

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

June 2016

Summer Landscape Color

It's been a good year for landscaping and gardening - the spring rains gave us a good wildflower show and everything is pretty green. That can change quickly, and there's no telling what our west Texas weather will do this year (I hope I don't jinx it!). Whether we continue to get rain or not, good plant selection is important to promote water conservation. There are many beautiful plants that can handle this climate, it just takes a little research to find the best ones.

Summer is the hardest time of year to establish new plants, so it's better to plant in spring or fall. 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 website texassuperstar.com to see a list of both perennials and annuals that have been research-proven to do well in Texas by Texas A&M University.



The newest Texas Superstar plant is the Whopper Begonia, a beautiful cultivar of wax begonia. Dr. Brent Pemberton, Agrilife Research horticulturist, said "They are outstanding in shade and partial shade and will tolerate full sun except in extreme heat, especially regions with low relative humidity," he said. "Both green and bronze foliage types are available with red or rose flowers. Everything is bigger in Texas and Whopper begonias fit the bill."

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

Pecan Update



Water is critical all season long, through the fall until after shuck split for good pecan production.

Keep an eye on this website for other updates and pest alerts:

<http://pecan.ipmpipe.org/>

Mosquito Control

Gardeners know that the best time to be outside working in the yard or garden in the hot summer time is during the morning and evening when it's cooler. But unfortunately, this is the time that mosquitoes like to come out too. Mosquitoes are known to transmit harmful diseases, so gardeners need to be conscientious about protecting themselves from these insects.

A good mosquito repellent is the best defense. Deet is the most common active ingredient, but now days there are other options too. The EPA has put together a helpful website that has an insect repellent database. Go to city-bugs.tamu.edu, and search "Help selecting mosquito repellents" to get the link.

You can get a list of all available products, or enter in how long you need it to work, or if you're looking for a specific active ingredient. It will give you a list of all the currently registered products.

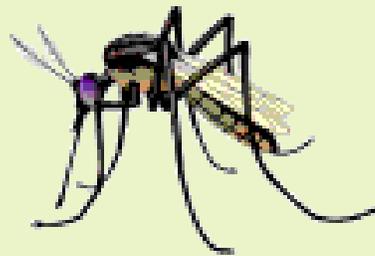
It's also important to not have any stagnant, standing water in the yard. Ditches or other low spots are breeding grounds for mosquitoes. If possible, try to improve drainage so they dry out faster. If you have a rain barrel to catch and store rainwater for landscape use, it needs to have a screen or filter over it to keep the mosquitoes

out.

You can also use a product called a mosquito dunk, which is a biological pesticide. It contains a bacteria called Bt that is only toxic to mosquitoes. You can put it in water features and rain barrels and it won't hurt plants, pets, or other insects.

The *Aedes* species of mosquito, that is the carrier for the Zika virus, is known to prefer small amounts of standing water – such as water in an old tire or even an unused pet water dish. So be careful to eliminate any potential mosquito breeding spots, even small ones.

This species also come out during the day, not just in morning and evening. Always wear long sleeves and pants, and use mosquito repellent when working in the yard. Another helpful website with mosquito information is <http://mosquitosafari.tamu.edu>.



Plant Spotlight

Orange Jubilee Esperanza

Tecoma stans 'Orange Jubilee'

This variation of the traditionally yellow esperanza plant is a beautiful perennial with showy masses of orange blooms in the summer. It is pest tolerant and looks good as an accent plant or in mass. It requires full sun and good drainage.



Turf Problems

Creating a perfect green lawn is a challenge in west Texas, and there are many things that can cause problems. One of the simplest problems is too much shade. Warm season turf grasses don't thrive in shade and will get thinned out around trees. Even St. Augustine, which is the most shade tolerant warm season grass we have, still can't grow in deep shade and bare spots will show up under shade trees – especially live oaks.

If your lawn is not thriving under a large shade tree, consider replacing it with a groundcover such as monkey grass or asian jasmine. The only other option would be to thin the canopy of the tree to let some more filtered light through. Increasing the mowing height and cutting the grass a little higher can help it survive low light conditions as well.

Another issue that has been seen in the Concho Valley is the disease Take-All Root Rot. It is a fungal disease, and symptoms include large patches of yellowing which later die back and can be easily pulled out of the ground. The chemical fungicide thiophenate-methyl (trade name Cleary's 3336g) can help control it, but I would also suggest applying sphagnum peat moss. The disease needs alkaline conditions, and peat moss is acidic. Also, avoid over-fertilizing as high rates of nitrogen fertilizer can contribute to the disease.

Other common pests of the lawn this time of year is the grub worm and chinch bugs. Grubs are usually the first pest blamed for brown spots on the lawn, but they actually aren't the most common cause. Cultural issues, broken sprinkler head, disease, or chinch bugs cause issues more often than grubs. For help identifying and controlling chinch bugs, check out the website insects.tamu.edu and search chinch bugs.



Plants for Shade

Shade trees are a great thing to have in the yard, especially in the summer when it gets so hot! But while we enjoy the shade, it can be hard to find flowering plants that like it as much as we do. Many flowering plants need sun, but there are some options for color in shady spots in the yard.

Some beautiful annuals that have colorful flowers and do well in the area are begonias and impatiens. Caladiums and coleus are two more colorful shade plants, they do not have flowers - but their leaves provide lots of beautiful color.

Begonias can have a double impact in the landscape, because the foliage can range in color from red to bronze to green. They have flower colors ranging from white, to pinks, to reds.

Impatiens come in many flower colors, in all different shades of pink, white, purple, blue, and orange.

When planting annuals, bed preparation is important. Incorporate lots of compost to loosen up the soil and add nutrients. Also when gardening with annuals, it's important to use them in mass plantings. A few annuals scattered throughout the bed will not have much impact, but if planted in a large pocket of color they have a great impact.

Flowering perennials for shade are harder to come by, but some good ones would be plumbago, turk's cap, daylily, and columbine. These would all provide beautiful color under shade and are available in various colors.

Save the date for the Master Gardener's annual Fall Landscape Symposium, which will be September 10th. There will be several excellent guest speakers covering several topics, and one presentation will be on good shade plants for west Texas. For more info, call the Extension office at 325-659-6522.

Harvesting Vegetables

This has been a pretty good year for gardening, and it's harvesting time! There's nothing better than using delicious fruits and vegetables that you've grown yourself in your kitchen and to give away to friends.

In order to have the best tasting fruits and vegetables, it's important to time the harvest right. The best time to harvest is right before they are fully mature. You don't want to harvest too early, or they won't taste as good. You don't want to harvest too late, because they can lose their nice firm texture and can become soft and even rotten.

There are no strict rules when it comes to harvesting your home garden crops, but here are some general guidelines:

Harvest asparagus when spears are about 6-8 inches tall and as thin as your little finger. If you snap them off at ground level, new spears will continue to grow.

When it comes to snap beans, you'll have to check daily. Pick them before you can see bulging seeds in the pod, and they should easily snap in two. Be careful not to wait until they get tough.

Corn is ready when the silks dry out and turn brown, about three weeks after the silks form. If a kernel is pricked, there should be a milky substance.

Summer squashes, cucumbers and zucchini should be checked daily. If they get too large or over ripe they are no good. Pick when they are still small, and the skin is tender.

Winter squash like butternut, acorn, spaghetti squash and pumpkins should be left to grow as large as possible and harvested late in the season.

Pick tomatoes when they are fully colored and as soon as they feel tender to the touch.



Vegetable Garden Safety

There seem to be more and more foodborne illness outbreaks in recent years from contaminated fresh produce. While the major outbreaks have been attributed to commercial production and not home gardens, some home gardeners get worried about the possibility of getting sick from their home grown vegetables and fruit.

There are two very simple and basic guidelines to follow to ensure that produce you grow is safe and not contaminated. First, don't use fresh manure around plants that will be eaten, and second always wash all produce before eating.

I recommend the addition of organic matter to soils to improve success in. It improves soil texture and nutrient availability. And manure can be a good source of organic matter, so many gardeners add it to their soil. But be very careful when dealing with manure in vegetable gardens. Never till in fresh manure, as water can splash microbes onto the vegetables and cause contamination.

So either stick with another type of organic matter, and avoid manure in the vegetable garden, or make sure the manure is very well composted and till it in well.

The composting process heats up and breaks down organic matter such as manure. The heat will kill many organisms and makes it safer to use. So again, just be sure to only use well-composted manure in a vegetable garden. If you are unsure, just use other sources of organic matter like composted cotton burr hulls.

In attempts to conserve water, many gardeners are utilizing grey water from the washing machine and recycling it to irrigate plants. Grey water is considered safe, as long as some rules are followed. It can't be sprayed with sprinklers, and can't be stored or allowed to puddle. Grey water is considered safe for vegetables if it isn't sprayed on the edible portion of the plant, but shouldn't be used if root vegetables are grown.

Classes & Programs

June 2016

Saturday, June 4, 9am

Talk & Tour Native Ornamentals - Nursery Tour Series

Location: Meet at 2750 Ben Ficklin Rd, San Angelo to carpool to Native Ornamentals in Mertzon

Cost: \$15

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection. Steve Lewis, owner, will give a tour and answer questions. Call to preregister 325-656-3104; Upon arrival: Refreshments & Door Prize



Friday, June 10, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Landscape Pests

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Find out how to win against some of the common landscape pests of the Concho Valley, including insects, diseases and weeds

Saturday, June 25, 9am

Landscape Water Conservation Seminar

Instructor - Dr. Dotty Woodson

Location: Tom Green 4-H Building

3168 N. US Highway 67 (next door to animal shelter)

Cost: FREE

See attached flyer for details



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



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