

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

May 2018

Beautiful Container Plants

It's spring and I'm excited to start planting flowers and vegetables, and to get the landscape spruced up with some color. One way to add beauty to the landscape is with a colorful planter, and one approach to make a showy, impressive container is the 'thriller, filler and spiller' technique.

A huge planter is not necessary to make a colorful impact, but it does need to be large enough to hold several types of plants. The thriller is the first step, and it's one plant that is an attention getter. It should be very structural and will be the tallest plant; some options might include a kangaroo paw, an agave, or a purple fountain grass. The thriller is the main attraction and there should be just one to catch the eye.

Then select a filler plant, this will be something that has smaller leaves and a more mounding form. Some examples include begonia, petunia, Mexican heather, pentas, or similar annual flowers. Then don't forget the spiller, a trailing plant to cascade beautifully down the pot. Spillers will soften the edge of the pot and eventually grow all the way to the ground, anchoring the planter. Some good spillers to try would be sweet potato vine, trailing lantana, trailing rosemary, blue daze, ice plant, Swedish ivy, and bolivian jew.

There are many other good plants to choose from that would also work, just choose what works best in the specific location and select the preferred colors. Choose plants that all have a similar water requirement and plant in good quality potting soil. Just keep to the theme of one thriller plant, some fillers and spillers to have a stunning container garden that brings life and color to the porch or patio.

The planters will need to be watered regularly, the frequency will depend on what type of plants; be mindful of water use and be as efficient as possible. Use recycled water whenever feasible, such as dish-water from the sink or melted ice from a cooler. Drip irrigation can even be used, just run a line of blank tubing with no emitters behind the plants and bring up a line of small tubing sometimes called 'spaghetti tubing' with an emitter at the end into each pot. Mulch can also be added to planters to help conserve water and keep them healthy.

May To-Do's

- Change irrigation timer over to summer watering from the spring schedule
 - Visit the website watermyyard.org to receive weekly watering recommendations
- Apply glyphosate ('Roundup') carefully around bed edges to keep bermuda grass from creeping in
- Replenish mulch around beds to conserve water and maintain plant health

Pecan Update



Keep an eye out for pecan nut casebearers, a small moth that damages nuts in the spring. Sign up for the Concho Valley Pecan Update newsletter to receive the announcement for the best time to spray.

Call 325-659-6522

Rainwater Harvesting

Living in West Texas, we know how important water conservation is, especially during a dry spring like we are having so far. Usually when we do get rain, it comes down hard but it doesn't come as often as we want. Rainwater harvesting is a solution that can help us catch the water when it comes, and save it for later when it's dry. In addition to providing us with a source of water when needed, rainwater harvesting has the potential to reduce stormwater runoff, and keep fertilizers, debris and other pollution out of the rivers.

Rainwater harvesting is not new technology, in fact my mom grew up on a sheep farm near San Antonio where they lived on nothing but rainwater from a cistern. But there has been a renewed interest in harvesting rainwater, and the technology has come a long way.

One inch of rain provides 0.6 gallons of water per square foot of surface area (roof). So just picture an average 2,000 square-foot home. That roof can catch 1,200 gallons of water in one inch of rain!

While rainwater can be used in the home with special purifying systems, the easiest and most common way to use harvested rainwater is in the landscape. Land-

scapes use a lot of water, especially in the summer time; so using rainwater will do a lot for water conservation, and also help conserve the pocketbook!

Rainwater harvesting can be as simple or elaborate as wanted. A garbage-can could be converted into a small rain barrel, or large tanks can be installed. All that's needed to capture rainwater is a roof surface, a tank to hold the water, and a gutter system to get the water into the tank. Storage tanks should be dark or completely covered, so that no light penetrates - this prevents algae growth.

Visit rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu to find out more information, including a calculator that can help determine what size of tank is needed. Also, there are demonstration gardens showing how rainwater capture works at the Tom Green 4-H Center (next door to the animal shelter). There are three 3,000 gallon tanks around the building, as well as a rain garden to slow down run-off. Those interested in rainwater harvesting can stop by any time to take a look.

Save the date and join us on Saturday, June 30 for a Water Conservation Seminar titled Every Drop Counts, which will cover rainwater harvesting and landscape irrigation with special guest Dr. Dotty Woodson. See the attached flyer for more info!

Plant Spotlight

Pam's Pink Honeysuckle

Lonicera x americana 'Pam's Pink'

Pam's Pink American Honeysuckle is a vigorous but less rampant semi-evergreen vine than coral honeysuckle or Japanese honeysuckle; blooms abundantly in the spring, followed by sporadic flowering through the summer and fall.



Photos by Laurin Watkins



Rose Rosette Disease

The Dallas/Fort Worth area is in a sad state for gardeners that love roses. There is a disease called rose rosette that is devastating many of their rose bushes, all over the metroplex. Here in the Concho Valley, we are a long way from DFW, but if we don't know what it would take for it to make its way here and it may be possible cause issues here someday.

Rose rosette is a viral disease, and is being spread in DFW by a very tiny mite. The mite is so small that it blows around in the wind, transferring the disease from plant to plant. There is currently no cure for rose rosette, and also currently no control for the mite.

So our only option for now is to keep our eyes open and be looking for rose rosette, and if we do see it it's vital to get rid of the plant immediately.

Rose rosette disease is always deadly to rose bushes, so if a plant has it, it will be gone soon anyway – don't risk it spreading by trying to hold on to it as long as possible. At this point, there have thankfully been no reported cases or signs of any rose rosette in the Concho Valley, but all it would take is someone to purchase a plant from the metroplex that has the disease and plant it here.

The major symptoms of the disease include extremely vigorous, long new shoots that grow out taller than the rest of the plant, the growth is very red in color and has distorted growth – leaves that are very close together, and usually a massive amount of thorns on the stem.

If a rose is confirmed to have rose rosette, the best thing to do is dig it up, roots and all, and seal up in a trash bag.



Diagnosing Tree Problems

Now that the trees are all leafed out and putting on their new growth, I've received some questions and concerns about tree health. There are many things that can cause stress in trees – including too little water, insect pests, diseases, nutrient deficiency, and herbicide damage.

Trees can sometimes have a quick response to stress and show their damage right away, or they can also be very slow to show stress, and the larger the tree the longer it might take to show symptoms – that can make it hard to diagnose what's wrong, because the problem could have happened several years ago.

Water is a big issue, especially for trees that need quite a bit of water like pecans. It has been a dry winter and spring, and some trees are showing thin canopies and other symptoms - it could be from the current dry spell, or even be from drought stress from years ago.

Whenever there are stressed or damaged trees, there are often signs of borer infestation. Borers are beetles that have a larval stage that tunnels through tree limbs to feed. If there are signs of borers such as bubbling, foaming sap and small shot holes in the trunk and branches, they need to be controlled.

But borers are secondary pests, and are usually not the direct cause of the tree stress or damage, but are taking advantage of the problem and can make it worse. A systemic insecticide like imidacloprid can be applied to the ground and watered in to provide some control.

If your tree has some unusual or unexplained die back or problems, herbicide damage may be the cause. Always be careful with weedkillers - they can damage trees. Some can be safe to use near trees, but you have to be very careful.

Keep in mind that if large, mature trees are showing stress or having problems, it's usually not a single cause—more often, it is a combination of factors that cause issues in large trees.

Plant Pumpkins

Pumpkins are a fun crop for home gardeners to try and now is the time to get them planted, especially to grow large pumpkins that need a long growing season. Fall is the last thing on a gardener's mind since it's still spring, but to have home-grown pumpkins for fall decorating, baking and carving, it's time to get them started. In the home garden, pumpkins are especially fun to grow with children – the seeds are large and easy to plant, they germinate fast, and the plant grows quickly. A pumpkin patch can be a good science lesson and kids can measure growth and chart progress as the plant and fruit grow.

Many plants in the squash family (aka cucurbits) do well in our hot summers – besides pumpkins, other good options to try are watermelons, cantaloupes, and various other squashes such as yellow summer squash, cucumber and acorn squash.

Depending on the type of pumpkin, it can take anywhere from two and a half months to four months to grow a mature pumpkin – the larger the variety, the longer it takes. So be sure to get them in the ground soon to ensure there's enough time to get plenty of mature pumpkins. Choose varieties to plant based on what they will be used for – some examples include Dill's Atlantic Giant for large pumpkins, Small Sugar for baking, and Magic Lantern for carving.

The plants are very large and will take up quite a bit of space, so there needs to be plenty of room for them to spread out in a plot with full sun. The soil should be well drained, so till in some compost if it's heavy and compacted.

The pumpkin seedlings will need to be kept moist when germinating; then decrease the frequency but increase the amount given each time as the plants grow. Use drip irrigation to be efficient with water use, and also apply mulch after the plants emerge and become established.

The People/Plant Connection, a local nonprofit organization, hosts a giant pumpkin growing contest each year, and is giving out free giant pumpkin seeds. Contact the People/Plant Connection for more info at 656-3104, or stop by the Extension Office at 113 W. Beauregard to pick up some seeds.

Take-All Root Rot Disease in Turf

Every year there are questions from many homeowners about dead spots in the lawn, or thinned and stressed-looking turfgrass. There are many things that can cause dead spots in the lawn, and identifying the source is the first step.

Pests like insects and diseases do their fair share of damage, but not everything is caused by a pest. Problems such as a sprinkler head not spraying correctly, compacted soil, lack of sunlight or misuse of herbicide are a few of the possibilities that don't involve living pests.

A frequent complaint revolves around St. Augustine grass that slowly declines over time, with yellowing that turns to large dead patches. This is usually caused by a combination of factors, but a disease called take-all root rot is often a key culprit. Take-all root rot is a fungal disease that can affect any type of turf, but is seen a lot in St. Augustine lawns. Like the name says, it causes the roots to decay which causes the large dead areas, and it is most active in the spring and early summer.

The pathogen really thrives in alkaline conditions, and likes light, frequent applications of water, and excessive nitrogen applications. It is also what we call an opportunistic pest, meaning it's usually not able to damage an otherwise healthy lawn, but if anything stresses the grass, the fungal spores are able to infect the grass and cause additional problems. Keeping the lawn healthy is key to preventing this disease; deep but infrequent irrigation is much better than light, frequent watering for other reasons but is also important regarding take-all. Don't over apply nitrogen – do a soil test to find out exactly how much, if any, nitrogen is needed. This is a good example of why identifying the cause is important, and why it's not a good idea to just give extra water and fertilizer to stressed turf.

Fungicides can be helpful, some of the fungicides that are labeled for and effective against take-all include azoxystrobin (trade name Heritage G), thiophanate-methyl (trade name Cleary's 3336) and propiconazole (trade name Banner Maxx). There are also other trade names and generic options available for each.

Upcoming Events

May 2018

Friday, May 18, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Collecting and Saving Seeds + Seed Swap

NEW Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters

Butterfield Building, 224 W. Beauregard

Second green door, going downstairs—look for the PPC banner

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to collect and store seeds, and take some seeds home with you! Bring some seeds to share if you like. FMI call Susan at 325-656-3104

Save the Date!

Thursday, June 21, 2:00pm-5:00pm

Gardening Seminar—Insects in the Landscape and Garden

NEW Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters -Butterfield Bldg, 224 W. Beauregard

Second green door, going downstairs—look for the PPC banner

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Linda Rowe, Master Gardener

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about insects—the good, the bad and the ugly! Find out which insects are beneficial and good for your garden, and how to treat unwanted pests. **Call to register: 325-656-3104**

Saturday, June 30, 9:00am-12:00pm

Water Conservation Seminar—Every Drop Counts

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67

Cost: Free to attend!

Speaker: Dr. Dotty Woodson, Extension Water Resources Specialist

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners; Learn how to save money on the water bill! Topics include rainwater harvesting and irrigation efficiency. See attached flyer for more info. Call to RSVP: 325-659-6522

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



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