

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

November 2015

Winter Color

It was hot and dry in September and October, but now that it's cooling down it's starting to finally feel like autumn. But freezing weather will be here before you know it, and many landscape plants will go dormant - leaving the yard a bit dreary. One way to keep the home landscape looking alive and attractive through the winter is to provide some color, and this can easily be done by using cool season annuals.

To get the biggest impact in the landscape, annuals should be planted close together in small 'pockets' - strategically placed to catch the eye. Spreading a few annuals out in a large flower bed will dilute the color and not allow the flowers to stand out. Plant around the mailbox, on either side of the front door, or any place that is easily viewed or receives a lot of foot traffic. Water conservation is still a major issue for us, and a few properly placed winter annuals can provide a large impact without the need for excessive watering.

There are several good cool-season annual flowers that can be planted now and that will bloom into spring until hot weather arrives, including pansies, snapdragons, dianthus and stock.



Stock is one of my favorite annual winter plants; not only are the flowers beautiful but they have a great spicy/sweet fragrance. Stock does very well here in the Concho Valley and will bloom late into spring. Size ranges from 1 to 2 feet tall and colors come in white, and varying shades of pink and purple.

Pansies are favorite winter flowers for good reason - they are tough and well adapted, easy to maintain, and provide a great color display for a long period of time. There are many, many color options that can integrate well into any landscape design or color scheme.

As with all planting, always prepare the ground by incorporating compost or other organic matter into well-tilled soil, and add a layer of mulch after planting to conserve water and control weeds.

November To-Do's

- Drain fuel from mower and other lawn equipment, or add a fuel stabilizer
- Plant trees and shrubs
- Utilize fallen leaves as mulch or add to compost bin

Pecan Update



We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan show on Thursday, December 3rd. Entries will be accepted until noon on Tuesday, December 1. This is a great way to learn what variety of pecans you may have and to visit the display and receive information on growing pecans in our area.

For more info, please contact the extension office at 325-659-6522

Plants and Cold Weather

We're getting closer to winter, and freezing weather will be here soon. Here is some info on how to protect your plants from cold weather.

There are three basic things you can do to deal with freezing weather. First, you can use lots of mulch. Second, you can cover the plants up, and third you can move them or bring them in.

Which method to use will depend on the type of plant and where it's growing. Some plants you don't need to worry about at all, like well-established trees and shrubs. Then there are perennials that usually the roots survive the winter and the plant comes back up in the spring, and finally there are those tender plants that can't take any freezing weather at all.

Mulch is very effective at moderating soil temperature and protecting plant roots from freezing temperatures.

Mulch should already be in place in the landscape for other reasons such as weed control and water conservation, but if not - put it down for winter protection. Even for plants that should be able to make it through the winter, it's better safe than sorry.

The second option, covering plants up, should only be used as an emergency solution for unexpected frosts. Tender plants that can't take frost can be covered with burlap, old sheets, or any cloth material. Avoid plastic unless you can prop it up over the plant where it doesn't touch the plant.

Then for the tropical plants, they just have to be taken inside. Remember that potted plants are more prone to cold damage because they are less protected. If you want to hold on to them through the winter, bring them inside the house into a spot with bright light, away from drafts.



Plant Spotlight

Snapdragon

Antirrhinum spp.

Snapdragons provide beautiful color in cooler weather. Plant in full sun or part shade, keep tips pinched so the plant stays full, and keep moisture level even.



Plant Bulbs

Planting bulbs is an easy, inexpensive way to get great color in the springtime – now that the soil is starting to cool off, it's time to get bulbs into the ground. Nothing announces the coming of spring quite like bulbs popping up, almost forgotten because they were planted so far in advance.

When growing spring bulbs, it's important to remember to consider some of them as annuals. For many types, our temperatures don't get cold enough to set new flower buds year after year; it's best to pull up the old plants when they finish blooming and plant new bulbs the following year. One exception is the daffodil, which can become naturalized and bloom again each year.

Store bulbs in a cool, dry spot until time for planting, preferably in a refrigerator. Just don't place bulbs in the same refrigerator as fruits or vegetables, because that would damage the blooms.

Now that the soil is cooling down, it's almost time for bulbs to go in the ground. Flowers like crocus, daffodil, tulips, and hyacinth are beautiful flowers and do well when planted mid-November through December. Tulips and hyacinth benefit from a 60-day pre-chilling treatment in the refrigerator prior to planting.

When planting bulbs, be sure to amend the soil in the beds with lots of organic matter such as finished compost. They can also be planted in containers with a nice well drained potting soil. They should go in about 6 inches deep, or twice the height of the bulb. They can be planted in full sun to part shade, just don't put them in deep full shade. It's definitely not an instant impact in the landscape and takes patience to enjoy, but planting spring flowering bulbs in the fall will be well worth the effort and wait when spring comes.

Winter Pest Control

Now through early spring is the time of year we can apply an insect control product called a dormant oil. Dormant oil is just a type of horticultural oil that is applied when plants are dormant. Horticultural oils are liquid products, and are applied as sprays to control many plant pests. Horticulture oils are good because they are safe to use, are very effective, and have a limited effect on beneficial insects.

Horticulture oil is good for control of aphids, scale and mites on woody plants. There are also many flowers and vegetables that it can help. Just don't use oils on plants that have been under water stress, because applying a horticultural oil to a drought stressed plant can cause injury. Oils can work in several ways - one way is to block the air holes the insects breathe through,

Another way is the oil can damage the waxy cuticle on the insects body, allowing internal cells to dry up or be killed. Dormant oils are called that because they are only applied in the dormant season. This is because if applied in the warm season, it can essentially 'cook' the plant. Dormant oils are particularly useful in controlling scale insects.

Scale insects are small pests that are found on trunks, stems, and sometimes foliage of plants. They secrete a waxy substance that covers and protects them while they feed on the plant. They look like little scabs, or spots on the plant and come in colors ranging from red, orange, black, and yellow. They are very hard to control because pesticides don't penetrate their protective covering. The adults never move, once they latch on they're there for good. Horticultural oils can control them very effectively if applied correctly, according to label directions.

Winter Vegetables

A lot of warm season vegetable plants have still been going, but will probably stop soon when we start getting freezing weather. You never know though, I remember harvesting tomatoes after Christmas with just a little frost protection here and there!

But this time of year is ideal for planting leafy greens and other winter vegetables. There are a lot of tasty crops that can be planted now through February. The colder it is, the better – for many winter vegetables like broccoli, cabbage and lettuce. If planted in the spring, when it starts getting warm, these cool season leafy greens can turn bitter and not be useable.

Another good thing about planting a winter garden is that there are fewer insect pests than there are in the spring and summer time.

You don't even have to designate a specific plot for a vegetable garden, these cool season crops can be incorporated into the existing landscape really easily once warm season flowers die back for the winter. They are attractive additions to flowerbeds and also when planted in containers for the porch or patio.

Here's a list of winter vegetables that can be planted now: Beets, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, kale, mustard greens, onions, spinach, swiss chard and turnips.

These vegetable crops will need to be watered and fertilized just like warm season crops, but due to the cooler weather and lower water use, they won't need it as frequently. And though pest populations aren't as bad in the fall as in the spring and summer, still keep an eye out for insect pests. An easy way to manage caterpillar pests like cabbage loopers is a product called BT which is safe to use on food plants.

Grow Oak Trees from Seed

Oak trees are beautiful in the home landscape. There are several good choices for the Concho Valley, such as Bur Oak, Chinquapin Oak, and Live Oak. Oak trees add a lot of property value and enjoyment. They can be easily found at nurseries and garden centers, but if you want to grow your own for free or do a fun science project with kids, try collecting some acorns and planting them.

Try looking along the riverwalk downtown, or check out a park if you don't have any sources in your neighborhood for acorn collection. They ripen this time of year so keep an eye out. To germinate them, you'll need to find acorns with no holes in them – many that are on the ground have been damaged by a weevil and won't grow.

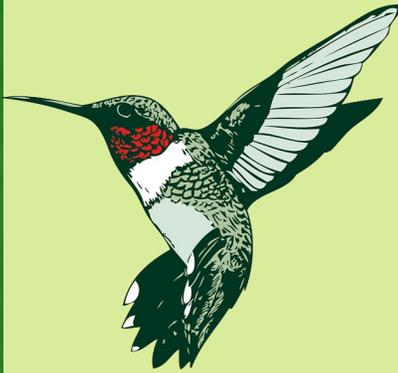
Also, acorns that spend time on the ground will dry out and won't germinate as well. Try getting some straight from the tree before they fall off.

Once you've collected some acorns, put them in a bucket of water and throw out any that float. The ones that sink to the bottom are the good ones. Acorns don't need to be chilled or treated to grow, just remove any caps that are left.

Plant the acorns right away, they should not be allowed to dry out. Plant either in pots with a good well drained potting mix or directly in the ground in a well prepared planting bed. Pots are probably easier though, since you don't have to worry about weeds. If planting in the ground, till in some organic matter to improve the soil. The acorns should be planted about an inch or two deep and kept moist until they start coming up.

Classes & Programs

November 2015



Saturday, November 7, 9am to 11am

Saturday Seminar—Hummingbirds

Location: Southside Rec Center— 2750 Ben Ficklin

Cost: \$10

Instructor: Charles Floyd

Offered by the People/Plant Connection. Learn how to attract hummingbirds to your yard!

Friday, November 20, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Tree Planting and Care

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Fall is the best time of year to plant trees! Find out good planting techniques, as well as how to care for mature trees.



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



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