

Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Jann Dworsky
“Water, Delicious Entertainment”

Perhaps my husband and I are just easily entertained, but we have had fun watching the water level in Lake Belton. No, this is not the same as watching paint dry. It began when we received that two-inch rain in January and watched the lake level come up a whole foot!

Curiosity leads to many discoveries and my husband found a site on the computer to see the water level readings taken of Belton Lake. This site gives a lake level measurement every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day. Hopefully, this is a computer measurement and not some poor bored individual out there reading the level every 15 minutes! You can find this information on the site called USGS (United States Geological Survey) 08102000 Belton Lake near Belton, TX. If you type this into the Internet query line and hit search the site will pop up. We have ours set to show 7 days, but you can choose from one to 120 days.

On January 20th the lake level was 581.79 feet and 7 days later the lake was up nearly a foot to 582.71. After the drought we had this past summer and all the water shortage problems we had, this seems like a delicious number! But this is not nearly enough to combat the current drought conditions.

Another great site is located in Gatesville, our hometown, on the Leon River in Fauntleroy Park. This site is called USGS (United States Geological Survey) 08100500 Leon River at Gatesville. Type this into the Internet query line and the charts will pop up.

We are in Gatesville often and check the level by looking over the edge of the bridge as we cross. I give a reading to my husband such as “wouldn’t get your feet wet going across,” which to say the least, is a non-professional reading. All last summer during the drought, the Leon River was often measured at 2.66 feet or this same “wouldn’t get your feet wet” level. This was very discouraging to see.

“Gages such as the ones on the Leon River near Gatesville and at Lake Belton are installed and maintained by the United States Geological Survey (USGS),” said Brad Brunett, Water Services Manager for the Brazos River Authority. “Many other similar gages are located throughout the Brazos River Basin and are funded by agencies such as the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Brazos River Authority. These gages provide valuable information needed to manage the area’s water supplies during flood events and droughts.”

Our Leon River Watershed begins above Comanche, Texas, about 90 miles northwest of Temple, TX. We have some Comanche area friends who have given us a tour of this attractive lake. Both Belton Dam and Proctor Dam were built to control the tremendous flooding on the Leon River. Leon is the Spanish word for lion, a good indicator of its behavior, before the 1950’s dams.

Now the good news, and you won’t have to drive anywhere! Look on the USGS 08100500 Leon River Crossing at Gatesville and the level of the water flow will show! All the rain that couldn’t soak into Comanche County is coming down the Leon to us! January 26 the rise from upriver started and the level at the Leon River site in Gatesville

was 4.54 feet and about three hours later 10.23 feet. On January 27 the level was 19 feet and continued all day! Big excitement at our house!

Many questions come to mind! How long will it take for the water to flow down the Leon River, thru Mother Neff State Park, and down Lake Belton to be registered at the dam? As it turns out, it can be as much as a week! My daughter has a saying, "Water can only run thru a funnel so quickly."

In February, Bell County received over two inches of rain and the Belton Dam reading went from 584 feet to 589 feet. In March, our area received over 5 inches of rain and Belton Dam level showed 600 feet!! Often during these large rains the Leon River site at Gatesville measures as much as 19 feet and that is about to the top of the bank of the river and you would get much more than your feet wet!

If you are as easily entertained as my husband and I, put these two sites on your favorites lists and enjoy some "delicious entertainment". Every drop that comes in will be important during the coming year, with drought predicted again for this summer. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact askbcmga@gmail.com