

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

July 2016

## Water Smart Yard of the Month

Guess what? A water-conserving landscape can be beautiful! That's the message that the Concho Valley Master Gardeners and the Tom Green County Extension Office want to spread. They have created an award system for residents of San Angelo to showcase beautiful landscapes that utilize water conserving practices, called the "Water Smart Landscape of the Month." Through the months of April to September, one yard will be showcased by displaying a sign in the yard as well as being promoted on the Master Gardener's Website, [txmg.org/conchovalley](http://txmg.org/conchovalley). Each monthly winner will also receive a \$50 gift card to the local nursery of their choice.



Check out the website to see the June winner, the home of Gary and Doris Campbell, on Muirfield Avenue in San Angelo. This landscape is a stunning example of a xeriscape that utilizes over 80 species of plants to add lush greenery and color that uses little to no water. To nomi-

nate your yard or the landscape of a friend or neighbor, visit the website [txmg.org/conchovalley](http://txmg.org/conchovalley) or call the Extension office at 325-659-6528

Even though it was the rainiest spring on record for San Angelo, and all our water resources received a good boost, water conservation is still important - it always will be. We'll have more water available for a while, but as we all know, west Texas weather is very changeable and at some point will dry up again.

Making attempts to conserve water outside in the landscape can make a big difference overall in the preservation of our reservoirs and lakes because in the summer time, landscape irrigation is a huge portion of the total water used in cities. There are many different ways to be efficient with water use in the yard, all while still having a beautiful, functional landscape – including rainwater harvesting, good plant selection, drip irrigation and mulch, and efficient irrigation systems.



## 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



From the Texas Pecan Pest Management Newsletter, Bill Ree:

Hickory shuckworm: During this time of year there can be some drop due to shuckworm. The drop can be identified by the white stain on the shuck (not to be confused with dried up spittle bug spittle).

For more info, visit [www.texasinsects.org/tree-crops.html](http://www.texasinsects.org/tree-crops.html)

## Summer Vegetable Gardening

We've been blessed with two good years in a row for gardening - the spring rains have given everything a chance to grow vigorously before the stressful hot summer sets in. Even when there's good weather in the spring, vegetable gardening can still be challenging in west Texas, so here are some tips for keeping the garden productive.



First, keep an eye out for pests. Squash bugs, spider mites, tomato horn worms and other pesky insects can stress and damage plants enough to reduce production or even kill the plant. Some insects are beneficial, so don't overdo it with broad spectrum insecticides - properly identify the insect, determine whether it's a pest, and how to safely control it. For help in identifying pests, contact the Extension Office. If birds are eating the produce before it can be harvested, try covering with some bird netting available at garden centers.

Water is another important consideration; steady, regular irrigation is key to keeping plants healthy and getting the highest quality produce. Uneven watering can cause plant stress and deformed fruit. Drip irrigation is the best method of watering, since it's healthiest for the plants and also the most water-efficient. The generous use of mulch also helps with water conservation, keeping the soil cool and moist longer and preventing water loss due to evaporation. A three to four inch deep layer of mulch also helps keep out a lot of weeds!

Keep crop rotation in mind for the summer garden. Some crops, like tomatoes, do best in the spring when it's cooler and production can decline in the summer heat. If spring garden plants start to fade and stop producing, try replacing them with a heat tolerant crop like okra. In late July or early August, tomatoes can be re-planted for a fall crop. It will be challenging for a little while to get the transplants established in the heat, but once September comes they will start thriving and can produce another good crop before the first fall frost in November.

## Plant Spotlight

### Mexican Oregano

#### *Poliomintha longiflora*

A must-have for every west Texas landscape! This beauty is colorful and beautiful, as well as tough and hardy. Needs plenty of room, because it does get quite large.



## Establishing Turf

What a great year this has been. The rain was heavenly and it didn't get hot as early as usual. Last spring was good too, so hopefully there aren't as many struggling lawns as there were a few years ago when we had dryer weather for several years. But even with better weather, lawns can still be challenging to keep healthy.

So since the weather is cooperating so far, this is a good year to replace dead lawns with new grass, or fill in bare spots. 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 you 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 me 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.



## Choosing Mulch

One of the most important things to do for the landscape and garden to help plants survive heat and drought is the application of mulch.

Mulch just means a layer of material covering the soil surface. It can be organic, such as shredded bark, wood chips, grass clippings, fallen leaves, and so on. Inorganic mulch would consist of things like rocks, shredded rubber, or plastic.

In most situations, vegetable gardening included, I recommend an organic mulch. Organic mulch will break down over time, and while this sounds like a bad thing because you have to keep replacing it, it's actually a good thing.

As mulch breaks down, it decomposes into the soil and provides the same benefit that compost does, only slower. It loosens it up, adds nutrients, and improves the structure. So even though you have to replenish mulch every year, it's doing a lot of good for the soil.

To choose a good mulch, it will be a trade off for how much you want to improve the soil, and how much you want it to stay put. Mulches that break down slowly will be slower to provide benefits to the soil and plants. Mulch that breaks down quickly will provide faster benefits, but will have to be replaced more often.

Mulch that is a finer, smaller texture will break down faster. Large texture mulch will decompose slowly. Also, cedar mulch is slower to break down, and shredded hardwood is quicker.

When choosing mulch, also take into consideration the color and how it looks. One more benefit of using mulch is that it looks good in the landscape. Adding mulch to planting beds will bring them together and make the yard look nicer. So choose a mulch that incorporates well into the look and design of the landscape.

## Summer Landscape Pests

Rain is a blessed, wonderful thing – but even though it refreshes our landscapes and makes gardening more successful, it also brings challenges like weeds. It's lovely to see everything staying so green, even into summer, but some lawns and landscapes are struggling with weed infestations. An abundance of rain can also cause desert plants to struggle; some like pride of Barbados, that like it hot and dry, might show stress while the rain keeps coming. But it's hot and dry more often than it's wet here in the Concho Valley, so they should recover soon enough, and we should continue to keep drought tolerance in mind when installing new plantings.

For lawns, the best defense against weeds is a healthy, dense lawn. That has been difficult in recent years and many lawns have been stressed and thinned out, but now is a great year to get the lawn back into shape with frequent mowing, proper fertilization etc. To control existing weeds, post emergent herbicides such as 2,4-d broadleaf weedkiller can be helpful in bermudagrass lawns, glyphosate (trade name Roundup) can be used in areas such as bed edges and fence lines (it is non selective and kills whatever it touches, so don't use on desirable plants). For more help, visit <https://aggieturf.tamu.edu/> or contact the Extension Office.

Other issues to keep an eye out for in the summer include diseases and insects. Some of the common insect pests seen this time of year include aphids, spider mites, flea beetles, tomato horn worms and other pest caterpillars, squash bugs and fire ants. Not all insects are pests, so be sure to correctly identify before attempting to control. The best method of control can vary greatly from species to species, and successful control depends on identification. For example – spider mites are commonly found on tomatoes in the vegetable garden, and many gardeners use carbaryl (trade name Sevin) for insect control – but that product usually makes spider mites worse. A better approach for spider mites would be to spray soapy water on the undersides of the leaves. Contact the Extension Office for help identifying, and proper control strategies.

## Collecting 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 half-way 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.

# Classes & Programs

July 2016

Saturday, July 9, 9am

## Saturday Seminar - Fall Vegetable Gardening, Heirloom Vegetables and Antique Roses

Location: 2750 Ben Ficklin Rd

Cost: \$25

Instructor: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection. Call to preregister 325-656-3104; Participants will be able to participate in a rose propagation activity and will receive heirloom vegetable seeds!



Tuesday, July 12, 6:30pm

## Fall Vegetable Gardening Program

Location: 4-H Center, 3168 N US Highway 67 (Next to animal shelter)

Cost: free

Instructor: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners, join us for this 1-hour program that covers the basics of fall vegetable gardening.

Friday, July 15, 12:00pm

## Lunch N Learn Class - Drought Tolerant Landscaping

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

It has been a wonderfully rainy year, but the weather is always up and down so take advantage of the good growing conditions this year to plant a landscape that can handle stressful conditions that will come later.

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



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