

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

June 2014

Summer Landscape Color

Summer is not the ideal planting time to say the least - it's the most stressful of the four seasons for planting. But for spots in the landscape that could use a bright pop of color, there are a few Texas tough plants that can usually handle the rough summer heat. Bear in mind that even tough plants will need care to get established.

Now that we had that wonderful rainfall, it's a great opportunity to plant some drought tolerant plants - we actually have some water now that we can use to get them established, but we need to still plan for the future and focus our selection on water-wise plants.

Be sure to water appropriately which means thoroughly and frequently at first but reduce the frequency as time goes by to allow the roots to dry out a bit. Use plenty of mulch and try to plant on an overcast day or at least when there is not a lot of wind. Plants will go through transplant shock and the dryer and hotter it is, the worse they will struggle to grow. As always when planting new things, incorporate some compost to improve soil structure and water holding ability.

Some good summer color plants for west Texas include annuals such as marigold, moss rose, purslane, and zinnia. Perennial options are gold star esperanza (also called yellow bells), Texas star hibiscus, lantana, salvia, Mexican bush sage, pride of Barbados, gaura and flame acanthus.

These are by no means the only good options, there are many beautiful drought tolerant plants - take a look around your neighborhood and local parks to see which plants do well in the heat, and try them out!



June To-Do's

- Continue to dead-head flowers
- Replenish mulch as needed
- Keep beds weeded to eliminate competition for water
- Watch for chinch bug & grub damage in lawns

Insects in the Lawn



Grub damage - turf pulls easily from soil, white c shaped grubs are seen

Chinch bug damage - insects are very small, about 1/6 inch long



Growing Watermelon

Nothing can help beat the heat quite like a fresh, tasty watermelon. If you'd like to try growing your own, there's still some time to get smaller, sweet varieties planted. Or for large types, keep them in mind for your spring garden next year.

We can grow pretty good watermelons around here because they like hot days and warm nights, and cooler temperatures can stunt the growth. So watermelon should be a pretty reliable crop for the Concho Valley.



Even though they like it to be hot, they will still need deep watering - watermelons are about 90% water and they can't just make it out of thin air!

Plant in well-drained soil - and if your soil is heavy like most of ours is, amend with lots of compost to improve drainage and texture.

They can be direct seeded, or you can purchase transplants or grow your own seeds indoors to transplant. Just be sure to harden them off by setting them in the sun and keep a close eye on them until they get toughened up against the heat and dry wind. When planting, leave lots of room because the plants will get very large and sprawl across a wide area.

Apply a nitrogen fertilizer at planting and then 3 weeks after emergence. Irrigate one to two inches of water every week. There are some insect pests that could possibly cause problems, such as whiteflies, mites, and armyworms. Use an insecticidal soap, or a vegetable garden safe pesticide such as Bt for caterpillars, or carbaryl for others.

Weeds definitely need to be controlled around watermelons because they will compete for water and nutrients. Cultivate the area well before planting, and as weeds emerge use a hoe to control them.

Plant Spotlight

Fairy Duster

Calliandra eriophylla

A beautiful and interesting species that is native to desert/arid areas of the southwest





Growing Sunflowers

Sunflowers are a great addition to the summer garden. In the home landscape, they provide a bright pop of color and interest and also provide food for desirable birds. Sunflowers are an important agriculture crop, and are grown in fields to produce seeds and oil. They are also edible, and were an important food crop to native people in the American continent.

These summery bloomers range in size from a few feet tall to 15 feet tall, and there are many different varieties with varying colors.

Some sunflowers are perennials, while many are annuals. You can tell the difference by looking at the root system – annual sunflowers have a simple fibrous root system, looking like small strings, while a perennial sunflower will have roots that thicken into tough storage tubers.

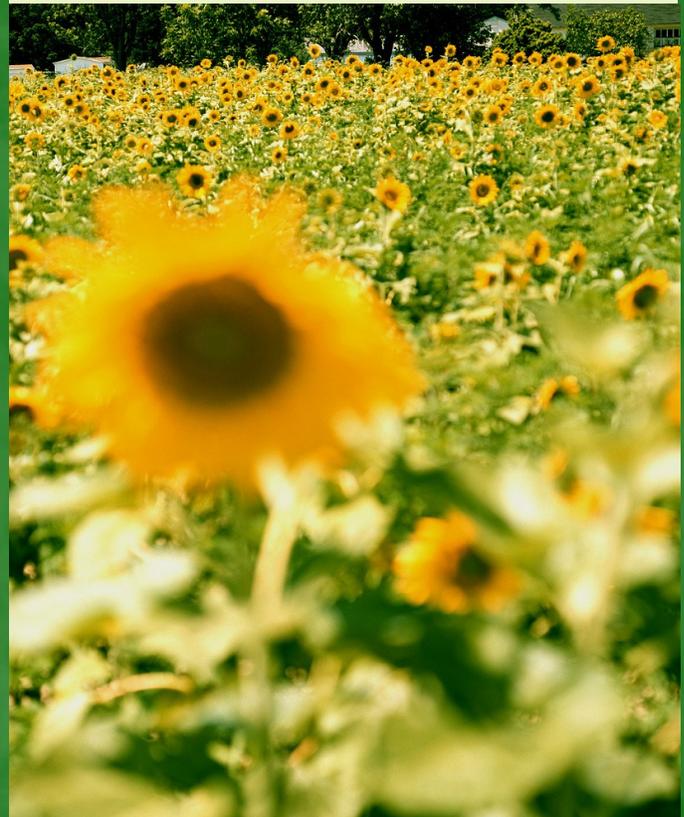
Sunflowers need full sun to grow, but are pretty adaptable to other conditions such as soil type, and are fairly drought tolerant.

Sunflowers are great to grow with children. They love to watch the giant varieties grow fast and like to track their

heights. You can also plant them in a circular pattern and create a teepee style playhouse space for the kids to hide out in. It's fun to watch how the flower heads can move throughout the day, always staying facing the sun as it tracks across the sky.

Sunflowers can be used for bright, cheerful flower arrangements, and there are special varieties that have been developed to have no pollen – so that the arrangements don't cause a mess.

The People/Plant Connection, a local non-profit organization, is hosting a giant sunflower growing contest this year, and are giving out free giant sunflower seeds. Anyone can sign up to try, and if you grow a large sunflower you can choose to enter the contest at the end of the year to try for a prize. Contact the People/Plant Connection for more info at 656-3104.



Drip Irrigation for Potted Plants



The most common issue with growing plants in containers is watering them. Growing plants in pots limits the size of the plant's root system, not letting it get as big as it could if it were in the ground. This means that potted plants usually require more frequent watering, which can become a burden.

One solution you might not have thought about is using drip irrigation for pots. Believe it or not, a drip system can be created for your containers that will make watering them easier than ever.

Drip irrigation can really help you out by making irrigation easier, but it's also good for the plants. It applies the water straight to the potting mix instead of splashing it on the plants.

Making a drip system for containers is not difficult at all and is a good way to learn how to use drip irrigation systems.

All you need to do is put a splitter on a faucet, attach a drip supply line to one of the connections of the splitter and run it behind the potted plants.

Use a punch tool to make a hole on the drip for each pot. Insert a small lateral line emitter, also called spaghetti tubing, into each hole.

Place the emitter in the pot at the top of the soil. A small stake can be used to hold the tubing in place. The emitters can be placed so they come in at the back of the pot, and are not visible.

Now all you have to do is turn on one faucet and all your plants will get watered at once. For even more convenience, use an irrigation timer.

When the plants need to be watered, you can set it to run for a couple of hours and it will turn itself off when the plants are watered.

Vegetable Garden Weed Control

The drought has prevented many home vegetable gardeners from planting a large garden plot this year, but for those that do have a garden plot, weed control is more essential than ever to have productive plants and not waste water. Weeds are very competitive for water, and if allowed to get out of control they will be a big waste of water and cause the vegetable plants to suffer.

For new plots, consider weeds when selecting the site. Some plants simply cause more trouble, and spots where they proliferate should be avoided. Bermudagrass, Johnsongrass and nutsedge are weeds that make it difficult to start a garden. It's hard enough to get a garden started, you don't want to have it taken over week after week with unwanted plants.

Herbicides are often thought of as the go-to option for controlling pesky weeds. There are some products that are labeled and can be used in edible crops, but there is no silver bullet – there are no herbicides that can be used on all vegetable crops to control all weeds. The old-fashioned methods are still useful and important for vegetable crops.



Weeds are easy to disturb in the seedling stage. Seedlings will pop up after rain, so use a garden hoe to

scrape or rough up the soil when the small plants emerge – catch them early and they're easy to keep under control.

Mulch is the best bet though. Properly applied mulch can keep many weeds out. Some will still pop up through mulch, but a lot less, and they're easier to pull. But mulch has to be deep enough for it to work – a 3 inch deep layer is recommended.

Upcoming Classes & Programs

June 2014

We are pleased to offer two major programs this month on water conservation, all are welcome to attend either or both:

Friday June 6, 9am

Texas Water Star Conference

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67 (Next to Animal Shelter)

Cost: \$30, includes lunch

Program geared towards landscape professionals and municipalities, but anyone is welcome to attend! See attached flyer for more details. Please call to RSVP: 659-6528



Saturday June 7, 9am

Water Smart Landscapes

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67 (Next to Animal Shelter)

Topics include using greywater and harvesting rainwater. Program is free and open to the public! See attached flyer for more details.

Friday June 13, 12pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Waterwise Landscaping

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5



Saturday June 14, 9am

Saturday Seminar - Gardening with Succulents

Location: Water Education Center

417 S. Oakes

Cost: \$10

Presented by the People/Plant Connection. Guest Speaker Mike Mosman, owner of Dessert Gardens in Cactustown will talk about gardening with succulents



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

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