

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

January 2014

Transplanting

While we certainly have our bad winter weather days here in west Texas, we also have a lot of really nice weather in the cold months. Now is a great time of year to take advantage of the pleasant days to do certain landscape projects like installing a patio or working to improve soil. It's certainly easier to do the harder jobs when it's cool outside, than when it's 100 degrees or more! We're lucky that our soil doesn't freeze solid and is still pretty workable all winter long. One chore that is most successful when done in the winter is transplanting.

Whether it's a volunteer plant that came up in a bad spot, or you just changed your mind about something you planted, it's possible to move plants around the landscape (within certain limitations). To increase chances for a successful move and reduce transplant shock, start out by only partially digging the root ball. Just cut into the soil around the trunk as if you were making a 'dotted line.' The goal is to sever some of the roots, but don't make a complete circle. This will allow the cut roots to branch out and increase within the root ball - and the more roots there are for the move, the better. Then about 6 to 8 weeks later, finish digging the plant for moving. Create a cylinder shaped root ball that is 10 inches in diameter for each inch of trunk diameter. A 2 inch trunk size is the limit for most homeowners, as the root ball gets too heavy to move beyond that. Be careful to not let the soil around the roots break up or crack. Once the plant is dug, immediately wrap in burlap to transport and plant in the new location.

After the plant has been moved, the final step is pruning. It is impossible to get all of the plant's roots when transplanting, so pruning the canopy of the plant to reflect the loss of roots can help compensate. Remove about 1/3 of the top of the plant, but don't ruin the form; be selective with which branches to thin out.

Volunteer plants rarely come up in a perfect spot in the landscape, so transplanting is necessary to be able to utilize these free plants. And sometimes purchased plants don't perform as well as they should and need to be moved to a better location. Don't be afraid to give transplanting a try!

January To-Do's

- Plant bare root fruit trees
- Prune shade trees if needed
- Need to move a plant in the yard? Now is the time - while dormant. Works only if the plant is young and small
- Order seeds from catalogs and online for spring
- Continue staggered planting of cool season vegetable crops such as lettuce, cabbage, and spinach

'Tango' celery



Celery is not a common crop in Texas because it's difficult to grow. But this variety, growing in the San Antonio Botanic Garden, seems to do better!

Join the Master Gardeners!

The Concho Valley Master Gardeners have been serving the community through horticulture education and programs for over 10 years now. The master gardener organization is a program that brings together people in the community that have an interest in gardening and horticulture.

They sign up for a training class that gives thorough education in all aspects of horticulture. After receiving training, the individuals share their knowledge with others by participating in educational programs and events.

Some of the projects the Concho Valley Master Gardeners work on include an an-

nual plant sale, rainwater harvesting training and rain barrel workshops, habitat for humanity landscapes, maintaining demonstration gardens, working with kids in a junior master gardener club, and more.

If you think you might be interested in taking the Master Gardener training course, the next class will be held March through May. Contact the Extension Office to register. 325-659-6522



Plant Spotlight

Pyracantha, firethorn

Watch out for the thorns, they are large and plentiful! But if planted in an area that is not near any foot traffic, where it doesn't pose a danger of pain, it's a beautiful plant with a sprawling form and colorful berries in the winter time.





Planting onions

Onion transplants can be planted mid-January through February. Onions are biennials, so if done by seed they take two years to produce a good bulb. Transplants are good if you want to get an onion in one season instead of waiting a long time. You can find onion sets in nurseries, through mail order catalogs and online. Just be sure to get them from a reliable source, because no matter how well you care for them you won't get good onions unless you start from healthy, pest free transplants.

When you get the live plants, plant them as soon as possible. If you can't get them in the ground immediately, take them out of the box and spread them out in a cool, dry spot. They can live this way for up to a couple of weeks. The roots and tops may dry out a bit

though, so get them planted as soon as you can.

Apply a fertilizer that contains phosphorus in a banding pattern 2 to 3 inches below the transplants when you put them in the ground. Fertilizer will ensure the healthiest, best produce.

The onions should be spaced about one inch deep and four inches apart. But, if you want to harvest some throughout the growing season as green onions, plant as close as two inches apart. Pull every other one just before they begin to bulb, leaving the rest to grow into larger onions. They do best in raised beds, because of the increased drainage.

At the end of the growing season, onions are fully mature when the tops have fallen over. Pull them from the ground and allow to dry. Then clip the roots and cut the tops back to one inch. To preserve them, keep them separated from each other in a cool, dry place.



Home Grown Fruit

What's better in hot summer time than biting into fresh, delicious homegrown fruit? Summer may be the last thing on the mind, but winter is a great time of year to plant fruit trees that can be enjoyed in the future. Most woody plants fare better if planted in the cool season, giving them a chance to establish a good root system in mild weather, than if planted when it's hot outside. Plus it's much easier on the gardener to dig the hole and do the work!

Our unpredictable climate doesn't make it easy to produce fruit, but it is possible to grow peaches, plums, apricots, pears, apples, pomegranates and blackberries in this part of Texas. Difficulty of production will depend on the type of fruit as well as specific variety. Pears are probably the easiest and most dependable option, while apricots only produce a crop occasionally.

Pomegranates are another good option, as they are well adapted to our hot, dry weather. Most apples are not self-fruitful, and will need at least two different varieties. The same goes for pear trees. It's important to choose varieties carefully, and select those that have proven to be successful in the area – a good variety would be one that has the proper chilling hours requirement, is resistant to pests, and is adapted to soil and other local conditions.

Chilling hours are the number of hours with temperatures between 32 and 45 degrees, and fruit trees will not bloom or set fruit until the requirement is met. In the Concho Valley, we

typically have about 900 chilling hours.

Most fruit trees will try to produce more fruit than they can sustain, and need to be thinned in order to produce high-quality fruit. For example, when fruit is still very small apples should be thinned to one or two fruit per cluster, and peaches thinned to six to eight inches apart.

Strawberries are another popular fruit to grow, but can be frustrating. They are sold in the springtime, but don't do well in our hot weather. Research is currently being done on fall planting of strawberries inside a low-tunnel hoop house for protection through freezing winter temperatures. Raspberries and blueberries are simply not a reasonable option in this part of Texas, but thankfully we have plenty of other tasty choices!

Recommended varieties for the Concho Valley:

Apple: Top Red, Anna, Mollie's Delicious, Gala

Pear: Orient, Moonglow, Kieffer

Peach: Ranger, Redglobe, Belle of Georgia

Apricot: Harcot, Golden Amber, Harval

Plum: Morris, Ozark Premier, Methley

Pomegranate: Sumbar, Russian 18 (a.k.a. Texas Red), Salavatski

Blackberry: Brazos, Womack, Rosborough



Upcoming Classes & Programs

January 2014

Friday January 10, 12pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Plant Propagation

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom
Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5



Saturday January 11, 9am to 11am

Saturday Seminar - Rainwater Harvesting

Cost: \$10

Location: Water Education Center, 417 S. Oakes
Call 656-3104 to reserve a space.

For more info on any activity, please call the Extension Office at
(325) 659-6528

For more information on any of the topics, or to ask questions please contact:



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Educational programs conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.