

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

March 2014

## Butterfly Gardening

Butterflies are such a beautiful part of nature, and everyone enjoys seeing them. You can easily create a habitat for them in your yard that will attract and provide nectar for these insects.

Butterfly gardening is great for anyone, and is an especially fun activity to do with kids. Many of the plants used in butterfly gardens are easy to plant and take care of, and kids really enjoy it.

There are three simple things to consider when attempting to create a butterfly garden. Number one is to find and plant flowers that butterflies like. Some examples are: anisacanthus, blue mistflower, butterfly bush, butterfly weed, gay feather, lantana, all the salvias, and verbena.

These plants provide nectar for the butterflies to drink. Also plant some dill, fennel, parsley, and passionflower to provide food for the caterpillars. You'll have to be ok with letting these caterpillar food plants be eaten, that's the whole point of them being in the butterfly garden.



That's the second idea of creating butterfly gardens, not killing the butterfly caterpillars. Sounds simple, but it can be hard on the nerves when you see the caterpillars eating up your beautiful plants.

The third step is to try and reduce or eliminate the use of insecticides overall in your yard or garden. You will also need to provide a small mud puddle for the butterflies in order for them to get some essential nutrients. A dripping water faucet or edge of a pond will do nicely.

When planting, group certain plants together. Having a lot of one type of colorful plant together will attract butterflies better than having them spread out. Deadheading your flowers will help the plants continue to bloom and is good for butterflies.

## March To-Do's

- Divide summer and fall flowering perennials and ornamental grasses
- Avoid purchasing bare-root trees and roses this late in the season - instead choose container grown or B&B
- Prepare soil in beds by tilling in 3 inches of compost
- Don't plant frost-sensitive plants too early. The last frost in the Concho Valley is usually early April.

## Till in Compost



Adding organic matter is the best thing you can do for your soil. Good soil means healthier plants!

## Master Gardener Plant Sale



Plant selection is the most important part of having a beautiful landscape. If you plant something that loves moisture and humidity in a dry hot spot of the yard, it won't make it. You have to choose the right plants for the right location.

If you love plants and want to find some interesting ones for your yard this year, try coming to the Concho Valley Master Gardener's annual plant sale!

The Concho Valley Master Gardener program is a volunteer organization dedicated to providing community education and programming to the public. Members undergo extensive training in horticulture, and then provide volunteer hours to the Concho Valley to receive official status as a certified master gardener.

There are many master gardener groups throughout the state, but there are few if any that provide the unique opportunity that the Concho Valley Master Gardeners do during their plant sale.

There will be thousands of plants offered at the plant sale, in many different types and varieties. There are tomatoes, vines, lots of perennials, trees and shrubs, and hanging baskets. They are plants that can thrive in the conditions of the Concho valley, and there will be some unique and unusual ones to choose from.

The plant sale will be held **Saturday, April 5th with doors opening at 8am**. It will be at the Tom Green County 4H center, which is located at 3168 N. US Highway 67 (next door to the animal shelter).

If you have any questions, please call the county extension office at 325-659-6528.



## Plant Spotlight

Tycoon tomato

*Solanum lycopersicum* 'Tycoon'

Recently designated as a "Texas Superstar," this tomato is known for its heat setting ability as well as its resistance to several common diseases.





## Fertilizing the Lawn

Fertilizer is an important maintenance step to keeping a lawn healthy and beautiful, but takes some careful consideration to do it most effectively. Nitrogen and phosphorus contaminate soil and water more than pesticides, and are damaging to the environment. Applying excess fertilizer is also a waste of time, work and money.

First, measure your lawn or get a good estimate of square footage. Fertilizer applications are done in pounds per thousand square feet.

Next, choose a fertilizer. Unless a soil test indicates otherwise, nitrogen is probably the only nutrient you'll need. A 21-0-0 fertilizer can be applied at 5 pounds fertilizer per thousand square feet of lawn to get the proper amount of nitrogen.

For bermudagrass and St. Augustine lawns, you may need to do this application 2 to 3 times a year. But if it's hot and dry again this summer, be careful with fertilizer applications - the grass can't use it if there's not enough water.

Timing is the next consideration. In the spring, wait to apply fertilizer until you've had to mow twice. This is when the grass is actively growing and able to use fertilizer.

Doing it too early is ineffective and could possibly damage the lawn. The other application should be in the fall.

When applying fertilizer, the most common and easiest way is to use a walk behind spreader. It can be a drop spreader or a rotary one, either one will be fine. Apply the fertilizer as evenly as you can, and don't go too fast. A medium, steady pace will help ensure even coverage.

If you have yellowing issues in your lawn that nitrogen doesn't fix, especially in St. Augustine grass, it might be an iron deficiency. Apply some granular iron to solve the problem. A soil test, which you can obtain info on through the county extension office, costs only 10-20 dollars and will tell you exactly what's going on in your lawn nutrient-wise.



## Palm Trees

Palm trees have a great tropical look, and many homeowners in the Concho valley like to have them in the landscape. They have graceful leaves, and provide movement when they sway in the wind. There are two different types of palms, based on leaf shape. Fan palms have windmill shaped leaves, and feather palms have feather shaped leaves.

There are some palms that are considered cold hardy in this area, but it's never guaranteed. Further north of here, there are very few options for palms that will survive the winter temperatures. Palm trees can be expensive, especially large ones, so to protect your investment plant them in a protected spot of the landscape.

There are usually microclimates in a home landscape that can keep temperatures a few degrees warmer, such as placing it against the home on the south facing side, and protecting from wind.

In recent years we had some unusually cold temperatures, and many of the palms suffered damage. If there is new, green growth coming from the top, the palm will be ok. If there isn't any green left, and no new growth, it probably needs to be replaced. Palm trees can't be cut down to the ground and expected to grow back - they only grow from the top. Next winter, try to wrap the trunk with burlap to protect it from freezes - but that will only work for short periods of light freezing weather, not long periods of time or deep-freezing temperatures. Wrapping Christmas lights around the trunk might help even more.

Some good palms that are generally cold hardy for the area would be Mexican Fan palm, California fan palm, Windmill palm, Pindo palm, and Sago palm.



# Upcoming Classes & Programs

March 2014

Tuesdays Starting March 4th through May 27th, 12pm to 3pm

## Master Gardener Training Course

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

Cost: \$175

Call Allison at 325-659-6528 by Friday, February 28 if interested



Tuesday March 11, 6:30

## Weather and Planting

Location: Tom Green 4-H Building

3168 N. US Highway 67 (next door to animal shelter)

Cost: Free

See attached flyer for details

Friday March 21, 12pm

## Lunch N Learn Class - Vegetable Gardening

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5



For more info on any activity, please call the Extension Office at (325) 659-6528

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

**TEXAS A&M**  
**AGRILIFE**  
**EXTENSION**

**Allison Watkins**  
Texas A&M Agrilife Extension  
Tom Green County  
113 W Beauregard  
San Angelo, TX 76903  
325-659-6528

Educational programs conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.