

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

October 2015

Fall Planting

September 23rd was the first day of fall, but I think Mother Nature missed the memo! It sure hasn't felt like fall weather. But fall will come, and when cooler, wetter weather does settle in, it will be a great time to plant.

Fall is the best time of year to plant trees and shrubs, because conditions are milder and the plants have a good, long chance to establish roots before the harsh summer comes. Consider replacing any plants that were damaged or killed by stressful weather in recent years with tougher, more tolerant options. Select the best plants based on the needs of the landscape, such as the amount of shade, drought tolerance, and soil type; then go to the nurseries looking for them, rather than just buying on a whim. Planning ahead will go a long way toward having successful plants!

Even if we get some rain through the fall, water conservation is always critical. Be sure to apply a 3 to 4 inch deep layer of mulch around plants to retain moisture – just don't pile mulch up high around woody trunks. Leave a few inches of space between plant trunks and mulch (think of the shape of a donut, not a volcano).

Some good medium to large shade trees for the area would include Chinese pistache, cedar elm, bur oak, and chinquapin oak. These beautiful, tough, and drought tolerant trees will provide good shade when they mature. For smaller homes, try a lacey oak or golden rain tree. Autumn is a good time of year to select a deciduous shade tree, since you can see what the fall colors will be.

Some of the suggested small ornamental trees would be desert willow, Texas mountain laurel, Mexican plum, Mexican persimmon, and Texas redbud.

For shrubs, choose a plant that will grow to the right size and shape at maturity, so it doesn't require regular, excessive pruning to keep it from overgrowing the beds and covering windows. Choose dwarf or miniature shrubs such as dwarf yaupon holly or dwarf Indian hawthorn.

Don't forget the cool season vegetables - crops like lettuce, broccoli, carrots and radishes can be grown through the fall and winter.

October To-Do's

- Harvest cold-sensitive herbs such as basil
- Plant cool season annuals
- Adjust irrigation schedule for cooler weather
- Plant trees, shrubs and vines

Pecan Update

From the Texas Pecan Pest Management
Newsletter by Bill Ree



At this time the only production insect problem facing producers could be a late emergence of pecan weevil and late infestation of stink bugs. Make sure you run PW emergence traps up though shuck split of your latest maturing variety.

As for foliage pests, to treat or not to treat for aphids and mites can be a tough call. I have arbitrarily set October 1 as the cutoff date for aphid/mite treatments.

Water Conservation

Even though the first half of the year was great, water wise, late summer and early fall has been really dry. Hopefully October will be nice and rainy! Even when we do have more water available, and aren't in as severe drought as previous years, water conservation is still important and should always be a consideration.

One way to have a positive impact on water resources is to be careful with water use in the yard. For those with automatic sprinklers, this is a good time of year to evaluate the system and make water conserving improvements. It's best to get going during the 'off season' and not wait until spring when irrigation contractors get busy. There are several practices to adopt in landscape irrigation to reduce water use, as well as improve plant health.

First, use drip irrigation for all planting beds such as perennial, shrub or vegetable beds. Drip irrigation is much more water efficient than sprinklers, which can lose a lot of water to evaporation. It is easy to install - existing sprinkler heads can be converted to allow connection of the drip tubing, or it can be connected directly to a faucet.

Besides the issue of conservation and evaporation loss, drip irrigation also is a better choice for

plants. Spraying water on leaves is generally not good for the health of plants. When it gets hot and dry in the summer, the salt content of water can burn or scorch plant leaves. When it's humid and wet outside, spraying water on the leaves can spread disease.

Concerning turfgrass however, sprinklers are usually the easiest way to go. There are sub-surface drip systems that can be designed for lawns which are more water efficient, but they are not very common. Something that can be done to help efficiency of sprinkler systems is an irrigation audit. Check to ensure sprinkler heads are facing the right direction, and are not turned around watering the wrong area. Also check the droplet size that is being sprayed - small droplets that come out as a fine mist will evaporate very quickly. High pressure can cause misting, while lowering water pressure can increase droplet size and reduce water waste.

Finally, become familiar with the irrigation time clock and learn to adjust it. The frequency and amount of water applied will change based on season, and should not be left on the same schedule year round.

Plant Spotlight

Woolly Stemodia

Stemodia tomentosa

This Texas native does great in well drained soil and makes a beautiful trailing plant for raised beds, or a nice groundcover for sunny areas.



Shrubs

Like mentioned on page one, fall is a great time of year to plant shrubs. While technically, you can plant container grown plants any time of year, summer is the least desirable time, spring and winter are good, but fall is generally the best.

When choosing a shrub to plant, pick the right plant for the spot before heading to the nursery. Select one that will grow to the right size and shape at maturity, so it doesn't require regular, excessive pruning to keep it from overgrowing the beds and covering windows. Choose dwarf or miniature shrubs such as dwarf yaupon holly or dwarf Indian hawthorn. If you choose the right plant to begin with, there should be no reason to have to prune it regularly, if at all. Like Neil Sperry likes to say, if God wanted us to have square and ball shaped plants He would have created them that way!

After picking the right type, shrubs are sold at various sizes, ranging from tiny quart sized to nearly fully grown 10 gallon pots. Smaller ones are cheaper but take a little longer to fill out. Be careful to not plant them too close together – it's very tempting to do so when they're small, but remember they will grow much larger.

After getting them home, prepare the bed for planting by incorporating a good amount of organic matter into the soil. No special soil amendments are needed except for plain, simple organic matter such as compost, peat moss or rotted manure.

When removing the plants from the pot, gently loosen any roots that are circling around the rootball, and plant at the same depth it was growing at in the pot – match the top of the rootball with the top of the soil. To finish off, apply a good layer of mulch – about 3 inches deep.

Pruning Trees

Soon cooler weather will start slowing down many landscape chores, and many of us will be looking for tasks that can be done in the winter time to stay productive and take preventative measures to help for the next growing season. One dormant season task is pruning.

Timing is important for pruning, especially for valuable mature shade trees. Winter is the best time for pruning many landscape shade trees, but not for trees that flower in the early spring – for those, prune after they flower. And even though winter is best, many can be pruned just about any time of year, with the exception of oak trees. Don't prune oaks until December or January, to help prevent potential oak wilt infection. Dead or diseased limbs should always be removed if they pose a danger to people or structures, no matter what time of year.

When pruning a woody plant, don't remove more than 1/3 of the total leaf canopy in one year. Pruning off too much at once can stimulate a rapid growth response in trees and shrubs, creating unsightly and unwanted water sprouts and suckers. It is also unhealthy to the plant to take off too much plant material at once, even when dormant. Pests are also dormant in the winter, decreasing the chances of insect or disease infestation; which is why you should always only prune an oak tree in the winter when the pest that spreads the oak wilt disease is dormant.

Make sure that any tools that are used on your trees are sterilized with a ten percent bleach solution, rubbing alcohol, or similar products. If you hire someone to do the work, make sure they sterilize their tools before starting.

Utilizing Perennials in the Landscape

Annuals and perennials make good partners in the landscape, and both should be utilized for good color and interest. Annuals generally have more concentrated color pop, but have to be replaced each year. Perennials generally don't provide as intense, concentrated color as annuals can, but they do come back each year and are very important to a good landscape design.

Perennial flowers are good at unifying and bringing a landscape together. Repeat three types of perennial flower in several different plantings in the landscape, instead of planting one of many different kinds. Too much variety can look hectic and disorganized.

Perennials work well for planting in small corners, curves or bed ends - you can plant just a few together to create an accent or focal point that will brighten up boring green hedges.

Perennials are also great for large planters and raised beds, mixed with annuals, to brighten up a porch or patio.

Cut flowers are a nice way to bring the beauty of nature inside, and perennial flowers give you that option. Whether it's a small set of just a few perennial flowers or a full blown cut flower garden, it's nice to have supply of flowers to pick when wanted or needed for a present.

Perennials aren't that hard to care for. The biggest maintenance step is deadheading, which just means to cut off or remove the old spent blooms. The flowers will shrivel up and turn brown, and try to start making seeds. If you pull the flower off before that, you can trick the plant into thinking it needs to bloom again and will get repeated blooms all season.

Some good perennials to try in this area are: autumn joy sedum, mealy cup sage, garden chrysanthemum, coreopsis, gaillardia, lantana, Mexican mint marigold, Mexican bush sage, and rudbeckia.

Choosing a Lawn Service

Many homeowners like to maintain their landscape themselves, because they enjoy it and like to know exactly what's happening and when. But if you don't have the time or desire to do yard work, and want to hire someone, here are some tips to help choose the best company.

First, keep an eye out in your neighborhood. See what lawn companies your neighbors are using, and see if their landscapes look well cared for. Talk to your neighbors and ask them how well the company they use does on their yard.

Then, see what services the company offers before hiring one. They may just mow lawns, when you need shrubs and flower beds to be taken care of too. Ask if they have a pesticide applicator's license if you need them to do any control of pests like insects, weeds or diseases.

Ask for references and then follow up by driving by or contacting the references to ask about how well the service is done. After choosing a company and then going through the process of hiring them, make sure that the contract includes the services you want done, and not anything that you don't want done. If you feel like they're trying to sell you a bunch of extra services that you don't need, talk them through the schedule and your questions before signing up.

Don't let a lawn care service do unnecessary work, or do things at the wrong time of year - but they will need some leeway on timing, and probably won't be able to do every task at the exact time of year that you would. And that's ok, as long as it's not too far off the recommended timing.

Classes & Programs

October 2015



Saturday, October 10, 9am to 11am

Saturday Seminar—Rainwater Harvesting

Location: Meet at 2750 Ben Ficklin (Southside Rec Center)
then carpool to instructor Ron Knight's home

Cost: \$10

Offered by the People/Plant Connection. Are you ready to start a rainwater system? This is a great time to learn what system works best for you and how much rainwater you can expect to catch.

Friday, October 16, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Don't Fall Behind

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's
Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Fall is a great time of year for working in the landscape and garden! The mild weather makes it better for you as well as plants. Find out what to do to stay productive, including bulb planting, cool season annuals, soil management and winterization.



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

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Allison Watkins

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension
Tom Green County
113 W Beauregard
San Angelo, TX 76903
325-659-6528

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