

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

January 2019

Time to Plant Fruit Trees

There is a trend in home landscaping towards incorporating edible plants like herbs, vegetables and fruit trees; it's called edible landscaping and it's certainly not a new idea because the generations before us knew the importance of using plants that provide more than just curb appeal – they often chose plants that gave a good harvest of food to eat. Pecan trees are so prevalent in San Angelo because after the drought in the 1950's there was a major need to replant trees, and they wanted something that produced a crop. So it's not a modern invention, but I am glad that edible landscaping is becoming popular. Edible plants can be as attractive as ornamental plants and utilized just like traditional landscape plants – you don't need a fruit orchard in the country in order to grow a couple of peach or pear trees, and vegetables can be incorporated into existing flower beds.

Now is a good time to discuss fruit trees, because it's a great time of year to plant them. Container grown fruit trees can be planted year-round, but summer is not ideal and fall or winter planting provides better establishment. And bare-root trees are only available in the dormant winter season; they are often cheaper to purchase but can be trickier to get successfully established.

Some of the popular fruit trees that can be grown in the Concho Valley include apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, pomegranates and figs. Also consider trying something a little different like persimmon or jujube. There are even a couple of citrus trees that are cold hardy enough to grow here, with some cold protection during the first few years. 'Arctic Frost' and 'Orange Frost' satsuma would be worth a try in a protected spot in the landscape.

Fruit trees at the home of Ron and Nancy Knight

*Left, training cuts on newly planted Harvester peach tree—January 2014
Right, Red Baron peach tree in bloom—March 2017*



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

Pecan Update



Congratulations to these local pecan growers who won ribbons at the West Regional Pecan Show!

Teel Family—3rd place Cheyenne

David Jansa—1st place Nacono
and 3rd place Other—Mandan

Chester McCown—Grand Champion
Native Pecan

Lance Michalewicz—2nd place
Nacono

Jeanette Montgomery—3rd place
Lightest Pecan

Join the Master Gardeners



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 opportunity to learn 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 pro-

grams and events.

Some of the projects the Concho Valley Master Gardeners work on include propagating plants for 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 course will start in February. It will be held on Tuesdays and lasts 16 weeks, starting February 12. Contact the Extension Office for more info: 325-659-6528

Plant Spotlight

Texas Ash

Fraxinus texensis

This type of ash is long-lived, fairly fast growing, very tolerant of salty and alkaline soils, and has nice fall color. It is a better option than the Arizona ash, which is short lived and has more pest problems.



Houseplants

Plants not only add beauty and value to the outside of the home, but can also brighten up and beautify the inside of the home as well. Check out the houseplant section at the nursery or garden center and try a plant or two inside the home. Besides looking nice, interior plants also purify air, release oxygen, and can improve overall health by reducing stress. A study at a university in England found that students showed 70% greater attentiveness when taught in rooms containing plants.

Plant selection and care are very different for plants inside the home compared to outside in the yard. Choose plants that are reliable indoor plants, and give them the best possible environment and care to have the best success. The two biggest challenges with house plants are light and water. Plants that are known to be good for inside a building are generally tropical plants that are native to areas with very dense canopies and can handle lower light levels, but all plants need some light to grow – and even house plants need more light than is usually available in the home to grow well and thrive.

A simple test to measure light levels and to help choose the best placement for houseplants can be done by simply holding a hand about 12 inches above the surface in question (floor, table, etc) during the brightest time of day. Look for the hand's shadow – if it is a clear and distinct dark shadow, that is a high light level. If it has a fuzzy outline and is a light, faint shadow that is low light. Place plants in the brightest light in order to have the most vigorous growth. Plants may survive in low light, but most won't have active growth or reach their potential.

Watering houseplants can be tricky; plants do best when they can be watered thoroughly and the excess water is allowed to drain away well, but houseplants tend to be watered lightly and more frequently; and there is a tray underneath to catch the excess water which can create standing water for long periods of time. If possible, try to place houseplants in the sink or tub and water thoroughly and then let drain well before returning. However, many houseplants can handle being watered where they stand, with the tray underneath, as long as they aren't overwatered – allow the potting soil to dry out a bit before watering again.

Plants will need to be repotted every year or two if they are healthy and growing well, some signs that indicate a plant needs to be repotted into a larger pot include smaller leaves, wilts quickly after watering, root are growing at the soil surface, lower leaves turn yellow. Don't repot into too large of a container, just go up to the next size.

Easy-to-grow houseplants:

Sansevieria, Mother-in-Law Tongue



Pothos Ivy



ZZ Plant



For more info on houseplants, click here: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/houseplant/houseplant.html>

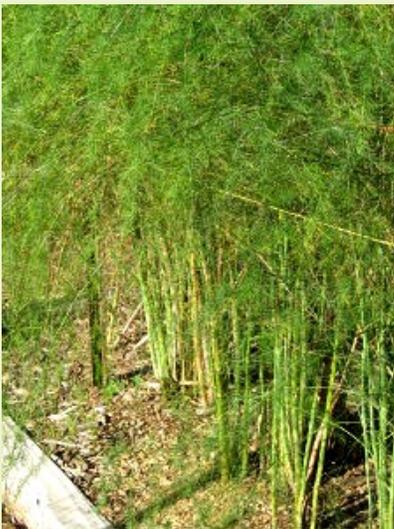
Plant Asparagus

We're deep in the middle of winter, but there are some beautiful warm days sprinkled throughout our Texas winters and now is the time to plant asparagus – so if you'd like to have a perennial vegetable to enjoy in the spring, take advantage of one of the nice weather days to get asparagus planted. Asparagus is one of the only long-lived, perennial vegetable plants – so it won't have to be re-planted year after year.

Asparagus likes well-drained soil, so be sure to incorporate plenty of high quality compost into the soil before planting. Most of the soil in the Concho Valley is heavy and has poor drainage. While there are many plants that prefer acidic soil and have a hard time in our alkaline pH, asparagus actually likes it a little alkaline. So just improving drainage and clearing out grass and weeds is all that's needed to prepare the ground for asparagus.

Purchase crowns from a nursery or seed catalog, or grow your own crowns indoors from seed. Asparagus crowns should be planted in full sun or an area that at least has a good bit of sun to get the best production.

Plant the crowns with about 12 inch spacing between plants – planting too close can reduce productivity. Water thoroughly at planting, and water every few days to a week depending on soil type and weather.



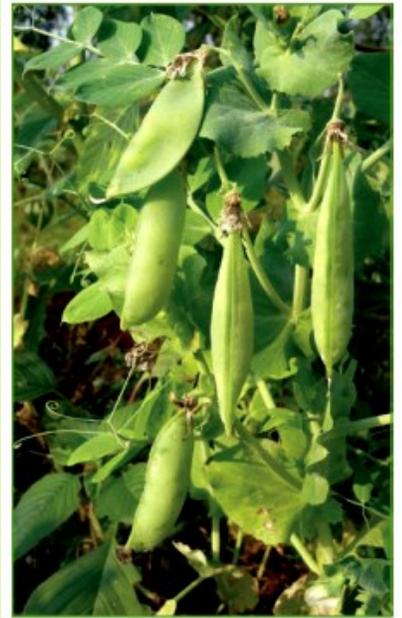
Once the plants come up, apply a thick layer of mulch. Asparagus will do best if allowed to grow vigorously for two years, so keep weeds pulled and don't harvest until well established. After the first two years of getting the asparagus established, it will require little care to keep it going. Just harvest spears when they

are six to ten inches long – and harvest frequently to prevent them from getting tough and fibrous.

Sugar Snap Peas

Sugar snap peas are a delicious winter crop to grow in the home garden, and can be planted in the late winter. As soon as we are clear of deep freezing weather, go ahead and start snap peas – they can tolerate light freezes even as young, tender plants. A few plants can be grown in flower beds or patio planters, with a small trellis for support, or if grown in a garden bed make 8inch raised rows with 24inch spacing between the rows. Plant seeds about an inch deep, and plant seeds in pairs down the row about 10 inches apart. Install a support wire or trellis that the plants can trail onto after they emerge.

Sugar snap peas are a legume, so they are nitrogen-fixing plants. That means they take nitrogen from the air and turn it into a form the plant can use – which makes them a great crop to grow in between seasons of other vegetables that aren't nitrogen-fixing.



To increase the nitrogen-fixing ability, you can add an inoculant - available at some garden centers, or online. And they won't need nitrogen fertilizer since they can create their own.

Most varieties will start producing pods about 60 days after planting, to harvest pick the pods when the peas inside are the size of bbs. This is about 5 days after flowering. Once a plant starts making pods, they will need to be picked at least every other day – if left on the plant too long, the pods will get tough and fibery. Sugar snap peas are delicious eaten fresh, straight off the plant or can be sautéed lightly in some oil with seasoning, or prepared in a number of other ways.

Upcoming Events

January 2019

Thursday, January 10, 6:00pm– 8:00pm

Tree Planting and Pruning 101

Location: Stephens Central Library Community Room, 33 W. Beaugard, San Angelo

Cost: \$10

Speaker: Allison Watkins

The time is right for planting and pruning trees—learn the best planting, establishing and training techniques for young trees, as well as best pruning practices for mature landscape trees. Call to RSVP: 659-6522

Friday, January 11th, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Year-Long Landscape Color

Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, Wells Fargo Building Basement, 36 W. Beaugard

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Find out how to keep up the curb appeal all year long with plants for every season.

Thursday, January 17, 2:00pm– 5:00pm

Green Thumb Seminar—Pollinators

Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, Wells Fargo Building Basement, 36 W. Beaugard

Cost: \$25

Speakers: Carol Sturm, Susan Stanfield

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about butterflies, hummingbirds, and the plants that attract them! Attendees also get to create a butterfly waterer to take home. Call to pre-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 12 through May 28. For more info, call 325-659-6528.

Saturday, March 16

Beautiful, Edible Earth-Kind Landscapes

Save the date! This seminar will be a fun way to learn how to have a beautiful and productive landscape in west Texas by incorporating edible plants like fruit, vegetables and herbs into the landscape along with the flowers and shrubs. More details to follow, but call 325-659-6528 to be put on a mailing list for when info is available.

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



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