

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

April 2016

Plant Summer Blooming Bulbs

When thinking of bulbs, most of us think about tulips and daffodils that are planted in the fall and bloom in early spring. Those are wonderful to have in the landscape, but there are also many beautiful bulbs that flower in the summertime. Many of the common bulbs, like tulips, do not naturalize in our warm climate and won't flower again after the first year. Choose bulbs that can handle our warm southern climate, and will continue to provide color and interest from year to year. Now is the time to get summer blooming bulbs in the ground.

The Crinum lily is a beautiful, old fashioned flower that is very striking and showy when it blooms. Crinums are pretty tough plants – in an article for Southern Living Magazine, east Texas horticulturist Greg Grant says they are “pretty darned eternal” because they’re so hardy. Extension Horticulture Professor Bill Welch claims “No crinum has ever died.” Well, that might not be entirely true – especially in the rough conditions of west Texas, but they are definitely worth a try! Some good varieties would be ‘Ellen Bosanquet,’ ‘Bradley,’ and ‘Summer Nocturne.’



The rain lily is another remarkable bulb, getting its name from the way it dependably blooms after a good summer rain. There are a lot of wild rain lilies in San Angelo, and they make quite an impact when they all pop up and bloom – some yards and vacant lots become a sea of small light pink or white blooms a few days after a storm. There are some improved varieties available, with larger, more colorful flowers such as *Zephyranthes grandiflora* and *Zephyranthes labuffarrosa*.

Many of these summer bulbs can be found at local nurseries, or can be ordered online – like at www.southernbulbs.com. Other tough plants that can be planted now include spider lilies, oxblood lilies, daylilies, cannas, and liatrus.

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

Plant Spring Vegetables

Planting a home vegetable garden is a great way to have delicious, fresh food, so I encourage everyone to try planting a few vegetables this spring. It doesn't have to be a huge garden; vegetables can be incorporated into sunny parts of existing flower beds.

It's helpful to try and get started as soon as possible with some plants like tomatoes, because they don't set fruit well when it gets too hot, and the heat can cause the fruit to crack. Other vegetables like it hot such as peppers, okra, melons and cantaloupe. If you would like a chart on when is the best time to plant various vegetables, just contact the Extension office.

Containers are good options for growing many vegetables, except for a few things like corn, pumpkins, watermelons, and other large plants. For container vegetables, be sure to use potting mix and not real soil.

For gardens in the ground, stay on top of weed control because weeds will really compete for water and nutrients. A 3-inch deep layer of mulch will help prevent a lot of weeds, but don't put mulch down on top of vegetable seeds- wait until the seeds have established well or only apply it around transplants.

If birds or squirrels are damaging your tomatoes or other crops, try using plastic netting or fiber row cover to protect your harvest. Make sure it covers all the way to the ground, and cover the edges with soil or rocks. Keep an eye out for pests such as tomato horn worms, spider mites, and aphids – it's important to know exactly what the pest is before trying to kill them, and you can always contact us at the Extension service for help. Growing your own food is really rewarding, so don't forget to get some vegetables planted this spring if you haven't yet!



Plant Spotlight

Crinum - Bradley *Crinum* 'Bradley'

The plant has beautiful, showy fragrant flowers in the summer and is also very tough. Plant in the spring for summer blooming.



Photo from The Southern Bulb Co.



Foundation Shrubs

Foundation shrubs are an important backbone of an attractive landscape. Evergreens provide life and greenery in the dull winter time, and make a nice background for perennials in the summertime.

Now it's spring time, and it's a good time of year to plant, and replace a few things that might not be looking so great. Be sure to use good planting techniques and pay special attention to proper plant selection – shrubs are a semi-permanent part of the landscape, and selection needs to be well thought out and planned.

Many home have shrubs in front that are too large, and either cover the home or have to be pruned constantly. A properly selected shrub will require very little pruning each year, if any. A good shrub choice will grow to a mature size that stays compact and doesn't block windows or walkways.

The best choice of shrub is one that does not grow too large for the spot and will not require regular shearing to keep it under control. One good example is dwarf yaupon holly, which is nearly ideal for many home landscapes. It is both tough and stays at a good size. Other good options are dwarf Indian hawthorn, juniper, dwarf glossy abelia and dwarf burford holly.

When planting, incorporate organic matter into the soil to improve the soil texture, water holding capacity and nutrient uptake. After planting, put down a 3 inch deep layer of wood mulch to conserve moisture and prevent weeds from coming up.

Some hollies have iron chlorosis problems, which means bright lime green or yellow leaves. Increase organic matter in the soil by mixing in compost to prevent this issue, or try applying an iron fertilizer.

Gardening With Allergies

It's rough to have allergies if you like to garden, there are lots of allergens in west Texas ranging from juniper pollen through winter to all the spring plants coming out now. Here are some steps that can help reduce allergy problems for gardeners.

There are two types of pollen, lightweight pollens that travel by wind, and then there are heavier, sticky pollens that need insects to spread them around. Try to choose plants that have heavy, sticky pollen instead of the lightweight wind spread pollen. Examples would be pears, peaches and redbud trees.

It's impossible to prevent all pollen movement, but keeping weed populations down will help. Johnsongrass, ragweed, and pigweed are some of the worst causes of allergies. Keep them mowed down and under control.

Another trick is to plant female plants instead of male plants, when there's an option. Some plants occur as either male or female, such as hollies. Sometimes male specimens are recommended to reduce messy fruit drop, but for reducing allergies female plants would be the way to go. One good example is the Chinese pistache tree; the female has beautiful red berries in the fall and does not shed allergy-causing pollen.

Another cause for allergies could be fungus. This can be prevented by keeping the landscape cleaned up and rake up fallen leaves, and to keep hedges and lawns trimmed to increase aeration and reduce mold spores.

Timing can also affect the severity of allergic reactions. Go out to work in the garden in the morning or late afternoon - this is when the pollen is higher in the sky and away from ground level. Use a mask when mowing, and change clothes after working outside.





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.



Classes & Programs

April 2016

Saturday, April 2nd - 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.



Friday, April 15, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Texas Superstar Plants

Instructor - Ron Knight

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office
Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Learn about some of the best plants for Texas! Texas Superstars are plants that have been through rigorous testing and proven to do well in the Texas climate.



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

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