Concho Valley Horticulture Update

July 2015

Establishing a Lawn

This has been such a wonderful year, the weather has been great so far. The spring was cooler than normal, and all the rain have been getting is heavenly. It's quite a difference from the previous few years, which had record breaking heat and bad drought. That harsh weather has caused a lot of lawns to struggle and get thinned out, and some lawns are pretty much gone and there's just weeds.

So since the weather is cooperating so far, this is a good year to replace dead lawns with new grass. Planting grass seed or sod requires a short period of very frequent irrigation, which isn't possible when we're under drought level water restrictions. So if need new grass, now is your chance to get it established! For more info on what kind of grass would be good under certain conditions, feel free to contact the Extension Office.

But whatever kind of grass you choose, it takes a bit of time, effort and money so you want to do it right from the very beginning, starting with good soil prep. In order for the lawn to thrive and be successful for years to come, soil prep is critical but is often overlooked. It's not good enough to throw out some seed or set down grass squares without preparing the soil.

Till up the ground to loosen up the soil and if possible, incorporate some compost; then plant the seeds or sod.

Water several times a day for the first 2 weeks, but just a light amount – it doesn't take a lot of water, only a light sprinkle but very often. Then as the seeds come up or the sod grows roots, decrease how often you water and water more deeply.

Get to the point where the lawn is getting watered no more frequently than once a week, about an inch each time. The combination of soil preparation before planting, and deep and infrequent irrigation after establishment, really promotes deep root growth. Deep roots are key to the lawn thriving, even during rough weather and drought.

For a more in-depth guide for lawn establishment, click here for a great Extension resource.

July To-Do's

- Check melons and squash frequently for ripeness
- Audit irrigation system to check for problems
- Pick okra, peas and peppers often to maintain production.

Pecan Update

Pest Update:
First generation PNC has run its course and we are now looking at second generation activity.

Walnut caterpillar larvae need mature foliage to feed on so the regrowth from the previous generation's defoliation will not be attacked. However trees attacked by first generation will be susceptible to the third generation.

From Bill Ree's Pecan IPM Newsletter

Bees and Beneficial Insects

Next time you enjoy a good apple, cucumber, peach or watermelon – thank a bee. Insects play a major role in feeding us by pollinating many crops. In fact, about one third of our total diet comes from insect pollinated crops, and 80% of that pollination is done by bees. Plus they make some delicious honey!

In addition to pollination, insects can do a lot for plants - beneficial predatory and parasitic insects can help keep pest populations under control.

Insects aren't always the most welcome guests in the landscape or garden. There definitely are some very pesky insects that can damage plants, but there are just as many beneficial insects out there that do not hurt plants - and will actually help. When insects are found in the landscape, it's important to identify them before attempting to control with chemical or other means - it might be a good guy.

I have observed that some of the worst insect pest problems I've encountered in landscapes were yards that had used pesticides extensively. Chemical pesticides can be very helpful if used properly and moderately, but overusing them can lead to worse problems in the long run because of the effect on beneficial insects. Some good predator insects include ladybugs, green lacewings, preying mantis, and assassin bug. Beneficial parasitoids include braconids, trichogramma wasps, and tachinid flies.

Please join us for a free educational program open to the public on bees that will provide info on protecting bee populations and also how to get started into beekeeping. The class will be at 6pm on Tuesday, July 21st at the A&M Research Center, located at 7887 N. US Highway 87 in San Angelo. A tasting of locally produced honey will be provided during the break! For more info, contact the extension office at 325-659-6528.

Plant Spotlight

Russian Sage

Perovskia atriplicifolia

This very sturdy plant is good for bees and butterflies, and is also resistant to deer damage. It is drought tolerant and can thrive in alkaline soils. It does best in well drained soil and full sun, and while it's a great landscape plant, it's <u>not</u> a culinary sage to use in cooking.

Growing Pomegranates

Pomegranates are great landscape plants. They are attractive small trees, have beautiful orange flowers and large, vibrant orange fruit. Besides the decorative aspects, pomegranates are a fun fruit crop to grow and eat.

Some pomegranates have been developed just for the flowers and don't make very goodfruit. So if you want to have pomegranates to eat, be sure to check the label and see if it's a good fruiting variety or not. If you can't find a good fruiting variety, we have some planted in demo gardens – they root very easily, so contact the Extension Office if you'd like to get some cuttings.

Pomegranates are a great choice for landscapes in this area because they do well in our hot, dry climate. They don't need as much water as some other fruit crops and aren't very prone to disease and insect problems. Pomegranates also prefer dry air over humidity, which is why they do so well in our landscapes.

Pomegranate plants can get up to 20 to 30 feet tall, but are usually about 15 feet tall. They will naturally be very bushy and have many trunks, so in order to be a tree will have to be trained.

Pomegranates will do best in full sun, but can take a little bit of shade. They will need to be watered frequently to become established, but once established won't require a whole lot of irrigation. Just give them a deep, thorough watering every few weeks if there has been no rain.

In most cases, pomegranates won't need to be fertilized, but if you see signs of yellowing try adding some nitrogen.

The fruit should be harvested when it becomes fully colored - it will be a very dark orange to red color, and when it has a metallic sound when tapped. Be sure to pick them before they get over-ripe, because they will crack open.

Recommended Varieties:

Surh Anor
Salavatski
Al - sirin - nar
Sumbar

If you can't find a good variety at a nursery, try catalog ordering, Or contact the Extension Office—we have stock plants available in demonstration gardens, and cuttings can be taken to grow new trees.

Effect of Heat on Plants

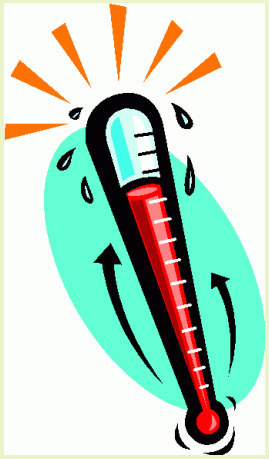
Heat can have a major impact on plant tissue. This year we had a pretty cool spring, and it's taking a lot longer than normal to get to 100 degrees. But has been in the high 90's , and some plants have shown some unusual wilting or curling of leaves, because they were used to the cooler temperatures – when it got hot, they had to adapt and curling up leaves helps prevent water loss.

Plants that have had that problem should acclimate be fine, and most are already used to the warmer temperatures and the wilting symptom is going away.

We all know winter hardiness limits and know that there are some plants that will freeze and die in the winter. But cold hardiness should not be the only guideline for choosing plants - there is also a heat index map, which gardeners aren't as aware of.

It's common sense that just like cold hardiness, some plants can't take the heat as well as others. Once temperatures reach 86 degrees, some plants will begin having stress and possibly damage. The heat index map is divided up into 12 zones, indicating the number of days on average that each zone has high temperatures.

Here in the Concho Valley we are in heat zone 9, which means between 120 and 150 days a year over 86 degrees. And that's just temperature – add in drought stress, and plants can really struggle to survive here.



When buying plants at the nursery, just remember that the hardiness zone on the label is just the cold hardiness – not heat or drought tolerance. You'll have to take that into consideration and maybe do a little research to find out how well a certain plant can handle our Texas heat.

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, many home gardeners do worry 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 highly 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 and rotted manure and not fresh 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 into the air 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 probably shouldn't be used if root vegetables are grown.

Classes & Programs

July 2015

Friday, July 17, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - West Texas Lawn Care

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom
Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: $5

Having a green lawn in the Concho Valley can be a challenge! Learn how to have better luck by learning about the best lawn care techniques for a dry climate.

Saturday, July 18, 9:00am

Saturday Seminar - Fall Vegetable Gardening

Instructor - Allison Watkins

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

Cost: $10

From the People/Plant Connection. Find out how to have a productive fall garden—including fall warm season crops, and winter cool season crops.

Tuesday, July 21, 6pm

Backyard Basics Seminar Series - Beekeeping

You don't have to live in the country to grow your own fresh food! Join us for a new series of classes on urban production. See attached flyer for details .

Location: A&M Center, 7887 N. US Highway 87, San Angelo

Save the Date!

The Concho Valley Master Gardeners are pleased to be hosting their 4th annual Fall Landscaping symposium and have an incredible lineup of speakers, including Neil Sperry! Seating is limited and attendees must pre-register to attend. See the attached flyer and visit http://txmg.org/conchovalley/ to register.

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

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