

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

May 2017

## Plant a Vegetable Garden

While it's certainly easy enough to buy just about whatever kind of fruit or vegetable that's desired at the grocery store, there is something to be said for growing food at home. A home vegetable garden, whether a large garden plot or a simple few containers, is a wonderful way to get delicious food and great satisfaction from the effort. Working out in the garden is a good source of exercise, fresh air, and sunshine; and while gardening is a challenge in the west Texas climate, it's definitely possible with some knowledge and good planning.

The first step is soil improvement. If planting in the ground, the most important task is the addition of compost. Soil in the Concho Valley is generally pretty lacking in organic matter, and adding compost will greatly improve success with growing vegetables. Till up the plot, apply a three-inch deep layer of high quality, finished compost, and till in well. If growing in pots or containers, use only potting mix – not real soil or bags called 'garden soil.'

After preparing the soil, install drip irrigation. Drip irrigation is the best option for watering vegetables since it applies the water to the soil, where it's needed, and doesn't damage plants by spraying on them repeatedly. Then plant the vegetables, and apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of wood mulch. Mulch will greatly reduce the most common frustration of vegetable gardening – weeds. But it needs to be deep enough to have an impact on weed populations. If starting vegetables from seed, wait until after the seeds emerge to apply mulch.

Vegetables grow vigorously and produce best with steady, even watering as well as light, frequent applications of fertilizer. Timing of planting is also important, for spring planting focus on warm season crops like tomatoes, melons, squash and peppers. It's too late for cool season crops like lettuce, carrots, and spinach. For growing guides for the various home vegetable crops, visit the website <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/> and check out the 'Easy Gardening Fact Sheets.'

Beyond the broad choice of crop selection, or which vegetables will be grown, selection of specific varieties can also help improve success. For example, tomatoes are difficult to grow in summer because they don't make fruit well at high temperatures. So while large, heirloom tomatoes are delicious they won't produce well when it's warm. Improved varieties that were developed for hotter temperatures will produce better in west Texas – such as the variety 'Phoenix.'

## May To-Do's

- Change irrigation timer over to summer watering from the spring schedule
  - Visit the website [watermyyard.org](http://watermyyard.org) to receive weekly watering recommendations
- Apply glyphosate ('Roundup') carefully around bed edges to keep bermuda grass from creeping in
- Replenish mulch around beds to conserve water and maintain plant health

## Pecan Update



Check out the website [pecankernel.tamu.edu](http://pecankernel.tamu.edu) for helpful information and updates on pecan pests and best treatments

## Plant Selection

Summer is the hardest time of year to establish new plants, so it's better to plant in spring or fall. It's only May, but we had an early spring and have already gotten to the summer temperatures. But with some careful attention and effort, annuals and perennials can be planted now to brighten up any spot in the landscape that could use some color. To increase the chances of new plants surviving when planted in the summer, till in compost to improve the soil and apply a three to four inch deep layer of mulch after planting to retain moisture and cool the soil. Try to plant on an overcast or cooler day to reduce transplant shock and always water plants in well after planting.

Annuals are plants that just live one season or year and don't come back (but some may leave seeds behind that come up) and perennials have hardy root systems and will come back each year. Both are good and add to the curb appeal of a home. Annuals generally have more intense color and flower almost constantly, but since they are short lived it's best to limit annuals to smaller sections or pockets in flower beds instead of filling up the yard with them. Perennials are more permanent but usually bloom for a shorter period or don't have as much color impact. Visit the web-

site [texassuperstar.com](http://texassuperstar.com) to see a list of both perennials and annuals that have been re-search-proven to do well in Texas by Texas A&M University.

The newest plant to be designated as a Texas Superstar is Balsamic Blooms, a basil herb that is great for both ornamental value in the landscape as well as culinary use.

Balsamic Blooms is an annual that reaches about two feet tall and does best in full sun to promote flowering—it boasts very vibrant, beautiful flowers if planted in enough light.



## Plant Spotlight

Sensation Deep Blue Salvia

*Salvia nemorosa* 'Sensation Deep Blue'

This vibrant salvia perennial will really catch the eye in early summer, it grows to a nice size and shape for edges, borders or containers. It attracts butterflies and hummingbirds but is deer resistant and makes a good cut flower.



## Butterfly Weed

If you like butterflies and want more to come visit your landscape, now is a great time to plant butterfly weed. There are a lot of beautiful plants that attract and provide food and nectar for butterflies, but anything that has butterfly in the name is an especially good flower for promoting butterfly populations.

Butterfly weed is one of several different types of milkweed, this one in particular has the botanical name *Asclepias tuberosa*. It's great for butterflies because they love the flowers for the nectar they provide, and it's also a good food plant for caterpillars.



Butterfly weed is a more attractive plant for a landscape because it's neater and not as big or messy as some other types of milkweed. It grows to about 1 foot tall, with clusters of orange flowers that are about 5 inches long.

Plant butterfly weed in the landscape in a spot that has well drained soil, bright morning sun, and plenty of organic matter. There are few pest problems that affect it, and even if there are some spider mites or other pests they don't do enough damage to kill the plant. Don't apply insecticides to plants that are there specifically to attract butterflies, because it would kill them as well as the pest.

Butterflies are a great beneficial insect to have in the yard, they provide beauty, movement and interest to the overall landscape design. They are also pollinators and help our flowers and vegetables produce. Butterflies also need water, so if there's a damp spot in the yard like where air conditioner condensation drips, that's a good spot for them to get a drink. If there's not a spot like that, you can make a butterfly waterer with a shallow dish filled with damp sand.

## Herbicide Damage

I always get calls in the spring about herbicide damage to trees and other ornamental plants. It's important to be very careful with herbicides so that we don't damage our own vegetable or landscape plants, or the neighbors'.

First, read labels very carefully when applying a weed control product to the lawn - especially weed and feed. Some of these have soil active herbicides that can be absorbed through tree roots and damage or kill shade trees or shrubs. If the label says 'don't apply over the rooting zone of ornamentals' then it is not the right thing to use if you have any trees, because their roots will go all throughout the yard. Also, double check the label and make sure the variety of grass you have is safe for that product - some weed control products can be used on bermudagrass, but not St. Augustine.

Another way landscape plants can be damaged by herbicide is drift. Never apply a herbicide spray when it's windy, and check the label for the right weather conditions. For instance, 2,4-d broadleaf herbicide can volatilize in warm weather and drift onto desirable plants even with no wind. Some formulations are more volatile than others, and shouldn't be applied when it's over 85 degrees.

If your trees have been damaged by herbicide, it is important to act quickly. If you are worried about a soil applied herbicide affecting trees, activated carbon can be applied to the soil and can absorb some of the pesticide. For foliar applied sprays, use a water hose to spray the product off immediately - waiting even just one hour can be damaging. For trees damaged by 2,4-d don't fertilize until all the damaged leaves have fallen off and new leaves start to emerge.



## Keeping Easter Lilies



Easter lilies are beautiful flowers that are often purchased this time of year to decorate the church for Easter, or to give as gifts or just brighten up the home. Easter lilies are not especially easy to grow, but can be planted in the ground and will rebloom the next year if cared for properly. Here are some tips to keep them blooming as long as possible, and after the lilies finish blooming, how to plant them and care for them in the landscape.

First, as soon as each flower opens up, pinch the anthers off inside the flower – this is the part with the pollen. It will keep the flower, and whatever table it's on, clean. Keep the plant moist, but not in standing water. To water, remove any lining around the pot, place in the sink and soak thoroughly. After draining, replace the wrapper and place back on display.

Easter lilies will flower the longest if placed in bright light and at cool temperatures. After it finishes blooming, plant in the flower bed in a spot that gets morning sun, but shade in the afternoon. Amend the soil with good compost, and apply mulch around the plant.

The following year, it will bloom again – without the controlled environment of a greenhouse, it may not flower until a bit after Easter though. Easter lilies can last in the landscape for several years, but probably not for the long term because the summer heat and extreme climate is rough on them.

So enjoy your beautiful Easter lily in the home until it stops flowering, and if you want to keep it going longer, just give it a spot in the flower bed for a few more years of enjoyment.

## Vegetable Garden Weed Control

For those that have a vegetable garden plot, weed control is essential to have healthy plants and also to conserve 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. But weeds can be the most frustrating challenge of growing vegetables, so be sure to have a good plan to keep the garden clear.

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.

The old fashioned methods of applying mulch and hoeing are the most important and helpful 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

May 2017

Saturday, April 29th 10am to 12pm

## **Water Conservation Seminar—'More Green with Less Blue'**

Location: The Bosque at the river walk - 330 S. Irving St., San Angelo

Cost: Free, open to the public

Join us for a fun seminar to learn about landscape water conservation!

See attached flyer, FMI call 325-659-6528

Friday, May 19, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Herbs and Butterfly Plants**

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Learn how to bring more butterflies to your yard and also how to grow your own herbs for food and crafts!

Weekly in May, 6:30pm

## **Backyard Basics seminar series**

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

Cost: varies

You don't have to live in the country or have a huge yard to grow your own food!

Topics featured include vegetable gardening, aquaponics, food preservation (canning), and fruit trees. Please see flyer for info and call to RSVP: 325-659-6522

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



**Allison Watkins**

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension

Tom Green County

113 W Beauregard

San Angelo, TX 76903

325-659-6528

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