

# *Concho Valley* Horticulture Update

February 2015

## Prepare for Water Conservation

We are blessed to be in much better shape, water wise, than some of the recent previous years. We are starting out the year with a larger water supply, but we can't get complacent about conserving water. It's still as important as ever. There's no telling what the year will bring, and we all need to do our part to protect the most important resource of all.

As we get started with planning the new landscaping and gardening projects for the year, be smart with water use and conserve water as much as possible. The first and most basic tip is good plant selection. Choose plants that can take high temperatures, are drought tolerant and can survive the harsh west Texas climate. That doesn't exclude pretty, attractive plants - there are many beautiful plants that are tough. Visit the website [earthkind.tamu.edu](http://earthkind.tamu.edu) for a plant selector that provides a list of good plants.

Some plants can handle heat and drought and still look spectacular – such as yellow bells, pride of Barbados, flame acanthus, Texas sage and desert willow.

A lot of landscapes have lost their turfgrass in recent years. If you are considering replacement, think about using buffalo grass for sunny lawns, or a drought tolerant variety of zoysia for shady yards.



For homes that have sprinkler systems, do an irrigation audit to check the sprinkler heads. While running, check and make sure they are spraying the right direction and not on sidewalks or the street. Don't be the neighbor whose sprinkler system is watering the driveway more than the flower bed.

Also, don't overuse fertilizer. While extra nutrition may be needed for some yards, don't go overboard and apply too much. It will cause the grass to need more water and mowing. Do a soil test to find out just how much fertilizer is needed.

## February To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals
- Apply Pre-emergent herbicide
- Plant and/or prune rose bushes
- Water 24 to 48 hours before hard freezes to protect plants
- Run irrigation system check
- Prune shade trees and shrubs as needed
- Check mowers and other lawn equipment; sharpen mower blades, get tune-up if needed

## Pecan Update



February is a good time of year to start germinating pecans, if you'd like to try growing some from seed. Just be aware that improved, named varieties are propagated by cuttings - and trees grown from seed won't be the same as their parent. You may get some good trees though!

## Pruning Roses

Many people get scared when it comes to pruning roses, but there is no great mystery or difficulty to prune them. Mid February is the time of year to prune roses, (with the exception of climbing roses which should be pruned after blooming in early spring), and here are some basic steps how.

For modern hybrid roses, prune heavily around mid February. Prune each bush down to about 18 to 24 inches, leaving only 4 to 6 main stems. Choose stems that will face outward and form an overall vase shape. It might help to visualize an inside out umbrella.

Old fashioned roses require less pruning, and should only be pruned if you need to change the shape or size. Just prune to fit the landscape. Don't take off more than a third of the height in one year though, as it can cause some damage to the plant's root system.

Spring blooming, climbing roses should be pruned right after they bloom, only pruned to remove dead or damaged stems or canes, plus one or two of the oldest canes which will stimulate new growth.

For all types of roses, always remove old blooms as they fade to encourage more flowering. This is called dead-heading. Also, keep any bad parts such as damaged, diseased, or dead twigs, leaves and flowers pruned off. This will encourage new, healthy growth.

Don't be afraid to grow your own roses, they take some care but if you choose a good variety it won't be any harder than most other landscape plants. And instead of just enjoying a bouquet for valentine's day, you will have beautiful roses year after year. They are much more interesting than plain old evergreen shrubs, and your friend and neighbors will be very impressed at your gardening skills every time your rose bush blooms.

## Plant Spotlight

### Narcissus 'February Gold'

This early blooming daffodil really announces the hope of a coming spring! Plant next fall to enjoy these cheerful yellow flowers in your yard.



## Replenish Mulch

Right now is a good time of year to take a look at shrub and flower beds to see if mulch needs to be replenished. It's nice to do it while it's cool outside, because carrying around those large bags and raking to spread it out can be hard work.

Mulch is just a layer of material covering the soil surface. It can be organic, such as shredded bark, wood chips, grass clippings, fallen leaves, and so on. Inorganic mulch would consist of things like rocks, shredded rubber, or plastic.

Mulch does several things for plants. First, it conserves moisture. Up to two-thirds of the water applied to shrubs can evaporate if un-mulched. Since water costs you money, it makes sense to save it as much as possible.

Also, mulch shades the soil and helps moderate soil temperature. It can keep soil warmer in winter and cooler in summer.

One of the best reasons to use mulch though is that it reduces weeds. Mulch shades out weeds and prevents them from germinating. Try your own experiment by using mulch in one bed and leaving another one with bare soil, and you'll be able to tell the difference!

If you use organic mulch, such as shredded bark, it will break down over time. While you may think this sounds like a bad thing, it's actually a great thing! As mulch breaks down, it decomposes into the soil and provides the same benefit that compost does - it loosens up the soil, adds nutrients, and improves the structure.

And last but not least, a great reason to use mulch is that it looks good. Adding mulch to all planting beds will bring them together aesthetically and make your whole yard look nicer. Mulch may be brown like soil, but it looks a lot better than just bare soil around your plants.



## Cold Weather and Plants

We've seen how unpredictable our west Texas weather can be, it's really up and down. As we get closer to spring, don't let yourself get too eager and plant too early, or you'll be in for some damaged or dead plants. While there are nice warm days here and there, there will still be plenty of cold winter temperatures until March.

When it comes to cold temperatures and plants, there is a difference between a freeze and a frost, and some plants tolerate them differently. A frost is when temperatures reach 32 degrees, and tiny ice crystals form on the surface of leaves. If temperatures go below 32 degrees, ice may form inside plant cells and cause them to burst. A frost is not as damaging to plants as a freeze, but some plants, especially tropicals, can be damaged even by a light frost.

If you plant frost sensitive plants in your garden and the a late spring frost comes along, it's better to start over and plant new ones rather than try and keep damaged ones alive. The frost damaged plants will not be as productive as plants that have not been damaged by a late frost.

Here in the Concho Valley, our average last freeze is around late March, but remember that we have tricky weather and never know what can happen. Use all your resources - the weather forecast, neighbors recommendations, past experience and professionals to determine when to plant. Just be sure to not put out bougainvillea, marigolds, periwinkles, zinnias, or other frost-sensitive plants until after that last spring freeze.

If you want to get a head start, you can start spring flower or vegetable seeds indoors. Just be sure to give them plenty of light, and keep the moisture level right - too much or too little won't work.

## Pre-Emergent for the Landscape

Pre-emergent is a type of herbicide that kills seeds as they germinate. It won't instantly rid a yard of a weed infestation, but if used properly over time pre-emergent will greatly reduce the amount of troublesome weeds in the lawn.

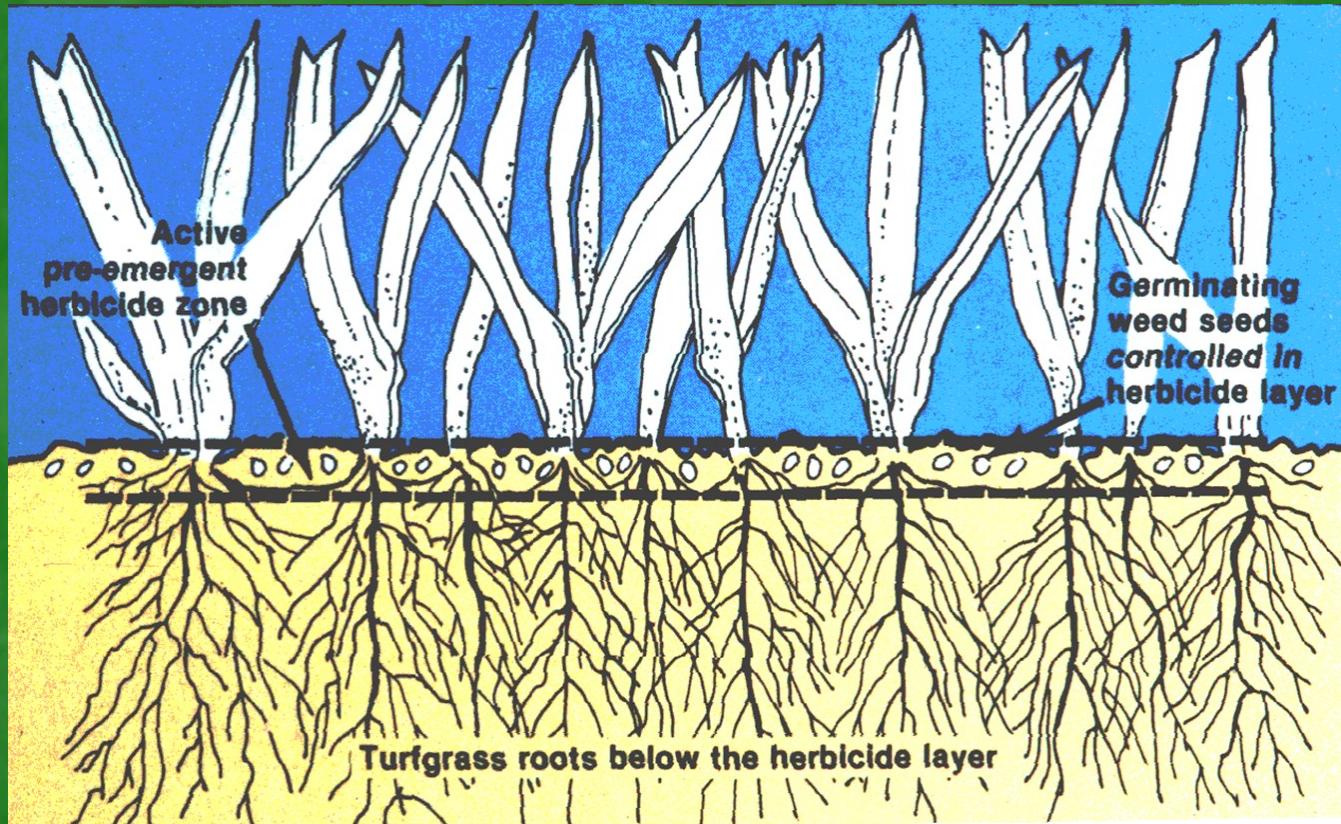
Pre-emergent is most affective against annual weeds, but it can help somewhat even with perennial weeds, by preventing new plants from popping up by seed.

The key to achieving good control with pre-emergent is timing. The product must be applied before weeds come up – but you don't have to be a psychic to know when to apply. Pre-emergent herbicides will last up to several months. For winter weeds, apply in the fall (September) and for spring weeds apply in the winter (right now in February). One additional application can be made in May to prevent grassburs ('stickers') which pop up in the summer, if needed.

Pre-emergent is highly recommended for lawns - it does not harm established, existing plants as long as it is applied following label directions. So there is no danger of harming the grass, shade trees, shrubs, or other landscape plants as long as they are well-established (which just means they need to have healthy root systems and have not been just recently planted).

Applying pre-emergent is not recommended in vegetable gardens, and in shrub and flower beds it depends on specific circumstances; do not use it if you plan on doing any planting there, even transplants. The tender root systems can be damaged. But for well-established beds, where no future planting is planned, it may be an option.

Pre-emergent can be purchased at garden centers, nurseries and horticulture supply stores. Some examples are pendimethalin (trade names Pendulum, Pre-M, Anderson 11-3-11), benefin (trade name Balan) or XL-2G which contains benefin and oryzalin)



# Classes & Programs

February 2015

February 7

## Saturday Seminar - Taking Photos In Your Garden

Instructor - Jim Bean, Owner : Jim Bean Photography Studio

Location: San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, 1 Love Street

Cost: \$10

From the People/Plant Connection. Learn how to take the best quality photos in your garden.  
Bring your cameras and questions!



February 16, 17, 23, 24

## EarthKind Landscape School

Instructors - Allison Watkins and Dr. Steve George

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$65

See attached flyer

Feb 17th - May 19

## Master Gardener Training Course

Instructor: Various instructors from around the state

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67

Cost: \$175, includes lunches and textbook

See attached flyer



Friday February 20, 12pm

## Lunch N Learn Class - Spring Forward : Get Ready to Grow!

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Spring will be here soon, learn how to get prepared for the season!

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



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