

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

December 2015

Preventing Oak Wilt

There have been several confirmed cases of Oak Wilt in the San Angelo area. Oak wilt is a deadly fungal disease that can affect any kind of oak but is very prevalent in live oaks and red oaks. But the good news is that there are some simple steps to take that are pretty effective at preventing infection.

Prevention is the key, since treatment with fungicide is very costly and not guaranteed to cure the disease once the tree shows symptoms.

First, prune only when the time is right - the season for pruning oak trees is now through January. There are sap-feeding insects called nitidulid beetles that can spread the disease to wounds on freshly pruned trees, but they go dormant in the winter, which makes it a safer time to prune.

Another preventative tip is to paint the cuts. Any cheap latex spray paint will work, it doesn't have to be thick pruning paint. In general, we don't recommend painting cuts, but oak trees are the exception. Use on all cuts of oak trees to inhibit the disease being spread to the cut through nitidulid beetles, especially for any limbs cut down in the warm season.

Third, be sure that any equipment used on oak trees is sterilized and cleaned between trees. If you do the work yourself, use rubbing alcohol or a 10% bleach solution; if you hire someone, be sure to ask them to clean tools before working on your oak tree.

Visit the website texasoakwilt.org for information, and for pictures of symptoms. For any chance of successful treatment, early detection is critical. Just don't panic if your oak tree is stressed, it's likely the tree is just suffering from the weather of recent years. Oak wilt should not automatically be blamed for tree stress.



Characteristic symptom in live oaks—veinal necrosis

December To-Do's

- Plant bulbs
- Reduce irrigation - but still water every few weeks to keep roots healthy
- Replenish mulch in beds
- Plant cool season vegetables such as lettuce, spinach and kale

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

Pruning Trees

December and January are the big months for pruning trees. It's a good way to stay productive through the cold, dormant months, but don't prune just for the sake of staying busy. Only prune if needed.

Pruning is best done during this time of year for many plants because they are dormant. There are some exceptions, but for many trees the dormant season is ideal. Minor pruning can be done year round if needed, and dead or damaged limbs should be removed any time of year.

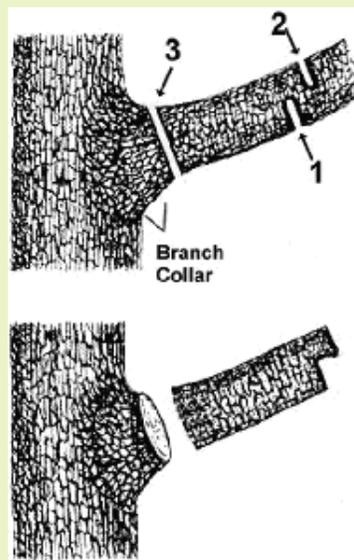
Some good reasons to prune would be to train the plant into a specific shape, to maintain plant health for certain species, to improve flowers, fruit or foliage, to restrict growth, or to remove damaged, dead, or unsightly branches.

Unless your tree matches any of these situations, it probably doesn't need to be pruned. Good plant selection usually prevents the need for extensive pruning, so choose the best types when possible.

When ready to prune, come up with a plan before any cutting starts. This is the order you should go: first, remove dead, broken or diseased limbs. This might be all that's required. Next, remove

any branch that is rubbing or touching another branch. Leave the stronger or better positioned one. Third, remove any branch that is growing in the same direction or space as the one next to it. Next, take off any branch that is growing from one side, through the middle, and out the other side of the tree. This type of crossing branch takes up space and crosses other branches that are better positioned.

The fifth step is to remove branches that are aimed toward the ground. Then remove all suckers and water sprouts. These vigorous shoots are unattractive and unnecessary.



When removing branches, don't cut flush to the trunk but cut just outside the branch collar. The collar has special tissues that help with healing. For large branches, use the three step cut to prevent potential splintering and stripping down the trunk.

Plant Spotlight

Bright Lights Swiss Chard *Beta vulgaris* 'Bright Lights'

This beautiful winter vegetable is pretty enough to plant in flower beds as a cool season annual, but can also be used as a tasty, healthy green leafy vegetable





Landscape Design

The dormant winter season is a great time to assess your landscape design and make plans for any desired changes. The landscape is a very important part of any home, it increases beauty and adds curb appeal, and also adds value to the property. A good landscape is also enjoyable and can provide recreation and relaxation.

Trees are the first step to evaluate. They are the largest, most permanent part of the landscape. You don't want trees that hide the home, but frame it instead. Place trees at a 45 degree angle off of building corners, so that the front is open. If you already have trees that are already blocking the view to the home, try pruning the limbs up - especially in front of the door and windows.

The next important aspect of a landscape is the use of shrubs. If placed well, shrubs can compliment the architecture of a home very well. Tall shrubs should be placed only at the corners, not between windows. Staggering tall shrubs with shorter ones under windows will break up the view and not be nice to look at.

If placing shrubs around the perimeter of the home, use evergreen plants. They provide a good foundation and will look good all year round. They can hide foundations and soften sharp corners. They provide a good background for other plantings such as colorful perennials and annuals.

A good landscape is built with layers, starting with shade trees and then foundation shrubs, then adding depth with flower beds with flowers and other ornamentals. A good landscape design also usually consists of broad curved lines instead of straight lines with sharp angles.

Starting Seeds Indoors

Some gardeners like to get prepared for spring by planting seeds indoors in the late winter. It's a good way to stay productive during the dormant winter season, and get a head start on spring growing. Seeds are cheaper than transplants, and if you start your seeds indoors you can get a 4 to 8 week head start on colorful landscape plants and garden vegetables as opposed to planting seeds outside after the last frost. It's too early right now to plant even inside, but it's a good time of year to start requesting seed catalogs so you can order what you need.

February is a good time of year to start many seeds. First, use a fine textured potting mix that is peat based. Use new, sterile potting mix for seeds; used potting mix can contain fungal disease that can kill the seedlings.

Next, get containers. Anything will do - wooden boxes, milk cartons, peat pots, or specially made seed starting pans work fine. Just be sure to add drainage holes if there aren't any.

Sow your seeds in two inch rows or directly into individual pots. Just be sure there is enough room for each plant to grow, as crowding isn't good for young plants. Timing of planting depends on each plant and outside conditions. Check the seed packet for instructions, and plant in time so they will be ready after the last frost, which is usually around mid April in San Angelo. Soil temperature should be warm - keep the seed trays around 70 degrees daytime, and in the 60s at night.

Water the seeds well when you plant them, and keep the soil moist until they emerge. Then, water only when the soil starts to dry out and doesn't feel moist to the touch.

Winter Weed Control

Cool season weeds start to come up this time of year, and can be a big pain through March. Dandelion, chickweed, henbit, and clover are some of the more troublesome winter and early spring weeds in lawns. These unsightly weeds not only make the yard look messy, but increase mowing requirements and can delay the spring lawn green-up.

Controlling these weeds helps the turfgrass form a dense, uniform cover that helps prevent future weeds, reduces mowing requirements and makes the lawn more attractive.

Besides chemical control, there are cultural practices to help reduce weeds in the lawn. Regular mowing, proper fertilization throughout the year, and proper watering will help your desired grass be as healthy as possible and help it out-compete the unwanted weeds. But this will not solve the problem of weeds already in the lawn. Prevention is always the best way to go, but if you're faced with a weed invasion some herbicides can help.

If you have dormant bermudagrass, you can spray overtop with glyphosate (trade name roundup) to kill weeds. But be sure to wait until the lawn is completely brown and dormant, and don't try this on St. Augustine lawns. Be careful not to get the spray on any other plants like trees, shrubs, perennials or other ornamentals.

Another chemical weed control method is the regular use of pre-emergent herbicides. Pre emergents, such as pendimethalin, kill germinating weed seeds before they come up. If applied every year in early spring and early fall, it will greatly reduce weed problems.

Henbit is one very recognizable problematic cool season weed - it's the one with small purple flowers. It is best controlled in the fall while plants are small, but control can also be attempted in the early spring. Products with dicamba or 2,4-d are effective.

Good Evergreens

Winter foliage plants are very important to have in the landscape. When most of our plants go dormant and leave the landscape looking dreary, a few good plants that keep going all winter long will really cheer up the yard. There are lots of evergreen options from junipers, hollies, boxwoods and so forth. One good option is the Nandina, also called Heavenly Bamboo.

Nandina is very easy to grow, looks very tender with finely textured foliage but it's actually pretty tough. Different types of Nandinas have different colored foliage at different times of year, ranging from green to yellow, red, and orange. They also have very attractive red berries that add a pop of color and interest to the landscape.

There are also a lot of size options for Nandinas. There are dwarf varieties that are short and can be used as ground covers, all the way up to 5 foot tall shrubs.

'Harbor Dwarf', 'Gulf Stream' and 'Royal Princess' are three varieties that are compact and small. If spaces two to three feet apart, they will eventually form a mass by spreading from stolons. Larger nandinas also do well as specimen or accent plants, in the ground or in containers.

Nandinas don't require much care. They prefer well drained soil, but can tolerate a lot of different soil and moisture conditions. Nandinas also do best in full sun, but can tolerate shady areas.

Nandinas put on the best display in the winter months, where they often turn a bright reddish purple.

Nandinas are widely available in nurseries and garden centers, although the dwarf varieties are in more demand and somewhat expensive. Nandinas are a great pick for a low maintenance landscape and add a lot of interest in the cold winter months.

Classes & Programs

December 2015



Saturday, December 5, 9am to 11am

Saturday Seminar—Growing and Using Herbs

Location: Southside Rec Center— 2750 Ben Ficklin

Cost: \$15

Instructor: Allison Watkins

Offered by the People/Plant Connection. Pre-registration required, contact Susan Stanfield to attend—325-656-3104. Learn how to grow herbs, then do a hands-on project making a rosemary wreath.

Friday, December 18, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Planting Fruit Trees

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Winter is a great time of year to plant bare root fruit trees, learn what the best varieties and planting techniques are for the Concho Valley.



Coming Soon

Master Gardener Training Course

Cost: \$175, includes lunches and textbook

Join the Master Gardeners! The extensive 15-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. Classes will be Tuesdays from 12pm to 3pm, March through May.

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



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