

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

July 2017

Root Knot Nematodes

Nematodes are a large group of roundworms, and there are some types of nematodes that can affect gardening. There are many different kinds of small, microscopic nematodes that live in soil, and some are plant pests – the main one being the root knot nematode.

I don't hear much about nematodes in the Concho Valley, since they prefer sandy soil. But they can still occasionally cause issues in the vegetable garden, and are very hard to control. Root knot nematodes feed on plant root cells and cause the roots to be distorted and covered in small knots and balls. They can't be physically seen above ground, which makes them hard to diagnose.



The above ground symptoms include stunted plants that wilt easily during the day, even when watered properly. If the plant is pulled up, the evidence of root knot nematode damage is obvious in the roots.

Prevention is the best option, choose vegetable varieties that are resistant to nematodes. For tomatoes, there are many options such as celebrity and better boy. Crop rotation also helps prevent nematode infestations, so be sure to always move crops around and don't plant the same thing in the same spot each year.

If you find yourself with a nematode problem in the garden, remove and destroy all infected plants. Soil solarization can help kill the remaining nematodes in the soil. To solarize, till up the garden, water it until damp, and put a layer of sturdy clear plastic over the soil. Seal down the edges by digging in to the soil, and put rocks down if needed. The heat of the sun and the greenhouse effect will heat the soil to temperatures hot enough to kill the nematodes in the top few inches of soil.



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.
- Watch for summer pests like chinch bugs and spider mites

Pecan Update



Keep an eye out for second generation pecan nut casebearers—no treatment is likely needed for good crops, but light crops may need treatment.

Visit pecankernel.tamu.edu for more info.

Live Oak Sprouts

Sometimes I get questions about live oak sprouts that come up in the yard all around mature live oak trees - they can be a big pain and interfere with the nice soft turfgrass. Live oaks are beautiful and very popular trees, and I don't want to disparage them, but live oaks do have some challenges in many home landscapes, such as the sprouts that come up in the lawn. And live oaks have a lot of genetic diversity, so it's hard to know how one will turn out when it's mature.



The small live oak plants are root sprouts, not from seed - so they're connected to the tree. They are stiff and pointy and can hurt to walk on, and cause the lawn to lose some of its uniformity. Since they are connected to the tree, they cannot be sprayed with herbicide without hurting the mature tree they're connected to.

I'm afraid I don't have a good solution for live oak sprouts, there's no easy way to control them. Some homeowners are lucky and don't have any or very many, but some have a forest coming up under their tree constantly. That goes back to the genetic diversity, live oaks are all cross pollinated with each other and have different shapes, different rates of spring green up, and other variations.

A couple of options, though not great solutions, include physically removing each year, or planting groundcover instead of turf and let them blend in.

If you want to remove the sprouts, dedicate a few hours after a rain when the soil is soft and dig with a sharp sharpshooter. If you want to go with a groundcover, choose something that can handle deep shade like mondo grass or Asian jasmine. Or just let them be and remind yourself how nice it is to have the cool shade from the tree.

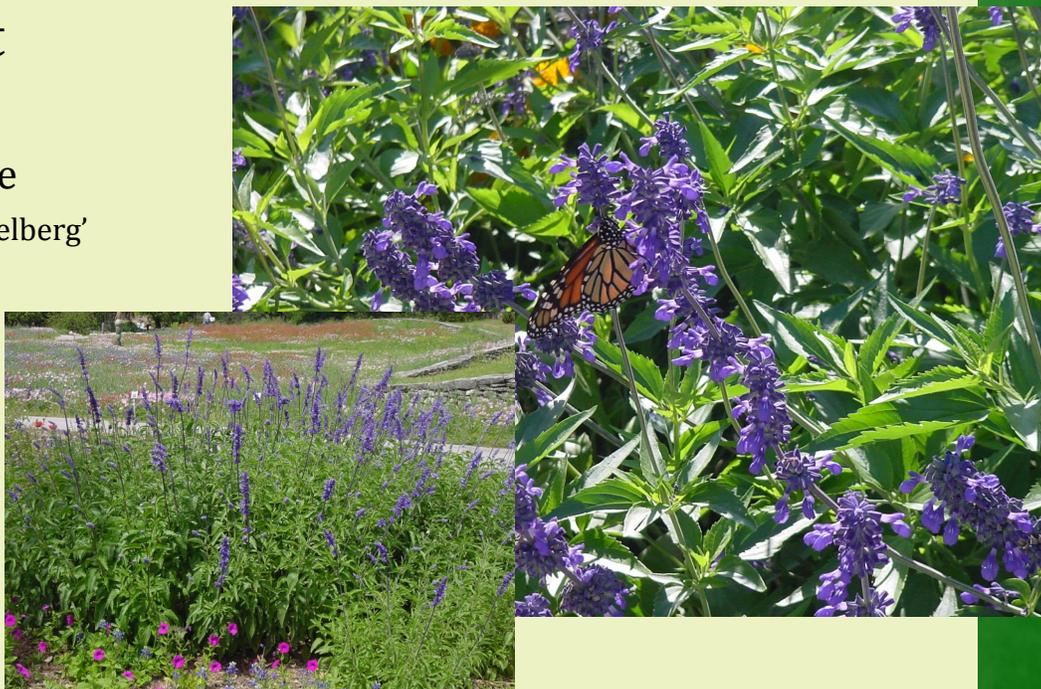


Plant Spotlight

Henry Duelberg Sage

Salvia farinacea 'Henry Duelberg'

This Texas Superstar selection is a star performer even in the west Texas heat,



Dry Creek Bed Landscape Features



Dry creek beds are a popular landscape feature for local landscapes, especially in desert style yards, but they

can be nice in traditional landscapes as well. A dry creek bed can provide the appearance of having water flowing through the property without actually having any.

Dry creek beds can also be functional, and provide a solution for drainage problems or other water related issues on the property - they can be used to re-direct the flow of water in order to keep it in the landscape instead of flowing off-property, or direct it toward streams.

Dry creek beds really compliment a water conserving landscape and really go well with the style of many landscapes here in this part of Texas. They are not that complicated to build, but it can be hard work to grade the land and place heavy rocks.

The first step to build a dry creek bed is to grade and sculpt the soil. Just sculpt out a long creek that integrates well with the flow of your landscape, or the existing flow of water if there is already water draining through the landscape. It doesn't have to be that deep, it just depends on how much water flow you have, how deep you want it to look, or how large of rocks you want to use.

Place large river rock at the ends, sides and bottom of the dry creek. Then place larger rocks or small boulders along the top edge. Just be sure to not keep the creek bed feature flat, it needs to look natural and be visible to be a good landscape feature.

Plants can be used to accent the dry creek bed and make it look more natural. Use plants like native grasses, wildflowers or colorful perennials, but choose plants that can take heat.

Trim Summer Perennials

It's been such a hot year, but even so many of our time tested, tough perennials and annuals have done well and bloomed nicely. But now is a good time of year to shear back any perennials that look raggedy and stressed. Cut back perennials like salvia and lantana can keep them compact, healthy and flowering well. Even if they don't look too stressed, a light shearing will keep them looking their best.

So now, and any time through the summer that perennials start looking stressed or damaged, you could do a lot of good for them if you trim the plant back to get fresh new growth. Just cut them back about 30 percent, or almost all the way to the ground if the whole plant looks pretty rough.

Pests like white flies, aphids and lace bugs can really damage hibiscus, lantana, verbena and other flowering perennials.

A good first step is to just trim them back and see how that works, instead of applying a pesticide. If they still have insect problems after that, try an insecticide. Just be careful not to damage the beneficial insects like bees and butterflies.

For annuals, be sure to deadhead flowers after they start to fade. When plants are flowering, they are putting all their energy into making the flowers and seeds. If the flower is removed before it goes to seed, most plants send up more flowers in an effort to get seeds made.

That's pretty much the only pruning to do during the summer, mid winter is a better time for pruning shade trees and late winter is good for spring flowering trees. But a good shearing will keep perennials looking good all summer long.



Low Maintenance Landscaping

Nobody ever asks about how to make a landscape more difficult to maintain – they always want to know ways to save time and effort but still have an attractive yard. There's no such thing as a maintenance free yard, but there are some ways to make it a bit simpler to care for.

And remember, that putting out rocks instead of a landscape isn't maintenance free either – weeds will still come up. Desert style landscapes can be beautiful, but are not the only option for low maintenance yards and even they have to be done well or can still be a maintenance problem.

The first thing to know is that lots of small beds are hard to care for. Small beds happen when we go to the nursery without a plan and just things we like without having a place for them. When the new plant gets home, and there's nowhere to put it, a new little flowerbed gets made to put it in. Lots of small beds are hard to mow around and require more string trimming.

So try to incorporate your plantings into large sweeping beds, and try to get tree trunks in there too. The less to trim around the better.

For the lawn, just let the grass clippings stay on the lawn - it's less work for you, and it's good for the lawn (as long as the grass didn't get too high and the clippings are too thick). For leaves –rake them into flower beds to be used a mulch instead of bagging them up.

Mulch has a huge impact on reducing yard maintenance. A thick layer of mulch really helps keep out a lot of weeds.

Along with mulch is drip irrigation. It takes a lot of work to water plants by hand, so think about investing in a drip irrigation system. It's not complicated or difficult to set up, and will save you a lot of work down the road.



The June winner of the Water Smart Landscape of the Month utilizes low-maintenance techniques

Collect Seeds

For those of you that have a vegetable garden, it might be helpful to remember to save some of the seeds from your harvest for planting next year. And when we get closer to fall, it will be a good time to save seeds from flowers and other landscape plants to share with friends and neighbors.



Not all plants make viable seeds, but many do - ranging from trees like Texas mountain laurel to garden vegetables like tomatoes and peppers. Just remember

though - if your garden plant is a hybrid, the seed will not grow a plant exactly like the one it came from. But if you planted heirloom or true-to-type vegetables, the seeds will be the same variety.

Also be careful if you grow similar plants next to each other, because they might cross pollinate and the seeds might turn out to be a very good plant.

Planting different kinds of squashes for example, can create seeds that grow into odd plants.

Knowing when seeds are ready to harvest can be difficult for some plants. Things like vegetables are easy because you just wait until the fruit is ripe. But for flowers it can be harder to tell.

A good indicator that flower seeds are ready would be when the stem they are on is brown and dried at least halfway down. The seed head should be brown and dry as well. Don't pick seeds that are still moist, soft or fleshy if you plan on storing them.

If your plant is prone to having the seed head explode and release the seeds before you get a chance to collect them, try tying a paper bag or a knee high stocking over the maturing seed pod. Moonflower and other datura seed heads are prone to popping open, letting seeds go everywhere.

Upcoming Events

July 2017

Friday, July 14, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Landscape Pests

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Instructor: Allison Watkins

West Texas has it's share of challenges with growing plants, find out how to identify and control some of the common landscape and garden pests.

Save the date—registration is now open for the Fall Landscaping Symposium! Don't miss this fun-filled day, visit: <http://txmg.org/conchovalley/2510-2/> for more info and to pre-register.

Saturday, September 9th



Concho Valley Master Gardeners' 6th Annual
Fall Landscaping Symposium

Saturday, September 9

Presentations:

- Steve Kainer
Landscape Water Features
- Bill Adams
Tomatoes and Other Edibles
and
Garden Photography
- Felder Rushing
Slow Gardening
and
Yard Art

Location: Texas A&M Agrilife Research & Extension Center
7887 N. US Highway 87, San Angelo

Registration 8:00am
Program 8:30am- 3:15pm
Cost: \$30 per person
No refunds for cancellations
Refreshments and lunch will be provided

Visit txmg.org/conchovalley for info on registration, parking and hotel

Visit <http://squareup.com/store/cvmg> to register with credit card

Must Pre-Register:
Deadline is 9/6/2017

FMI: 325-659-6522



The members of Texas A&M Agrilife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity

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



TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Allison Watkins
Texas A&M Agrilife Extension
Tom Green County
113 W Beauregard
San Angelo, TX 76903
325-659-6528

The members of Texas A&M Agrilife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M Agrilife.