about electricity
- Experience being a lineman
- Play interactive games
- Develop leadership skills
- Make new friends

Send Your Kid To Energy Camp

Courtesy of Choctaw Electric Cooperative

Three eighth grade students from the Choctaw Electric Cooperative (CEC) service area will receive an all-expenses paid trip, including round trip transportation, to YouthPower Energy Camp.

To be eligible, student must:

1. Be an eighth grade student and reside in a residence served by CEC.
2. Write a 250-300 word essay on the topic "What qualities must one possess to be an effective leader?"
3. Essays are to be legible or typed and double spaced.
4. Attach an entry form to the essay. *(Please do not write your name on the essay. Name should appear on the attached entry form only.)*


Essays will be judged on originality and creativity (60%); composition and grammar (20%); neatness (10%); and spelling (10%).

Judges for the Energy Camp contest are not affiliated with CEC.

Essays must be turned in to CEC by 5 pm on Friday, March 4, 2016.

For more information and entry forms, please visit www.choctawelectric.coop, or contact:

Brad Kendrick, Camp Coordinator
Choctaw Electric Cooperative
800-780-6486, ext. 209
P.O. Box 758 Hugo, OK 74743
bakendrick@choctawelectric.coop

 **SEND US EMAIL:** Please email questions for Ask Your Co-op to: Jennifer Boling, jboling@choctawelectric.coop. Or, mail questions to Choctaw Electric Cooperative, PO Box 758, Hwy 93 North, Hugo, Oklahoma 74743.

ASK YOUR CO-OP

■ **My power is out! When will it be restored? Why is it taking so long?**

When outages happen, CEC is flooded with calls from members who want answers to these exact questions. Due to the uncertainties linemen encounter during major storms, it is impossible for co-op employees to accurately predict when repairs will be complete and power restored.

If you lose power during a major weather event, CEC will keep you informed via posts on Facebook and Smarthub. Once power is restored, CEC will call your phone or, if you reported your outage through Smarthub, send you an email message that your power is back on.

Please remember, during a power outage your co-op office is flooded with calls from members reporting outages. Calling often to check the status of the restoration effort will not result in a more rapid restoration. It does, however, contribute to "clogged" telephone lines and busy signals for other members who are trying to report outages and/or emergency situations.

Unless it is a planned outage, CEC does not contact members on life support equipment. During outages, life support members are advised to make other arrangement to power their life support equipment.

All co-op members are encouraged to notify CEC of any changes in their official address or telephone numbers. When outages happen, up-to-date records help us contact you with the information you've been waiting for: The lights are on!

february

Best days according to Moon phases.



Best planting days

Above ground crops ...	9-10, 13-14, 17-18
Root crops	1, 4-6, 24-28
Seed beds	1, 17-18, 27-28
Kill plant pests	7

Best fishing days

👉 Best	17-18
☺ Good	1, 9-10, 22-23
☺ Fair	4-5, 7-8, 13-14, 19-21, 24-25
☹ Poor	2-3, 6, 11-12, 15-16, 26, 29

Best days to do other stuff

Begin diet to gain weight	10, 14, 18
Begin diet to lose weight	1, 23, 28
Begin logging	5-6
Breed animals	1, 27-29
Make sauerkraut, can, or pickle	1, 26-27
Cut hair to discourage growth	25-26
Cut hair to encourage growth	13-14
Cut hay	11-12
Destroy pests and weeds	11-12
End projects	7
Go camping	2-3
Graft or pollinate	18-19
Harvest above ground vegetables	13-14
Harvest below ground vegetables	5-6, 23-24
Go to the dentist	23-24
Plant above ground vegetables	9-10, 18-19
Plant below ground vegetables	1, 27-29
Prune to discourage growth	2-4
Prune to encourage growth	11-12, 20
Quit smoking	1, 23, 28
Set posts or pour concrete	5-6
Start projects	9
Wean animals and children	1, 23, 28

—from the *Old Farmer's Almanac*

Good Eats

IN SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA

Mocha Dark Chocolate Brownies



INGREDIENTS

- Cooking spray
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa
- 3 T. butter, melted
- 1½ T. instant coffee granules
- 2 T. water
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 large egg white, lightly beaten
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ (3-ounce) bar dark chocolate, chopped (such as Ghirardelli)



DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Coat bottom of an 8-inch square baking pan with cooking spray.

Combine sugar and next eight ingredients in a bowl.

Lightly spoon flour into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Add flour and dark chocolate to cocoa mixture, stirring just until blended. Spread batter in prepared pan. Bake at 350°F. for 30 minutes. Cool on a wire rack. Yield: 16 brownies.

SOURCE:MYRECIPES.COM

■ swap shop

FREE CLASSIFIED ADS FOR CEC MEMBERS

CEC members who missed the monthly classified ad section will be happy to learn that the Swap Shop is back! Thank you for reading, and we hope to see your free ad here soon.

■ PETS

HAVN Low Cost Spaying and Neutering. Spaying and neutering your pet makes them healthier. 580-873-2491 or 580-317-5026.

Ark of McCurtain County offers discount spay/neuter services +mobile spay/neuter services. Please help us stop unwanted litters by spaying and neutering your pet. 580-236-2275.

■ MISCELLANEOUS

Want to Buy: Used wood splitter that has about 25 ton power rating. It needs to be able to split in the vertical position. 580-420-6989.

PLACE AN AD IN SWAP SHOP

Ads are free for members of Choctaw Electric Cooperative. Submit ads online at www.choctawelectric.coop, via email to jboling@choctawelectric.coop, or mail ads to CEC *Inside Your Co-op*, PO Box 758, Hugo, OK 74743. Ads must include a valid telephone number or email address. Please provide your name, mailing address and CEC account number when submitting an ad.