

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

April 2015

Landscape Weeds



This has been a good year for wildflowers, and unfortunately also for weeds. Remember that we can't have one without the other!

It's a lot of work to keep these pests out of the landscape and garden, but it's important to do so to keep the yard looking good and plants healthy. Weeds compete for sun-

light, air and water and if there are too many around they can cause desirable plants to suffer – especially anything newly planted, even trees.

Mulch is the best option for planting beds, and is very effective at suppressing weeds, but it has to be the right depth. Shrub and flower beds should be designed to be able to hold 3 to 4 inches of mulch, which will reduce weed seed germination and cause emerging weeds to die from light starvation. Not only does mulch help control weeds, it also conserves moisture and looks attractive in the landscape.

The lawn is also a concern, and requires a different approach. The best defense a lawn can have against weeds is to be healthy, dense and aggressive. The grass needs appropriate irrigation, nitrogen fertilizer, and frequent mowing to stay thick and be able to choke out weeds.

If weeds are still a problem after good cultural management, chemical control may be an option. Pre-emergent herbicide is effective against annual weeds, and should be applied around February, May and September each year. Post emergent broadleaf weed killers such as 2,4-d can kill existing broadleaf weeds in bermudagrass. Just be careful to not let any type of herbicide drift onto landscape plants and follow label directions.

Glyphosate, trade name Round Up, can be helpful in some circumstances, but remember it's non selective and can kill all plants it hits. It's helpful along fence lines, walkways and driveways, any area where no plants are desired.

April To-Do's

- Deadhead flowering annuals and perennials to extend blooming period
- Replenish mulch as needed in all beds
- Apply bait for fire ants
- Fertilize lawn - 5 pounds of 21-0-0 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet
- Plant spring vegetables

Pecan Update



Check out the website pecan.ipmpipe.org/ for helpful information and updates on pecan pests and best treatments

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 plum

Prunus mexicana

Mexican plum is a beautiful single-trunked, spring-flowering small tree with interesting bark that eventually gets dark and striated, peeling off in patches. Early in the spring it is covered with clouds of white fragrant flowers that are up to an inch wide. The dark red or purple fruit ripens late in the fall. Because it does not sucker from the base and is relatively drought tolerant, its root stock is widely used for grafting. It grows singly and does not form thickets as many of our other native plums do .



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Protect Beneficial Insects

Something interesting I've noticed at homes that ask for my help with pest problems, the ones that have the worst problems tend to be the ones that use the most pesticides. Insecticides can be very useful for protecting landscape and garden plants, but if over applied can risk damaging the populations of beneficial insects. Beneficial insects are the ones that don't harm plants, but are predatory or parasitic to insects that do harm plants – and they are often more sensitive to insecticides.

Beneficial insects exist everywhere in nature, and using an insecticide can change the balance of insect populations. If a broad spectrum insecticide is used, especially too often or in combination with other types of insecticides, it can kill many of the beneficial insects, and it can make the original problem worse. Or even create new problems.

Killing beneficial can also cause secondary pests – which are insects that were not causing problems, but when the predator insect is killed they come in and causes trouble to your plants.

So when you see insects out in the yard or garden, don't be too quick to get out the insecticide. Only consider pesticides if the insect is a known pest. If you are not sure if the insect is a pest, take a picture and email it or bring it to the extension office for identification before trying to kill it.

Some of the best beneficial insects that are commonly found in the yard are dragon flies, lady bugs, spiders, tiger beetles, ground beetles, praying mantis, and green lacewings

These beneficial insects can even be purchased to release in the garden, but there's a possibility that they fly away and not stick around to help. That's why conservation of existing natural enemies is important.

Vegetable Garden Weeds

It's been a pretty good spring so far, which means our plants are happy but also that weeds are prolific. For those that have a vegetable garden plot, weed control is more essential than ever to have productive plants and not waste water. Weeds are very competitive, and if allowed to get out of control they can cause the vegetable plants to suffer and be less productive. They also waste water by taking it away from the plants that we want to thrive and causing more irrigation to be needed.

Herbicides are often thought of as the go-to option for controlling pesky weeds. While there are some products that are labeled for vegetable gardens and can be used in edible crops, there is no silver bullet. There is no single herbicide that can be used on all vegetable crops to control all weeds.

Always read the label and follow it very carefully, especially for food production. And the old fashioned methods like hoeing are still very useful and important for vegetable crops.

Weeds are easy to disturb in the seedling stage. Seedlings will pop up after rain or irrigation, so use a garden hoe to scrape or roughen up the soil when the small plants emerge – catch them early and they're easy to keep under control.

Properly applied mulch can keep many weeds out. Some will still pop up through mulch, but fewer, and they're easier to pull. Mulch must be deep enough for it to work – a 3 inch deep layer of organic mulch such as shredded tree limbs or fallen leaves is recommended.

While most of us want an easy, one-step method to keep weeds out of the vegetable garden, the safest and most effective methods require some labor – application of mulch and hoeing are the way to go.



Grass Clippings

What a nice spring it's shaping up to be! I pray that we continue to get more rain and that it turns out to be a great gardening year. Now that it's warming up, it's time to start mowing the lawn. And one simple thing to do to help the lawn stay healthy, and also reduce the amount of waste sent to the landfill, is remember these words: 'Don't bag it.'

Instead of bagging grass clippings when mowing, two better options would be to let the clippings stay on the ground where they fall, or add them to a compost pile. The organic matter the grass clippings can provide to the landscape is beneficial and shouldn't be wasted. We want to mimic Mother Nature's system as much as possible, and recycle all the organic matter we can, instead of throwing it away.

Research has shown that grass clippings don't contribute to thatch build up. Instead, they can recycle valuable nutrients back to the grass while helping enhance the topsoil.

In order to be able to just leave the clippings on the lawn, they have to be small enough to filter down through the grass, and break down quickly. Large, thick clippings should not be left on top of the lawn. So successful recycling of clippings means that the lawn has to be mowed often enough so that the grass is kept at the recommended mowing height, and that no more than a third of the length of the grass is removed at each mowing. This kind of mowing is best for the lawn anyway, and will promote healthier root systems.

If the grass got too tall though, and the clippings do need to be collected, they make a wonderful addition to a compost pile. Mix them in with old fallen leaves, kitchen scraps such as vegetable peels and coffee grounds, and plant trimmings from cleaning up the yard. Good quality, homemade compost will do a lot of good for planting beds; just till some in anytime new plants are added.

For more info on the "Don't Bag It" program from Texas A&M University, visit the website earthkind.tamu.edu, and click on the 'publications' tab. There is also more information on composting and other practices that can help create a healthier, beautiful landscape while still protecting our natural resources and conserving water.

Cannas

Cannas are a great way to add a lush, tropical look to a landscape and are very easy to grow and maintain. Whether you choose old fashioned or new hybrid types, cannas are fairly inexpensive and grow quickly.

Cannas have brightly colored, show flowers. Just take a look at the sunken garden, a city maintained garden on Bryant near the river. It is full of many different types and colors of cannas and it looks spectacular when they are all in bloom.

Modern cannas have longer blooming period, wide ranges of colors, and various flower styles that make them an improvement over the old fashioned varieties. New Cannas are usually shorter, have more flowers on each stalk, and continuously re-bloom for a long period of time.

Plant cannas in soil that has been tilled up well and incorporate some organic matter. Choose fresh, plump rhizomes to plant, and avoid shriveled and brown rhizomes as they will not perform well. Also be sure to wait until all danger of frost has passed, since cannas like warm weather. Place in full sun for optimal blooming. They don't need excessive amounts of water, but should be kept moist while establishing and watered every week during the warm season.

Mulch well around them to hold in moisture and keep out weeds, and in mid-season apply a nitrogen fertilizer. Pests are not very common, but cannas can be affected by a leaf roller insect - just apply Bt, insecticidal soap or other insecticide if they become a problem.

Come visit the Master Gardener plant sale on April 11th, and pick up some free canna rhizomes - courtesy of the city parks department!



Classes & Programs

April 2015

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

Master Gardener Plant Sale

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67 (next to animal shelter)



Friday, April 17, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Best Plants for the Concho Valley

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Good plant selection will go a long way to creating a beautiful, successful, low maintenance landscape. Find out some of the best landscape plant choices for the Concho Valley!

Saturday, April 18, 9:00am

Saturday Seminar - Using Succulents and Cacti in Your Garden

Instructor - Mike Mosman, owner of Desert Gardens

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

Cost: \$10

From the People/Plant Connection. A "Talk and Tour" session, a one hour lesson will be given by Mike Mosman. Then we'll caravan to his nursery for a tour. To pre-register, call 656-3104.



Tuesday, April 21, 6pm

Backyard Basics Seminar Series - Vegetable Gardening

You don't have to live in the country to grow your own fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, honey and more! Join us for a new series of classes on urban production. See attached flyer for details on all the events.



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

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