

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

August 2014

Stay Busy Through the Summer

What a nice summer this is turning out to be! It has definitely gotten hot, but we've been lucky as far as temperature goes. It certainly beats those summers with 100+ days of 100 degrees! (I apologize in advance if this jinxes the weather and we end up with scorching heat for August). While summer is not as active a time for gardening as spring and fall, there are some things that we need to work on to be prepared for the coming seasons. Take advantage of some of the not-as-hot days to do tasks such as seed harvesting, wildflower planting, and fall vegetable gardening.

Start keeping an eye out for flowering plants that are winding down and have begun going to seed. Collecting and storing seeds is a great way to have a stash of free seeds to plant next year or share with neighbors. If seeds will be stored for any length of time, they need to be harvested only after they are fully mature and have dried out well. For seed pods of flowers and shrubs, wait until the stalk the seeds are on has dried out and turned brown at least halfway down. The seeds or pods should also look brown and shriveled up. For food plants like squash and tomato, remove seeds from fully ripe fruit, then wash and dry. Lay the seeds out on an old window screen or someplace with plenty of airflow to continue to dry out for a few weeks – the drier the seed, the longer it will survive storage.

Nurseries will probably start selling spring blooming bulbs this month, and while it's too early to plant them, it's a great time to purchase them. The strategy is 'buy now, plant later.' It's best to buy bulbs while there is a good assortment of healthy bulbs instead of waiting until time to plant, around November, when choices are limited. Just store them in a cool, dry location. A refrigerator only works if there's no produce also being stored – fruits and vegetables create a gas that can damage a bulb's future flowers. Another type of plant that requires some planning ahead would be wildflowers. Many of the spring blooming wildflowers should be planted in August or September. Spring seems like a long way off, but for bulbs and wildflowers a little work now can pay off with big color!

Finally, I want to issue a challenge to everyone within the San Angelo city limits to create a rain barrel out of their old trash can. We will have a change in our trash service soon, and a new type of receptacle will be provided. Once the new one comes, let's not waste the old one – clean it out and set it up to catch and store rainwater. See the attached instructions titled "Making a Rain Barrel."

August To-Do's

- Prune roses to stimulate a fall flush of blooms
- Provide water for backyard wildlife - songbirds, butterflies etc.
- Continue to deadhead crape myrtles to stimulate new flowers

Pecan Update

From the Texas Pecan Pest Management Newsletter
By Bill Ree



The pecan season is heading into the final but critical last half of the year. Overall with a 63 million pound prediction for Texas the crop still looks good, however, we are entering a critical time of year where moisture stress and insects can have still have a significant impact on the crop. There is still time to take leaf samples to check the nutrition of the tree and how you fertility program is doing.

Potential insect pests on the horizon include walnut caterpillar, black pecan aphids, pecan weevil and stink bugs.

Fall Vegetable Gardening

Autumn is my favorite time of year to plant vegetables; even though spring is the most popular time to plant a garden, fall is often as good or better for warm season crops like tomato, cucumber and squash. Plus, later in the fall, winter vegetables can be planted such as spinach, broccoli and carrots.

Many home gardeners struggle to grow productive vegetable gardens in the spring and summer. It's a challenge to grow healthy plants in west Texas! But challenging doesn't mean impossible, and sometimes the challenge is what makes it worth doing.



Depending on spring success, some gardeners give up for the summer while others try to keep spring plants alive and going through the summer. Usually the best strategy is to start over fresh in August for warm season vegetables.

It may seem counter productive to pull up mature plants and start over with new transplants, re-planting new warm season vegetables for fall production. But summer is really rough on plants, so starting with healthy new

plants will usually give higher yields for a fall harvest.

The key to getting a good harvest of warm season crops in the fall is to plant large, healthy transplants in late July or August, keep them well watered, and give a little shade if necessary so they don't wilt when first planted. Fertilize with nitrogen to get vigorous growth before cooler weather sets in.

Fall is a great season for vegetables because as the weather becomes milder, pest populations go down and there is less stress on the plants - and it's easier on the gardener too!

Then once autumn really sets in - around September to October, cool-season crops can be seeded. There are many forms of greens that can be grown such as cabbage, leaf lettuce, spinach, swiss chard and kale; and they make a very tasty addition to the dinner table. More options include broccoli, carrots, beets, radishes. Planting should be staggered, seeding a little at a time every two weeks so there can be a regular, steady harvest. Most cool season crops can be planted from September through February.

Plant Spotlight

'Powis Castle' Artemisia *Artemisia* X 'Powis Castle'

This beautiful foliage plant has silvery grey leaves and grows in a nice mounded form - it spreads out like a groundcover but is taller than most. It rarely flowers, but makes a very nice backdrop for annuals and perennials.



40 GALLON CHALLENGE

40 Gallon Challenge

Now that it's mid summer and getting hot, water is more important than ever for plants. Our water resources are a lot better off than they might have been because of that big rain in late May, but water conservation is just as important as it ever was. We need to be good stewards of what we have so we can hold on to it longer. The water restrictions in the San Angelo have been lessened, but there are still rules in place that help prevent wasting water.

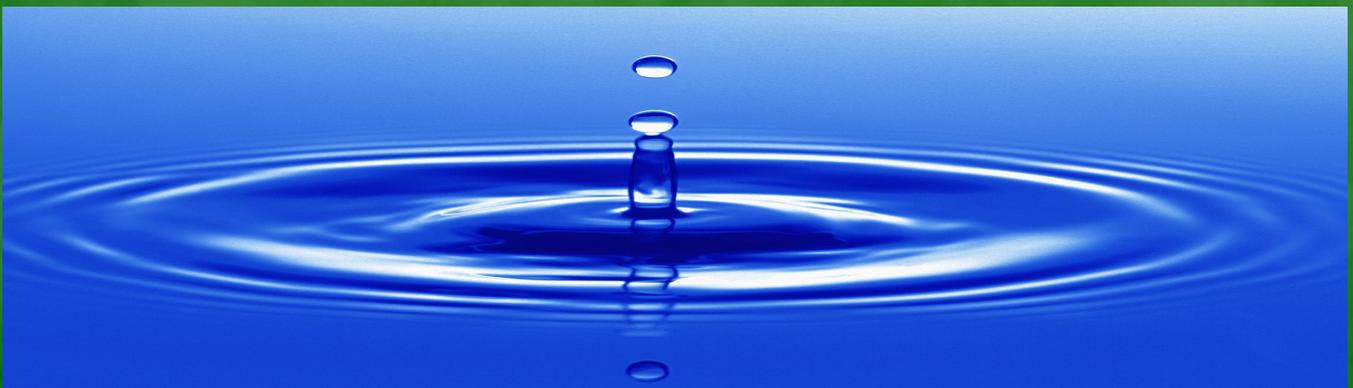
Let's all be careful with how we irrigate so we can get the plants what they need to stay healthy and still conserve. If lawns or beds have been irrigated too frequently (which would be twice a week or more) they will struggle to adapt to drought; watering deep but infrequently helps train deep roots and make plants more tolerant to hot dry weather.

Applying an inch of water one day a week will allow deep, healthy roots to develop.

The key to helping landscapes survive the drought and make it through water restrictions is slow, deep watering. Irrigate thoroughly, so that the water soaks deep into the ground. If shallow, heavy soils or slopes cause water to begin to run-off before the ground has been thoroughly soaked, use the 'soak and cycle' method. This just means to run the system until the water starts puddling or running off and stop. Wait a period of time to let the water sink in, and run it again.

And finally, water early in the morning before temperatures heat up and cause water loss to evaporation.

Take the 40 gallon challenge to get many great ideas one ways to conserve water at home, both indoors and out. Find out just how much water you can save by doing simple things like turning the water off while you brush your teeth. Visit the website 40gallonchallenge.org and make your pledge to conserve water.



Effect of Heat on Plants

Temperatures of 100 degrees or more are hard on us as well as plants. The surface of plant leaves and other tissues absorb and transfer heat, and surfaces of plant tissues in direct sunlight can be well over the recorded air temperature for the area. When air temperatures are 103 degrees, plant surfaces can be over 115 degrees. This can cause sunscalding, which damages plant leaves and stems and even tree trunks of young trees.

We are all well aware of winter hardiness limits and know that there are some plants that are too tropical to be grown here, and that will freeze and die in the winter. Actually, the USDA plant hardiness map has recently changed our hardiness zone from 7b to 8a – a little warmer than it used to be. 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.

Summer Turfgrass Chores

Summer is the season for lawn care. Those homeowners who have a lawn that survived the drought are kept busy with irrigating and mowing. Fertilization is another task that many homeowners are working on in the summer, but needs to be done with caution when it's hot and there's little rain.

Fertilization should always be done based on a soil test. A simple analysis can be done through the County Extension Office for less than \$20, and should be done once every 3 to 4 years. A test will tell you what nutrients are available to plants in the soil, and how much, if any, need to be added.

But besides a soil test, fertilization should also be done based on weather – temperature and moisture. Without adequate irrigation or rainfall, fertilization can burn grass tissue, increase weed growth, and cause other lawn problems.

Time fertilizer applications along with light rainfall, or with a thorough irrigation. Most years here in the Concho Valley, this means skip summer and wait until fall for fertilization, or at least fertilize only lightly and use slow release forms. Most summers our temperatures are too hot, and there isn't enough rain for fertilizer to be a good idea. Even irrigated lawns can be risky to fertilize, because sprinklers just can't take the place of a decent rain - and those of us in the San Angelo city limits are on irrigation restrictions.

Without adequate irrigation, avoid fertilizing in the summer time. Doing so can increase the plant's need for water even more, and damage the grass. For homes that do irrigate regularly, and want to fertilize be sure to use a slow release form of nitrogen.

Classes & Programs

August 2014

Saturday August 2, 9am

Saturday Seminar - Xeriscaping for West Texas

Instructor: Steve Lewis, owner - Native Ornamentals,

Location: Water Education Center

417 S. Oakes

Cost: \$10

Learn exactly what the term 'xeriscaping' means when it comes to planning and making your landscape use less water.



Friday August 15, 12pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Wildflowers

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Learn how and when to plant wildflowers, and find out what the best ones for our area are.

Save the Date

Saturday, September 13th

Fall Symposium

Join us for this fun program with top-notch speakers from around the state! (See attached flyer for details)



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



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