

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

March 2015

## Container Gardening

What interesting weather we've had this year! It started out with a winter blast of ice on New Year's, and it's been really up and down ever since. We've certainly had some spring and summer weather mixed in between the cold spells, but soon it will warm up for good, and spring will be here before you know it.

Good plants can go a long way to sprucing up a home, and growing your own produce is important to many people. If you don't have the space or ability to plant an extensive vegetable garden or a large flower bed, consider a few planters with flowers and/or vegetables. Container gardening provides a way to garden in small spaces.

Vegetables can be grown in any kind of container, just ensure that it has good drainage. If there are no holes in the planter, simply drill some in the bottom. Potting mix should be used in container gardening, never use real soil – it can become too compacted and hard for potted plants.

Decorative planters make an attractive addition to any porch, patio or deck and are a simple way to grow some fresh produce. Almost any plant that can be grown in a traditional backyard garden can be planted in a container. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and cucumbers are just a few of the many possibilities. Not everything will work in a pot, such as corn, or large plants like watermelon and pumpkin.

Container gardening is also great for ornamental plants, because it can add a lot of life and color to a front entrance or a balcony. A few decorative planters filled with colorful flowers can really spruce up the curb appeal. Annual options include (but aren't limited to): moss rose, marigold, periwinkle and zinnia. Perennials that do well in containers include trailing lantana, gaillardia (Indian blanket), hibiscus, and blue daze.

There's no telling what the rest of the year will bring, and whether we have drought or not, water conservation will be important. Even if we have a good year with rain, protecting our water sources is something we all need to work on from now on.

Potted plants do require more frequent attention than plants in the ground; since the pots are exposed they can dry out faster. But mulch can be just as beneficial for containers as it is for flower beds, and can help the root systems stay moist longer. Also, it can be more convenient to use some recycled water from inside the house to keep a few potted plants growing than it is to water an extensive bed. Dip out dishwasher water from the sink, use a bucket to catch some water in the shower while it's heating up, pour out the ice chest into a planter, install a rain barrel. Every drop counts!

## 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 can be as late as mid April.

## Pecan Update



Spring is a good time to start fertilizing. Once leaves emerge and the tree is actively growing, apply nitrogen fertilizer. If you'd like a good crop of pecans, applying zinc is very beneficial - apply any time there is new growth in the leaves. Start at bud break, Zinc must be applied as a foliar spray, and is not absorbed through the soil.

## Master Gardener Plant Sale

Good plant selection will go a long way to providing a healthy, beautiful landscape. Try to only plant things that are well adapted to our soil and weather conditions. Even with this stipulation there are many, many beautiful plants that will work great in the Concho Valley.

Locally owned nurseries provide lots of good plant options that are right for our climate, and another way to see some good plant choices is to check out 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. They undergo extensive training in horticulture, and then provide volunteer hours to the Concho Valley to receive official status as a certified master gardener.

The Concho Valley Master Gardeners put a lot of time and effort into their plant sale because it raises money for educational programs for the community.

They spend months propagating everything they sell – they grow all their own plants right here in San Angelo, all from seeds or cuttings.

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

This year's plant sale will be held Saturday, April 11th 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). So save the date for this great opportunity, Saturday April 11th.

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

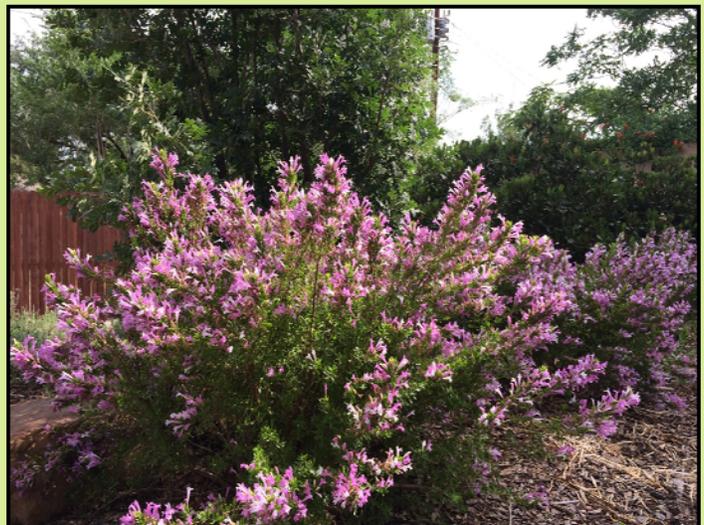


## Plant Spotlight

### Mexican Oregano

#### *Poliomintha maderensis*

Great plant for our climate - drought tolerant, attracts hummingbirds and butterflies, leaves are good for cooking, deer resistant, and can take sun or part shade. What more could you want?





## Thinning Fruit Trees

Thinning fruits and vegetables is one of the hardest things for a home gardener to do. When starting vegetables from seed, we just scatter them down the rows – depending on the crop, it's not always feasible to plant each seed in the exact right spot with the correct spacing. So after the seeds germinate, it's important to pull the extra plants that are too close. If you don't they won't get as big or productive as they should.

Most fruit trees also need to be thinned - such as peaches, plums, and apples. And the sooner it's done, the better.

Thin out young fruit before it's the size of a dime. Stone fruit like peaches should be thinned out and spaced about 4 to 6 inches between fruits. Simply pick off and throw away the fruit along the branches, leaving only one for every 6 inches or so. Apples should be thinned to one or two fruit per cluster.

There are two major reasons for thinning fruit trees - for the health of the tree, and for better quality fruit. If all the fruit is left on the tree, it will take up a lot of energy and nutrients and can stress the tree. It will also weigh down the branches, so much that they can even break and fall off.

Thinning also improves the fruit that is left. If not thinned, the fruit is much smaller. If you thin out the branches, the remaining fruit is large and sweet and better quality.

It may seem like you're losing fruit, but you will still end up with the same total weight of fruit - you won't have as many, but they will be larger.

Don't wait too long, and get the thinning done as early as possible - if you wait until the fruit is starting to mature, it won't make a difference.

## Spring Plant Diseases

We're getting into spring now, and soon it will get warm and stay warm. When it does, we can put out our warm season plants and start gardening and landscaping full scale. But unfortunately, disease pests also like the spring climate just like plants.

If it's a dry spring, we probably won't have many diseases to deal with. But we are hoping for a lot of rain - and if it's humid, we will probably have some issues.

Cedar apple rust is a fungal disease that overwinters in junipers, and in the spring spreads to apple trees. You can see it in early spring when it forms round gelatinous orange masses in junipers. To control it, prune off infected juniper branches.

Fireblight is a very destructive, quickly spread disease that can affect apple trees, rose bushes, spirea, pyracantha, and others. Fireblight is a bacterial disease that overwinters in infected branches; in the spring, the bacteria ooze out and attract insects.

These insects, as well as rain, wind or pruning tools then spread the disease to other plants. Symptoms include rust colored or burnt looking dead young twigs or branches, bent branches, and dead leaves and fruit that remain attached. It's hard to control, but try pruning out infected branches. Keep pruning tools sanitized by dipping in 70% alcohol solution or 10% bleach solution.

Brown patch is one of the most common turfgrass diseases, and can affect St. Augustine and bermuda grasses. The symptoms will depend on the type of grass, but generally include rings or patches in turfgrass that appear burned or dead. To prevent or manage the disease, avoid over fertilizing, don't apply nitrogen when the disease is active, mow a little higher, and irrigate only in the morning. There are also several fungicide options available at nurseries and horticultural supply stores.



## Lawn Fertilization

Fertilizer is an important maintenance step to keeping a lawn healthy and beautiful, but it should be done with careful thought and planning. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus can contaminate soil and water and can be damaging to the environment. Applying too much 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 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 even damage the lawn.

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, (check out the website <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu>), costs only \$10-20 dollars and will tell you exactly what's going on in your lawn nutrient-wise.



## Other Lawn Tips

Lawns are an important part of the landscape, and many homeowners are searching for how to achieve the perfectly manicured yard. An immaculate turf like on a golf course requires a lot of work and a lot of knowledge.

But if you can live with a pretty nice lawn instead of a perfect one, here are some tips to have a good looking yard without tons of work.

First, water it right. Don't just let an automatic timer decide when to water. Automatic systems are nice, but don't turn it on until the grass needs it. You can tell by when footprints start to show up, the grass begins to wilt, and the soil feels dry to the touch. When the grass needs it, water thoroughly and deeply so that the roots are trained to grow deep. Watering too frequently can cause shallow roots, which creates poor quality in the lawn.

Next, apply pre-emergent herbicides regularly. Avoid weed and feed products, because they can damage trees and ornamentals. But pre-emergent herbicides will only kill germinating seeds and will help a lot with annual weeds in the lawn. A good schedule would be late winter or very early spring, around February to March, then again in May, and a third time in the fall - around September or October. If done regularly for a year or two, your weed population should be greatly reduced. Keep it up every year to get the lawn weed-free.

The next step would be to mow frequently and not mow too short. How short your grass is should depend on how often you're willing to mow. The more often you can mow, the lower you can make the grass. If you let the grass get tall and then cut it really short, it damages the root system and causes growth problems.

# Classes & Programs

March 2015

Saturday, March 7, 9:00am

## Saturday Seminar - Bringing Birds to Your Garden

Instructor - Charles Floyd, Professional Birder

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

Cost: \$10

From the People/Plant Connection. Learn what plants to use in your garden to bring birds to your landscape. Also learn how to start birding as a hobby. Find out the best resources, what information to document and how to get started. To pre-register, call 656-3104.



Friday, March 20, 12:00pm

## Lunch N Learn Class - Old Fashioned Plants

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Learn about heirloom vegetables and antique roses. Tried and true varieties!



Saturday, April 11th - **8:00am**

## Master Gardener Plant Sale

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

(next to animal shelter)

Don't miss this opportunity to purchase some great plants at a reasonable price! All plants are locally grown by Concho Valley Master Gardeners, and all proceeds go to community educational projects.



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

**TEXAS A&M**  
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