

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

August 2016

Low Maintenance Landscaping

Some homeowners are willing to spend more time working in the yard than others, but no one wants to intentionally make the yard difficult to maintain, even those who prefer a more extensive landscape - and shortcuts are always welcome. It requires some planning ahead and some extra work up front to make a landscape as low-maintenance as possible, but utilizing good horticultural practices is worth it and can go a long way to making a yard easier to keep neat and healthy.

When creating new planting beds, always start with a clean slate and remove all the grass and/or weeds. Glyphosate can be very useful in clearing out vegetation to create a new garden plot or bed, but for those that don't want to use chemicals, soil solarization can help also. To solarize the soil, just till up the area and remove as much vegetation as possible, then put down some clear plastic sheeting and use rocks or soil to keep the edges down tight. Leave the plastic for a few months during the summer and the heat will kill most everything underneath.

The next important step is plant selection. There are many beautiful plants that can thrive here in west Texas, but there are also plenty that can't handle our alkaline soil or climate. So plan ahead and choose the best plants - visit the website <http://earth-kind.tamu.edu> and use the Earth-Kind plant selector for some ideas of adapted plants. Choosing plants that don't like the local conditions is a major cause for extra labor in the landscape.

After planting, install drip irrigation in the beds. Drip irrigation is healthier for plants than sprinklers, and is more water efficient. Sprinklers can be adapted to drip tubing (just make sure the bed is on a separate zone), or drip tubing can be connect to a water faucet or hose.

Be generous with the use of mulch. While it's possible to over-do it and apply mulch too deeply, more often than not it's not applied deep enough. A three to four-inch deep layer of mulch is ideal for most plantings, and will greatly reduce the amount of weeds that come up. Replenishing mulch once a year is better than fighting weeds all year long.

Remember that several small beds are harder to maintain and mow around, so design the beds to be large sweeping curves and include tree trunks when possible. This helps reduce the amount of string trimming that has to be done.

August To-Do's

- Lightly prune shrub roses to stimulate a fall flush of blooms
- Provide water for backyard wildlife - songbirds, butterflies etc.
- Continue to deadhead perennials and annuals to stimulate new flowers

Pecan Update



State Pecan Show Results

Congratulations to Larry & Sharon Schwertner from Runnels County, for winning the first place ribbon for the Burkett variety at the state pecan show!

Fall Pecan Care

The pecan crop around the Concho Valley is looking pretty good, many trees have a good load of pecans on them. Homeowners have been calling in lately with questions and concerns about pecans and leaves falling from their landscape trees, this is called August Drop and it's a physiological response to stress.

Trees that are overloaded with pecans, or have not been well cared for can abort young nutlets in an effort to be able to bring others nuts to maturity.

There are also cases of insect damage - both the pecan nut casebearer and pecan weevil can damage nuts, and the walnut caterpillar can damage leaves. Some trees have had infestations of walnut caterpillars this year so keep an eye out for defoliation. They don't kill trees, but the effort of having to put new leaves out can stress the tree and reduce pecan quality.

For nut pests, it's too late to spray for casebearers, but it's just about the right time to spray for the other common pecan pest - weevils. Mid-August is when most pecans are changing from the water stage to dough stage, and are susceptible to the weevil. Cut open a few nutlets to track



the progress, to determine the best time to spray. Carbaryl is an insecticide option to use for control.

Apply a nitrogen fertilizer now to trees with a good crop, at the rate of 1 pound nitrogen per inch of trunk diameter, but don't go over 10 pounds of fertilizer per thousand square foot in the lawn or it could burn the grass.

Now is the time that pecans need water the most, so irrigate three inches every two weeks at the drip line. Watering the lawn is not enough for a loaded pecan tree to produce good pecans.

Plant Spotlight

Fireworks gomphrena

Gomphrena globosa "Fireworks"

Gomphrena is a great summer plant that thrives in heat, and the 'Fireworks' variety is a showstopper for the landscape! It is also a great cut flower for arrangements.



Building a Rain Barrel

We had a lot of rain in the beginning of the year, which was great, but it's been pretty hot and dry so far this summer. Water conservation is always important, and one way to help contribute to the cause is to install a rain barrel.

Rainwater harvesting is a wonderful way to get good quality water for use in the landscape, and whether it's an extensive system with large tanks, or a small rain barrel, every drop counts.

Rain barrels can often be purchased at local stores, with different styles ranging from basic to decorative and stylish - but it's also possible to make one out of a recycled plastic barrel or a new large trash can.

Is using a recycled container like a 55 gallon plastic barrel, only use on that has never contained a herbicide or caustic chemical.

It also needs to be opaque and not allow light through, if it's white it needs to be painted so algae doesn't grow inside.

Whether it's a barrel or a trash can, the steps to convert are similar. A large hole needs to be cut into the top to allow the water to come into the rain barrel, and a screen or filter must be added to keep mosquitos out. Then a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch hole should be drilled near the bottom so that a faucet can be screwed in. Also add an overflow hole at the top.

Then place the barrel under a gutter downspout, or if there are no gutters, place it in an area where a lot of water comes off the roof – such as an inside corner where the eaves meet.

For full instructions, Contact the Extension Office at 325-659-6528 or visit the website: rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu.



Weed Control

Weed growth always matches rainfall, or lack thereof. We had an incredible spring with lots of rain, and the massive weed growth reflected that. Now that it has gotten hot, and isn't raining so much, weeds will slow down a bit – but no matter the weather, there is always something that will come up.

During the dry times, there are some weeds that are better able to take advantage of the situation and pop up when others can't. Mesquite trees are one example, and often pop up in landscapes and gardens in the summer.

Mesquite weeds can be controlled using a mixture of the herbicides Reclaim and Remedy, when doing a leaf spray, or using Remedy mixed in diesel fuel when doing a stem spray. It may take many repeat sprayings to get full control.

For more details on how to control mesquite, contact the extension office at 325-659-6528 for a pamphlet with instructions.

We often have a rainy fall, which would be wonderful, so be sure to apply pre-emergent herbicide to the lawn around late September to prevent winter weeds from taking over later.

Pre-emergent herbicide is weed-control that kills germinating seedlings. It doesn't prevent seeds from germinating, but kills them when they do. So the weeds seeds are still there, waiting in the soil for some rain to come so they can germinate. So remember that pre-emergent does not kill existing weeds, it only prevents some from coming up.

Some examples of good pre-emergent products would be pendimethalin (trade name Pendulum or Pre-M) or something like XL-2G. Just use a fertilizer spreader to apply a layer evenly over the lawn.

There are many different weeds that can get into landscapes and gardens, for help identifying and controlling problematic infestations, contact the local Extension Office.

Spring Bulbs

Spring is probably the last thing on the mind of most gardeners right now. But when spring does come, it's always wonderful to have beautiful colorful bulbs popping up after a dreary winter. And in order to have the showy spring blooms, they must be planted in the fall or early winter. Planting spring bulbs in warm soil causes them to rot, so don't plant too early. Garden centers and nurseries usually start selling them as early as August or September, so go ahead and buy bulbs when they're fresh and selection is good and just hold on to them until it's time to plant.

In Texas, some bulbs are treated as annuals because we don't get the deep freezing winters required to set new blooms. If left a second season, some like tulips would just produce foliage but no flowers.



Daffodils are the most dependable bloomers and require no pre-chilling or special treatments. Tulips and hyacinths are also good choices as well and provide nice flowers, but should be refrigerated for 60 days prior to planting. Most daffodils may come back year after year and become naturalized, but tulips and hyacinths are best discarded after they bloom.

If you do purchase bulbs early, it is best to store them in the refrigerator whether they need chilling or not, to preserve freshness. Don't seal them up in airtight bags, but in a brown paper bag. Bulbs cannot be stored in a refrigerator that holds fruits or vegetables, as they produce a gas that prevents the bulbs from flowering.

Once the soil is cool, under 55 degrees, you can plant the bulbs. It takes a long time to see the results, but it's well worth it in the spring.

Plant Roses in the Fall

Next month will be the beginning of fall, a great time of year to plant roses. Shrub roses are the most common kind of rose, and really have a nice impact in the yard, but don't forget about the way climbing roses can add interest and beauty to a landscape. When planting a rose, be sure to allow plenty of room to grow, because they stay healthier with air flow and full sun.

There are many ways a climbing rose can improve a landscape by growing over an ugly fence or structure, or an attractive structure can be built especially to showcase a climbing rose.

Don't let a plain chain link or barbed wire fence detract from a nice landscape. They can be covered with a beautiful blooming rose, and then can be a focal point in the yard. Ornamental fences can also be accented with climbers.

Other structures that can support and showcase a climbing rose include arbors, pillars, tripods, pergolas and trellises. Just be aware that structures need to be sturdy and solid for a climbing rose – the plants get very large and heavy, and can pull down flimsy trellises.

Arbors are a great way to connect one part of the landscape to another, and roses can be planted on each side so they meet at the top. An arbor covered all the way up the sides and over the top can make a gorgeous addition to a yard.

Roses can also be grown around pillars, but require more training than other structures. Roses covering a large pillar on a porch or a cedar post in a flower bed can create a dramatic effect. But the canes will have to be consistently trained as they grow around the post so that they will stay in place.



Classes & Programs

August 2016

Friday, August 19, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Rainwater Harvesting

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

No matter what the weather is doing, we always seem to need more water. Learn how to capture and store rainwater when it comes, to use when it's dry.



Saturday, August 20, 9am

Saturday Seminar - Soil Amendments - Don't Treat Your Soil Like Dirt!

Location: 2750 Ben Ficklin Rd

Cost: \$25

Instructors - Tommy Olive, Linda Rowe and Susan Stanfield

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection. Call to preregister 325-656-3104;

Learn about improving soil, creating compost and how to start a worm farm



Coming soon:

Saturday, September 10, 8:00am to 3:15pm

Fall Landscaping Symposium

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

Cost: \$30 early bird registration, by August 22

Instructors: Mike Shoup, Jerry Parsons, Steven Chamblee

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners, join us for this wonderful full day of educational presentations from top-notch speakers! **Pre-registration required, visit txmg.org/conchovalley**

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



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