

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

January 2014

Earth-Kind Landscaping

If you're interested in having an attractive landscape but also want to conserve water and limit the use of fertilizers and pesticides, a great strategy to try is the EarthKind landscaping method. Not only does it provide a beautiful yard, but it's also lower maintenance and more environmentally friendly.

Earth-Kind practices are research-proven methods that have been scientifically tested. It's not organic gardening, but a combination of the best organic practices and the best traditional methods that work in the real world to grow healthy plants, and at the same time help preserve natural resources.

If you're interested in finding out more, visit the website at earthkind.tamu.edu. In short, the EarthKind system is a balance between traditional and organic, and uses the best of both for a successful landscape or garden.

The main goals of the EarthKind program are to: Reduce landscape water use, Reduce landscape fertilizer & pesticide use, Reduce yard wastes entering landfills, and increase Energy Conservation in the landscape.

The Earthkind program was created by Texas Agrilife Extension and Research, along with Texas A&M university. It's researched based, scientifically backed information that really works. The great part about Earth-Kind is that not only does it help protect natural resources and the environment, but it is also good for plants and is generally lower maintenance and cheaper to maintain than some of the more traditional landscaping.

The basic EarthKind principles in a nutshell are: water conservation, which includes rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation, soil improvement, which includes composting and mulching, good plant selection, landscape design, energy conservation, and integrated pest management.



Example of a front yard that follows EarthKind landscaping principles in San Angelo

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

Pecan Update



Congrats to the growers from the Concho Valley that placed at the West Regional Pecan Show! They will advance to the State Pecan Show:

Chester Mcown, Runnels
LeRoy Olsak, Schleicher
Brian Edmiston, Schleicher
Douglas & Sarah Wilde, Tom Green
Robert Fuessel, Tom Green

Join the Master Gardeners!

The Concho Valley Master Gardeners have been serving the community through horticulture education and programs for 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 annual 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 Feb. 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.



Integrated Pest Management

One of the goals of the EarthKind landscaping system is to lower the use of pesticides. The best way to do this is to follow an integrated pest management system, IPM for short. In a nutshell, an IPM system focuses on preventing pest problems as much as possible, and then when needed, using various methods for control instead of only relying on chemicals.

Don't just follow a calendar and apply pesticides as a routine, but use all available methods to prevent and treat problems, including cultural, mechanical, and biological controls.

One recommendation in an IPM program is to not try and kill every single insect in the yard, but keep pest numbers below the level that they would cause unacceptable damage. Not every insect is a pest, so it's important to identify before killing.

What cultural control means in an IPM program is basically just good plant care, like proper watering and pruning. Healthy plants are less likely to get pest infestations. The second approach, mechanical control, means physically removing or blocking pests. That would be things like hoeing or tilling weeds, or spraying insects off with a stream of water.

The third step is biological control. This just means using other living things, like beneficial insects, to keep problems in check. The fourth option is chemical control. Try to only use chemical control if all the previous methods don't work, and find the product with the lowest toxicity and that has the least impact on beneficials.

Reducing Fertilizer Use

Another step in creating an Earth-Kind landscape is to reduce fertilizer use as much as possible. The first, simplest way is to do a soil test. This just means digging up a little bit of soil and mailing it to a lab for analysis. They'll tell you what's in your soil and provide a fertilizer recommendation based on what type of plants you're growing.

This can help lower fertilizer use because many homeowners just put down fertilizer every year on a schedule without knowing for sure if they need it. It's not uncommon for a homeowner to submit a soil sample and find out they don't need to apply fertilizer at all, or at least not as much as they thought.

Reducing the use of fertilizer this way is good for you, good for your plants, and good for the environment. Some people think that if a little bit of fertilizer helps, a lot will help more.

But overfertilizing is bad for plants; it stimulates excess growth which is tender and more susceptible to pests and requires more water. It's best for plants to grow at a natural, moderate pace and be healthier than trying to stimulate them to grow as fast as possible.

The one area that does generally require fertilizer every year is the lawn, but be careful not to overdo it. Over fertilizing the lawn just increases the need for mowing and water.

Many bedding and ornamental plants can be maintained with nutrition just from compost and mulch and don't need a lot of supplemental fertilizer. Remember the phrase "compost once, mulch forever." This means incorporate 3 inches of compost into the soil before planting, then mulch over. Keep replenishing mulch every year. The initial compost is a good source of nutrients and organic matter, and the mulch will add to it as it breaks down.

Classes & Programs

January 2014



Friday January 9, 12pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Plant Propagation

Instructor - Allison Watkins

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

Cost: \$5

Learn how to grow your own vegetable and landscape plants from seeds and cuttings!

Coming Soon

Master Gardener Training Course

Feb 17th - May 19

Instructor: Various instructors from around the state

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67

Cost: \$175, includes lunches and textbook

Join the Master Gardeners! The extensive 14-week training course provides instruction on many different horticultural topics. Contact the Extension Office and put your name on the Master Gardener waiting list, so we can mail you the schedule and registration form.



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

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