

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

December 2017

## Assessing 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 thing 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; bed depth should also be proportional to the size of the home, with larger, taller homes having deeper, larger beds.

Don't be afraid to draw out your landscape plan - you don't have to be an artist and it's a big help to see it on paper. We will be offering a Landscape Design School, a 4-evening program in March, if you're interested call the Extension Office for more info and to pre-register at 325-659-6528.

## December To-Do's

- Plant bulbs
- Reduce irrigation - but still water every few weeks, depending on plant type and weather
- Replenish mulch in beds
- Plant cool season vegetables such as lettuce, spinach and kale

## Pecan Update



Join us for the West Regional Pecan Show on Thursday, December 14th at the Tom Green 4-H Center.

We would appreciate volunteers to help with the shelling starting at 8:30am; FMI contact Allison at 325-659-6528

## Christmas Cactus



The Christmas cactus is a great winter flowering houseplant, and makes a nice Christmas gift, especially to bring to a Christmas party. The Christmas cactus makes a good hanging basket because it has pendulous stems and trails well. It has beautiful flowers in colors ranging from red, orange, pink, purple and more.

It's called the Christmas cactus because it blooms around Christmas time if cared for properly. It can be a somewhat finicky plant and needs careful attention to get it to bloom profusely.

Don't keep the plant wet, just water when the top of the soil in the pot dries out. The Christmas cac-

tus is somewhat drought tolerant and does not like to have wet feet. At the same time however, it does like a lot of humidity. Keep the pot on a tray of pebbles and water to keep the humidity up.

If your plant is already in bloom or covered in buds, just keep your Christmas cactus in an area with bright, but indirect light. If you have a plant without buds, you will need to force it to bloom. To do this, the Christmas Cactus should be placed in a place that gets bright indirect sun in the day, but complete uninterrupted darkness for 12 hours at night. A closet works nicely. Continue these dark treatments until buds form.

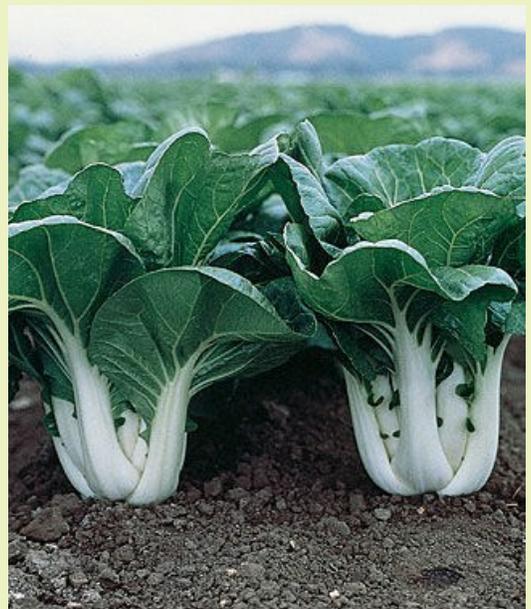
One common problem that happens with the Christmas cactus is that when taken home from the florist or nursery, the flower buds can fall off. This is usually because the plant is not used to the low-humidity environment of the home. The plant can acclimate to low humidity environments eventually, it just takes time. Other causes for flower bud drop can be over watering, or insufficient light.

## Plant Spotlight

### Bok Choy

*Brassica rapa* subsp. *chinensis*

Want to try growing something new and different? Try bok choy, a cool season vegetable crop. It looks nice in planting beds and is also tasty. Not sure how to use it? Visit <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/why-and-how-to-eat-bok-choy> for some ideas.



## Winter Weeds

Cool season weeds start to come up this time of year, and can be a big pain through March. Dandelion, chickweed, annual bluegrass, 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 the need for mowing 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 always solve the problem of weeds already infesting the lawn. Prevention is always the best way to go, but if you're faced with a weed invasion some herbicides can be useful if applied correctly.

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.

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.

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.



## Poinsettia Selection and Care

The Holidays are here, and bright, colorful poinsettia plants are out for sale everywhere. While it is a Christmas icon, the poinsettia is actually a tropical plant and requires special care in selection and maintenance to keep it healthy.

When choosing a poinsettia for the home or to take to a Holiday party, be sure to choose one that is thick and full, and has a lot of dense foliage that goes all the way down to the pot. Poinsettia leaves should be dark green in color.

Watch out for any drooping or wilting stems or leaves and avoid choosing a plant that looks water stressed. Air circulation is important for poinsettias, so the highest quality plants will be displayed with plenty of room around them and not crowded together.

While the traditional red simple poinsettia is most popular and is a beautiful plant, there are now other interesting options to choose from when buying poinsettias. There are different colors and patterns such as pink, or white, and marbled or swirled patterns.

When caring for a poinsettia at home, make sure to place it in a bright window with lots of sun; but also make sure that it doesn't get too hot in the afternoon. Keep the climate around the plant steady and avoid high or low temperature, and especially keep away from drafts.

Poinsettia plants should be watered regularly, but be careful not to overwater. Only water when the soil at the top of the pot feels dry to the touch. Don't wait for the entire rootball to dry out or the plant will be stressed. But when the first few inches begin to dry out, this is a good time to thoroughly water the rootball.

Another thing to remember when watering a potted poinsettia is to let it drain well. Don't water while the decorative wrapper is still around the pot, water must be allowed to drain out of the pot so take the wrapper off when watering. Water the pot well and let it drain in a sink before placing the wrapper back on.

## Tree Pruning

Winter is a time for pruning many landscape 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 when needed.

Pruning is best done during this time of year for many plants because they are dormant. There are some exceptions, but for most trees the dormant season is ideal. Minor pruning can be done year round if absolutely 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 you get 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 deciding between two branches, keep the one that has a larger branch angle. Branches that are narrowly attached to the tree are much weaker than branches that come out wider from the trunk. When pruning, try to visualize a straight central trunk, wide angled branches coming off of it, each going in a different direction. If you had a bird's eye view of the tree, the branches should be arranged like the spokes on a wheel.

It's important to not work against the natural form of a tree. Sometimes this is the goal, such as topiaries and hedges, but for shade trees it is too much work to change the natural shape. It would take very frequent, extensive pruning to drastically change the overall shape or form of a large tree.

Keep in mind that when you prune, you are guiding the new plant growth. New growth comes from buds, which you can see on small branches. The direction the bud is facing is the direction the new branch will grow. Cutting a branch to just above the bud will force a shoot to grow, and if you pay attention you can select the right bud to create a new branch that will go the right direction.

When pruning shrubs, stay open minded about shearing them. It is a very common practice to create very formal looking round or square shapes, but you might want to consider a more natural, easier to maintain form. Limit shearing and shaping to hedges, topiary, or formal gardens.

When pruning large, heavy limbs, use the three-step cut to prevent bark splitting and stripping down the trunk, causing damage and open wounds. Also, don't cut flush to the trunk—leave the branch collar intact and cut just outside it.

The branch collar is an area of tissue containing a protective zone. If you cut at the collar, the plant will be able to direct chemicals and oils to seal off the wound, and cause it to heal faster.

You can see where the branch collar is by looking on the underside of the branch. There is a slight bulge where the branch meets the trunk, this is the collar. When pruning a limb, you will take the limb off just before the collar. There will be a slight protrusion left, but not a stub. Cutting to the collar creates a much smaller wound than cutting flush to the trunk.

When making the cut, start off with an undercut. To do this, cut into the underside of the branch, about six to 8 inches from the trunk. It only has to go in about a third of the way, and can't go all the way through a heavy branch. Next, come about 3 inches farther out and saw the branch off from the top until it falls off. Then remove the stub by cutting to the branch collar.

# Upcoming Events

December 2017

Friday, December 1st

## **Concho Valley Pecan Show**

The pecan show will be held Friday, December 1st in the Extension Office at 113 W. Beauregard. For more info, contact Allison at 325-659-6528



Thursday, December 7, 2:00pm-5:00pm

## **Gardening Seminar—Growing Herbs + Wreath Making Activity**

Location: Station 618 Senior Center, 618 S. Chadbourne, San Angelo

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about growing herbs in the Concho Valley, then make a fresh rosemary wreath to take home for the Holidays. Call to register: 325-656-3104



Thursday, December 14th, 8:30am

## **West Regional Pecan Show**

The regional pecan show will be held at the Tom Green 4-H Center, come see how the pecan crop is this year and help shell pecans for judging. FMI contact Allison at 325-659-6528.

Friday, December 15, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Pruning**

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Winter is the best time of year to prune many landscape trees, join us to learn the best pruning practices to keep trees healthy and structurally sound.



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



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