

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

January 2018

## Insect Control

Now through late winter is an appropriate time of year to apply an insect control product called dormant oil. Dormant oil is just a type of horticultural oil that is a thicker, heavier formulation and should only be applied when plants are dormant. Horticultural oils are liquid products that can be either plant based (such as neem, soybean, etc) or petroleum based and are applied as sprays to control many plant pests. Horticulture oils are good because they are safe to use, are very effective, and have a limited effect on beneficial insects.

Horticultural oil is good for control of aphids, scale and mites on trees and shrubs. There are also many flowers and vegetables that it can help. Just don't use oils on plants that have been under water stress, because applying a horticultural oil to a drought stressed plant can cause injury. Oils can control insects by blocking up the airways that the insects breathe through (called spiracles), so they suffocate. Horticultural oils require thorough coverage, and direct contact with the pest so apply properly for full benefit.

Dormant oils are named as such because they are only to be applied in the dormant season. This is because if applied in the warm season, it can scorch, or essentially 'cook' the plant due to it being a heavier oil. Dormant oils are especially useful in controlling scale and mite insects, which are otherwise difficult to control. They also help control any other insects that are overwintering on the plant, waiting to re-emerge in the spring.

Scale insects are small pests that are found on trunks, stems, and sometimes foliage of plants. There are different types of scale, one type called armored scale will secrete a waxy substance that covers and protects them while they feed on the plant. They look like little scabs, or spots on the plant and come in colors ranging from red, orange, black, and yellow. They are hard to control because pesticides don't penetrate their protective covering. The adults never move, once they latch on they're there for good. Horticultural oils can control them very effectively if applied correctly, according to label directions.

Even though it's early winter and dormant oil is less likely to scorch plants, it is best applied on cooler, cloudy days, but not when below freezing. During the warmer growing season, horticultural oil that is a lighter, more refined formulation that is also called 'summer oil' can be used but is still best applied when under 90 degrees, and when cloudy and overcast.

## January To-Do's

- Plant bare root fruit trees
- Prune shade trees if needed
- Need to move a plant in the yard? Now is the time - while dormant. Works best if the plant is young and small
- Order seeds from catalogs and online for spring
- Continue staggered planting of cool season vegetable crops such as lettuce, cabbage, and spinach

## Pecan Update



Congratulations to these local growers for their placings in the Regional Pecan Show!

Neil & Betty Conner—1st place Kiowa  
ElDorado Orchards—1st place Wichita,  
1st place Nacono  
Chester McCown—1st place SCNative,  
1st place Waco  
Jeanette Montgomery—1st place Stuart  
Bettie Olsak—1st place Western,  
1st place Desirable  
3rd place Cheyenne  
3rd place Wichita

## Master Gardener Class

If you're interested in landscaping or gardening and would like to learn more skills, consider taking the Master Gardener training course that will be offered starting in February. Whether you have a lot of experience or are a beginner, it's a good class to take and is also the first step to joining the Concho Valley Master Gardeners.

The master gardener organization is a program that brings together people in the community that have an interest in gardening and horticulture. They sign up for the training class that gives extensive education in horticulture. After receiving training, the individuals share their knowledge with others by helping out with educational programs and events.

Some of the projects the Concho Valley Master Gardeners work on include an annual plant sale, rainwater harvesting training and rain barrel workshops, habitat for humanity landscapes, maintaining demonstration gardens, and more.

Being a master gardener does involve work, but it can be really rewarding. It's also a lot of fun - you get to work with other gardeners and participate in new learning experiences. Taking the course is

just the first step - to complete certification, volunteer hours are required throughout the following year.

We're always looking for new members, so if you think you might be interested in the master gardener program and want to take the master gardener class, the next class will start in February. It will be held on Tuesdays and lasts 16 weeks, starting February 13. Contact the Extension Office for more info: 325-659-6528



## Plant Spotlight

### Onions

*Allium cepa*

January is the time of year to plant onion transplants, for the Concho Valley go with short-day varieties.

For more info on growing, visit:

<https://agriflifeextension.tamu.edu/browse/featured-solutions/gardening-landscaping/onions/>



## Soil Management

One landscape or garden job you can take care of this time of year is soil improvement. Preparing soil is an essential step for any planting beds such as vegetable gardens, flower beds, shrub beds and so on. It's something that often gets overlooked when planting new beds, but it's essential to have healthy plants. Mild weather days through the winter are perfect for working on improving soil in the yard and garden.

Creating good garden soil is not complicated, but it can take some labor. The main step is incorporating organic matter. A good finished compost is, as gardeners say, the new black gold because it has a huge impact on the soil and plants. Compost can be free if you make your own, or it can cost some money. But it's worth it and has an instant effect when tilled into existing soil.

Compost can be anything from yard and kitchen scraps that you make yourself, or you can buy composted manure, cotton bur hulls, leaves, or local materials purchased from a garden center.

Apply 3 inches of compost on top of the existing soil, then till it in. Try to get it in 8 to 10 inches deep. Organic matter is a very valuable part of a good soil. Microorganisms in soil break it down into nutrients that plants use, which will reduce the amount of fertilizer you have to apply. Organic matter also improves the water holding capacity of soil, and also aeration.

Organic matter should be applied to any type of soil, but if you have heavy, sticky clay soil there is one more step - the addition of expanded shale. Expanded shale is a mineral that is heat treated until it expands, and the result is a very light, small rock full of air space. Apply 3 inches in addition to the compost, and till it all in together. This will really open up the heavy soil and keep it aerated and easier to work.



## Plants and Cold Weather

Now that winter is here, our warm season perennials, annuals and vegetables are done for the year. It's not feasible to try and keep warm season plants going by covering or protecting them from freezes all winter long, that's better left for unexpected late spring or early fall frosts. But there are some things you can do to protect perennial roots and other plants that may need a little extra help surviving winter. And in some special cases, covering tender plants is still necessary - for instance, I am trying some fall planted strawberries that need to be protected from freezes. Fall planting gives them earlier, better fruit production in the spring but they are not completely cold hardy.

The most important winter protection for most types of plants is mulch. Replenish mulch in all beds to at least 3 inches, but no more than 4 inches. One exception might be to go a little deeper with mulch just over the rooting area of any plant that is only marginally hardy here, like pride of Barbados.

The next tip is to keep watering, but only as needed. Plants use less water in the cold season, but still need some. Drought will make plants more prone to winter injury. Water about every 3 to 4 weeks if we go that long without rain.



For those plants like my strawberries that need full winter protection, try covering them up - mine are planted in a bed with a

hoop house frame that I can put plastic over when it freezes.

For palm trees, low temperatures can be deadly. Covering the trunk with burlap only provides minimal protection, and won't solve the problem of prolonged deep freezes. The best bet is planting palms in a protected area, next to the home so they don't get as cold. But another option is to wrap the trunk with Christmas lights and turn them on during a deep freeze. The warmth that the lights make may be just enough to prevent the trunk from freezing.

## Plant Bare Root Fruit Trees

For anyone interested in trying a new fruit tree in the landscape or garden, January through mid-February is a good time of year to plant bare-root fruit trees. Healthy, well-rooted container grown trees can be planted any time of year, including now, but bare root trees can only be planted in their dormant season.

The advantage of bare root trees is a lower price – they weigh less without soil and can be shipped at a cheaper rate, making them a more economical option. Bare root fruit trees will be available at local nurseries and through catalog or mail order during the winter, but be wary of clearance sales in the spring – after winter is over, bare root is not a good option any longer.

Choose fruit that is known to work, such as peaches, plums, apricots, apples, pears, pomegranates, and persimmons. Beyond crop selection, variety selection is also important. There are many different varieties of each of these fruits, and they can have very different requirements.

Chilling hours is one major aspect to consider. Most fruit trees have very specific requirements for how long they need to spend below 45 degrees, and when that requirement is met the tree blooms. The Concho Valley receives an average of about 800-900 chilling hours per winter, but warm temperatures cancel out some of those; recommended varieties for the area generally need between 600 and 800.

After purchasing bare root trees, plant as soon as possible to avoid damage to roots due to drying, and soak in a bucket of water right before planting. After digging the hole and placing the tree, carefully back-fill with soil that came from the hole (no amendments are needed) and use a water hose to settle any air pockets. Keep the area around the newly planted tree weed free, as weeds and grass can create a lot of competition for water and nutrients. Mulch can help a lot with reducing weeds.

For more information on how to successfully grow fruit trees in Texas, visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/> for crop-specific growing guides.



*Red Baron Peach tree in bloom*

Some of the recommended varieties for the Concho Valley include:

Apple: Fuji, Gala, Red Delicious

Pear: Orient, Moonglow, Kieffer, LeConte

Peach: Ranger, Redglobe, Belle of Georgia

Apricot: Harcot, Golden Amber, Harval

Plum: Morris, Ozark Premier, Methley

Pomegranate: Sumbar, Russian 18, Salavatski, Surh Anor

For a more comprehensive list, visit <http://counties.agrilife.org/tomgreen/files/2011/09/Fruit-Varieties-List.pdf>



# Upcoming Events

January 2018

Friday, January 12, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Fruit Trees**

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard, San Angelo

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Winter is a great time of year to plant fruit trees, come learn about the best planting and maintenance techniques, and the best varieties for the Concho Valley.

Thursday, January 18, 2:00pm-5:00pm

## **Gardening Seminar—Composting**

Location: Santa Fe Crossing Senior Center, 702 S. Chadbourne, San Angelo

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Linda Rowe and Susan Stanfield, Master Gardeners

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about composting, including vermicomposting (earthworms). See a demonstration on how to assemble a small worm farm!

Call to register: 325-656-3104

*Coming Soon:*

## **Master Gardener Training Course**

Join the Master Gardeners! Cost: \$185, includes lunches and textbook. Classes will be Tuesdays from 12pm to 3pm, February 13 through May 22. For more info, call 325-659-6528.

## **Earth-Kind Landscape School**

Save the date! This four evening course will cover tree care, lawn care, and plant selection specifically for the Concho Valley, as well as landscape design principles. Attendees will learn skills needed to create a beautiful landscape that can thrive in west Texas. More details to follow, but call 325-659-6528 to be put on a mailing list for when info is available. March 19, 20, 26, & 27 2017.

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



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