

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

September 2015

Build Good Soil

There are only a lucky few in the Concho Valley that have really good soil for growing. Most of us have either average or very poor caliche soil. Three options for this type of soil are 1 - limit plant selection, 2 - build raised beds, or 3 - improve the soil.

Improving soil is not as hard as many think. The most important thing is to incorporate lots of organic matter. Now is a good time to do this, when doing any fall planting.

Basic compost is a great source of organic matter, and should be applied 3 inches deep and tilled in. It will really improve the soil structure, no matter what kind you have.

An easy to do soil test through the Texas A&M Soil testing lab will be a big help in managing soil. It will tell you exactly what fertilizer amounts you will need and will help prevent any under or over fertilizing. Often, if adequate amounts of compost or other organic matter have been added, no fertilizer will be needed. Visit the website soiltesting.tamu.edu for info on how to do a test.

Another important part of building good soil is the regular use of organic, or plant based, mulch. Mulch is a very basic, simple method that does a lot of good for plants, soil, and water conservation.

Over time, proper use of mulch creates better, healthier soil and plant growth. Mulch will conserve moisture by preventing evaporation, it moderates soil temperature, prevents erosion, and prevents weed growth.

Over time, mulch will break down and add organic matter to the soil. If you keep mulch replenished every year, there will be less need for fertilizers. Mulch and compost cannot be considered fertilizers themselves, but as they improve soils they definitely increase the nutrient levels of soil.

So the key to creating good quality soil, and therefore have healthier plants, is to “compost once, mulch forever.” Any time new plants are installed, add three inches of compost and till in, and add three inches of mulch after planting. Then keep the mulch replenished to three inches deep every year as it breaks down.

September To-Do's

- Purchase bulbs while selection is good, but wait until November to plant
- Plant wildflower seeds
- Divide spring blooming perennials such as iris and daylily
- Adjust irrigation as temperatures cool down

Pecan Update

From the Texas Pecan Pest Management
Newsletter by Bill Ree



Pecan Weevil: With dry conditions, drought delayed emergence of adults will probably be occurring. The use of adult emergence traps can detect this delayed emergence which in turn will alert producers that a treatment is needed.

Adult females will lay eggs in pecans up to shuck split so traps should be monitored up to shuck split of the latest maturing varieties. Carbaryl is still a product of choice but control can also be achieved with bifenthrin.

Don't Forget to Buy Spring Bulbs

Nothing says spring like beautiful bulbs such as tulips, hyacinths and daffodils. But in order to have these showy spring blooms, you have to plan ahead. Spring bulbs are planted from November through January, but garden centers and nurseries usually start selling them as early as August or September. Don't let this fool you into planting them too early.

This doesn't mean you can't buy them early though, when there is good selection. Just hold on to them and plant when it's cool enough. It's good to buy bulbs as soon as they come in, that way you get the freshest, best assortment to choose from. Buy bulbs that are firm and have no blemishes. Avoid dried up or moldy bulbs.

In Texas, bulbs have to be treated as annuals because we don't get the deep freezing winters required to set new blooms. If left a second season, most 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 must be refrigerated for 60 days prior to

planting. Some 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, you can 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. But bulbs shouldn't be stored in a refrigerator that also 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 Spotlight

American Beautyberry
Callicarpa americana

Beautiful large perennial with arching branches that are full of bright purple berries in late summer and early fall. Works well as an understory plant and prefers part shade.





Planting Garlic

It's almost time to plant garlic! It's very easy to grow, so if you want to plant some of your own fresh, flavorful garlic it can be started in late fall when soil temperatures cool down. If planted in the fall, it should be ready to harvest by spring.

To grow garlic, purchase some cloves to get started. Each small clove will grow into a full sized plant. For best results, buy pre-chilled cloves or refrigerate them below 40°F for 6-8 weeks before planting.

Garlic does best in well-drained soil, so plant in well-prepared beds with compost or other organic matter. It also grows very well in containers or raised beds. Plant in full sun to get the best production.

The garlic will be ready to harvest when the flower cluster starts to dry out and deteriorates, and the leaves begin to turn yellow.

In order to keep your garlic fresh and useable, dry it out thoroughly after harvesting. Otherwise it will start to rot before you get to use it. For storage, hang it up in a well-ventilated area and don't expose it to extremely high or low temperatures. Room temperature is best, around 75 degrees. If stored properly, garlic can last 3 to 4 months.

Sometimes the garlic doesn't grow into a full bulb the first year, and instead forms what is called a 'garlic onion.' This happens from planting an immature garlic clove, so just be sure to use fully mature cloves. The garlic onion will look just like an onion but have garlic flavor. It can be re-planted and will mature into a full garlic bulb the second year.

Growing Onions from Seed

Onions are commonly planted as transplants, called 'onion sets' but can also be started by seed. Transplants are planted in winter, but seeds should be planted in the fall. They are biennials, so if done by seed they take two years to produce a good bulb.

Transplants are good if you want to get an onion in one season instead of waiting a long time. Seeds are a little cheaper and are good if you like to use green onions for cooking.

When seeding, plant in well-drained soil and only cover very lightly. Onion seeds are small and do not need to go deep into the ground. If planted thickly, they can be pulled throughout the season to be used as green onions on salads and baked potatoes.

But for large onions, they need to be planted with wider spacing and/or thinned out at least 3 inches apart. If left too close, there is not enough room for the bulb to grow large. The plants must be completely thinned to the proper spacing by February so there is enough time for the bulb to mature and expand into a large, fully grown onion.

Onions started by seed must be started no later than the end of October to get the best result and the healthiest plants.

Another key to good onion production is phosphorus fertilizer. Phosphorus is not usually required for most landscaping and gardening, but is needed for onions. Apply in a banding pattern about 2 or 3 inches underneath the seeds at planting.



Dealing with Aphid Honeydew

I always get lots of questions about how to deal the sap that drips down from pecan, oak and other types of trees. Actually, the sticky stuff is not sap straight from the tree. It's called honeydew, and it's a sugary substance secreted by insects as they feed on plants—usually aphids when it's coming from shade trees.

Aphids are a cooler season insect, they do cause problems in the summer but are more abundant in the spring and fall. They are pretty small so you might not notice them right away, but if you look close they are oval shaped and can be black, yellow, red, orange or green. They are really invasive and can come in such large numbers that another common name for them is plant lice.

Lady bugs love to eat aphids and can eat quite a bit. Some homeowners purchase and release ladybugs in order to control the pests, and sometimes that method can help a lot.



Usually, aphids do not kill or severely harm a tree. You can just let them run their course and let natural predators take care of them. But if you are having problems with the sticky honeydew and want to get rid of the aphids, there are some different options.

First is to use a hose-end sprayer to apply a chemical insecticide such as malathion. For pecan trees, there is a 3 day pre harvest interval, that just means to wait three days between applying the chemical and harvesting the nuts.

But if you have large trees, spraying will be hard or not an option at all. Another way is a chemical called Imidacloprid. It's a systemic product that you apply to the ground around the drip line and water in. Some examples include Merit, and Bayer Advanced tree and shrub insect control.



Trees with Fall Color

While Texas isn't particularly known for having major autumn fall colors in tree leaves, there are a few tree options for us that will almost always provide a good display.

One reason Texas doesn't always have a fall color change is the weather. The tree species is not the only determining factor in color change, but temperature and moisture also have a big effect. Sometimes we seem to have a long drawn out summer and suddenly in November or even December we go straight to winter. But if we actually have a nice long autumn, with cycles of cool and warm days during September and October, there is a better chance for pretty color changes.

Here are some of the more dependable trees to try in your landscape if you are interested in adding fall color: the first one is Chinese pistache.



Chinese pistache is a very tough, drought tolerant tree that is a good choice for our climate. It also has a moderately fast growth rate. Chinese pistache trees have different fall colors, so

it's best to buy in the fall so you can pick – they range from crimson red, to orange, to yellow.

The cedar elm is an excellent shade tree for the area, and has nice yellow fall leaves.

The lacey oak is a small, tough tree that is easy to grow and puts on a yellow display in the fall.

Like the name implies, the Texas red oak usually has good red fall color and is another good shade tree option for the area.

The chinquapin oak is another type of oak that is an excellent choice to plant around here as it is drought tolerant and tough, and will change to yellow leaves in the autumn.

Classes & Programs

September 2015

Saturday, September 12, 8:30am

Fall Landscaping Symposium

Location: Stephens Central Library, San Angelo

Pre-reservation required

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! If you signed up early, don't forget to mark your calendar. If you haven't signed up yet, call the office to see if space is still available—the event is nearly sold out! Call 325-659-6528

Tuesday, September 15, 6pm

Backyard Basics Seminar Series - Food Preservation

Location: 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67, San Angelo

Cost: \$20

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 .

Friday, September 18, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Plant Propagation

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Learn how to grow your own plants from seeds and cuttings! A good way to save money and fill your garden with great plants.

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



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