

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

November 2017

Plan Ahead to Plant Fruit Trees

Many home plantings are a spur of the moment decision - an idea comes to mind to grow something new and in the excitement sometimes we skip some important planning stages. That may not be as big of a deal for some types of plants, like perennials that really tough and adapted to our local conditions; some plants can do ok without soil prep or special consideration, but almost every kind of plant will do better with some soil improvement and planning. And for some things, planning ahead is especially important. Fruit trees are one of the things you want to prepare ahead of time for.

January is a great time of year to plant fruit trees, but start now with site preparation and start researching which variety to grow. Many fruit trees are very particular about having good soil drainage, and it's important to plant the right variety that is best adapted to the climate.

First, to prepare the planting site, clear the area completely of all vegetation and till up a plot of about 4 feet by 4 feet. Then level the area out and till once more. Soil amendments are not recommended for large landscape trees, but for a fruit tree it's a good idea to mix in three inches of good quality compost to improve drainage and soil structure.



If soil is particularly heavy and has poor drainage, build up a berm or raised bed so the tree will be sitting above grade and have better drainage.

Finally, plant some rye grass seed and water it to germinate well. The rye grass roots will help create channels in the soil to keep it loosened up, and can be tilled in as a green manure before planting in January. Or, just use a thick layer of a good wood based mulch for a similar effect. The organic matter will help create a better soil texture for the fruit trees when planted later in the winter. For a list of some of the recommended fruit varieties for Tom Green County, visit <http://counties.agrilife.org/tomgreen/files/2011/09/Fruit-Varieties-List.pdf>

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
- Plant spring bulbs

Pecan Update



We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan show on Friday, December 1st. Entries will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, November 29th. 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 325-659-6528

Broken Tree Twigs

I often get questions about what causes small branches in a tree to die and either hang in the tree or fall to the ground. This is a symptom called flagging, and when you stand further away from the tree you can see small patches of brown dead leaves. There are multiple things that can cause this, but two of the more common causes in the Concho Valley include squirrels and a twig girdler beetle.

In the spring and summer, this kind of damage is more commonly caused by squirrels. Arborists have some ideas of why they think squirrels do this, such as young ones gnawing to sharpen their teeth, or to get moisture when it's hot and dry, but there isn't a proven reason. There isn't a good control option either, but though some trees might look bad with several small dead spots this kind of damage isn't lethal or even very damaging to the tree.

In the fall, the damage is more often caused by twig girdler beetles. The adult female lays eggs in the twig, then moves backward a bit and goes round and round the twig chewing in a circle. With the bark and cambium layer underneath damaged, the twig dies from that point on and

dries up. Eventually the twig falls to the ground and the eggs develop inside, feeding on dead wood.

Twig girdlers are also not lethal to trees and very rarely cause any kind of permanent damage. It's not possible to treat the tree to prevent them because the timing is so specific it's not feasible to apply insecticide. If you would like to reduce this kind of damage in the future, just rake up and destroy all the fallen twigs or bag them up and throw away.



An example of the flagging symptom in trees

Plant Spotlight

Daffodil

Narcissus pseudonarcissus "Lent Lily"

It's time to get spring blooming bulbs in the ground now that soil has cooled off. If you want a bright pop of sunny yellow in late winter, try planting some of the 'Lent Lily' type of daffodil.



Photos from Southernbulbs.com

Cool Season Color

The weather is cooling down and many landscape plants will start going dormant soon, but that doesn't mean you can't have color in the yard. There are a lot of great cool season annuals to keep the landscape bright and attractive through the winter.

Pansies are the most common solution and are a great choice. October through November is the best time to plant these flowers, which come in lots of different colors. They can withstand temperatures as low as 10° F, and they will continue to bloom until hot weather comes back in the spring.

Pansies work best in a location that receives full sun, and will keep blooming throughout the season if kept moist and by applying a balanced fertilizer program and pinching any blooms that have faded.

Pansies are so popular because they come in so many different colors and color combinations, and keep blooming steadily.

Some other great options for colorful, cool season annuals are things like snapdragons, flowering kale, and Johnny jump ups.

Johnny jump ups are similar to pansies, but have smaller flowers. They also do extremely well in the cold winter weather, and will reseed themselves every year. Watch out because they can start to take over flower beds if left alone.

One of my favorite cool season annual flowers is called stock. It's really hardy and tough, but is also beautiful and smells wonderful.

Garden mums are a great autumn plant; they do well in the cool fall weather but don't last into winter. Be sure to get garden mums, florist mums won't come back next year

When planting any cool season annuals, be sure to till up the soil well, incorporate some compost, and mulch over well after planting. This will help your plants stay healthy and beautiful as long as possible.



Concho Valley Pecan Show



There are a lot of pecan trees in San Angelo and in the Concho Valley, and those who are lucky to have healthy pecan trees that produce a good crop really enjoy having them around. They are a beautiful native plant that provides a good, healthy source of food. They are not drought tolerant or low maintenance, but if you have the time and water available to care for them, pecans are a great tree that gives more than just shade – pecans are delicious and healthy to eat.

For winter maintenance, the main job to do besides harvesting pecans is watering. Pruning can also be done if needed. When it's cold, they definitely won't need as much water as they do during the growing season, but though the tree is dormant, it's still alive and the roots will need water occasionally.

So if there is less than an inch of rainfall in a month, give occasional supplemental water to pecan trees now through February.

If you want to plant a nice landscape shade tree and have enough water to maintain it, some of the recommended varieties include Pawnee, Hopi, Sioux and Wichita do well in the Concho Valley.

Pecan trees in the home landscape should be spaced far enough away from hardscapes such as patios and driveways and home foundations - this means at least 15 feet away.

We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan show on Friday, December 1st. Entries will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, November 29. For more info, please contact the extension office at 325-659-6522. This is a good opportunity to see how your crop is looking for the year and find out what variety of pecan you have.

Cold Weather and Plants

The weather has been really up and down, warm then cold—and for some, there was an early first frost on October 28. Not all locations dropped to freezing, but now it's only a matter of time before cold weather sets in for good. 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—like the early frost that came through. 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. Covering plants in this manner is only feasible for a short, light frost and only for plants that you want to hang on to for a short while longer. When winter really sets in, it's best to let these tender plants go.

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.

Efficient Winter Watering

Even though we haven't been in severe drought, water quality and quantity is still a big deal. Last year we had more than normal rainfall, and this year hasn't been bad, but our reservoirs are still low and we need to keep focused on conserving water everywhere possible.

One big way to have a positive impact on water resources is to be careful with water use in the yard. Now that it's cooling down and we're going into winter, it's a lot easier to conserve water and plants won't need as much. But dormant plants still need some moisture, so when we go for a few weeks without rain they will still need a little irrigation – and we still need to be careful and conserve as much as possible.

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, convert to 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's also a better choice for plant health.

For lawns with spray heads, do a little sprinkler system audit. Check that sprinkler heads are facing the right direction, and 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.

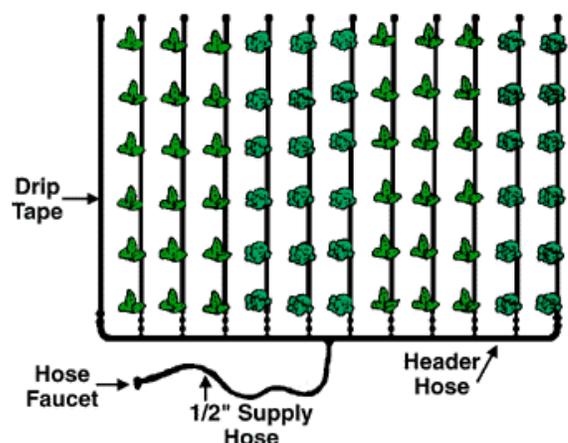


Fig. 9. Typical design (layout) of a drip system for a home vegetable garden.

Upcoming Events

October 2017

Thursday, November 2nd, 6pm

People/Plant Connection Pumpkin Festival

Location: 2750 Ben Ficklin Rd

Cost: Free to attend, \$10 per pumpkin or pie entry

Provided by the People/Plant Connection; Come see the Giant Pumpkin Contest weigh-in and the pumpkin pie contest! There will be activities for kids, door prizes, and pumpkin themed refreshments. FMI: 325-656-3104



Friday, November 17, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Vermiculture—Worm Farming and Composting

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard, San Angelo

Cost: \$5

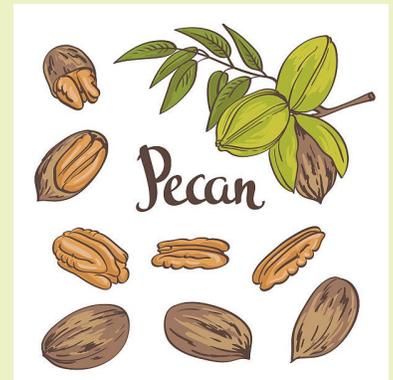
Guest Speaker: Linda Rowe, Master Gardener

Provided by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to start a worm farm and how to use the castings to improve the soil in your garden!

Wednesday, November 29

Deadline to submit pecans for the Concho Valley Pecan Show

The pecan show will be held Friday, December 1st in the Extension Office at 113 W. Beauregard—if you would like to enter samples, bring a bag of 42 pecans of each variety being entered along with contact information, by Wednesday November 29. For more info, contact Allison at 325-659-6528



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



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