

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

February 2019

## Pre-Emergent

February is a busy month in the landscape and garden, it's the time of year for pruning, cleaning up beds, and soil preparation. Another step that can be taken is application of pre-emergent herbicide. Pre-emergent is a type of herbicide that kills seeds as they germinate. It won't work instant miracles in a weed-infested yard, but if used correctly over a period of time pre-emergent can greatly reduce the amount of these troublesome pests in the lawn.

Pre-emergent is most effective against annual weeds, plants that come back only from seeds each year. Perennial weeds grow back from the roots, and pre-emergent will not kill existing plants. The key to achieving good control with pre-emergent is correct timing and proper application—the product must be applied before weeds come up. For winter weeds, apply in the fall (September) and for spring weeds apply in late winter (February). One additional application can be made in May to prevent grassburs ('stickers') which pop up in the summer, if needed.

Pre-emergent can be very helpful for lawns, in particular - it does not harm well-established, existing plants as long as it is applied following label directions. So there is no danger of harming the grass, shade trees, shrubs, or other landscape plants as long as they are well-established. Don't apply pre-emergent to vegetable gardens or flower beds where seeds or transplants will be planted.

Pre-emergent can be purchased at garden centers, nurseries and horticulture supply stores. Some examples are pendimethalin (trade names Pendulum, Pre-M), benefin (trade name Balan) or XL-2G which contains benefin plus oryzalin.

Don't be tempted to fertilize the lawn at the same time as applying pre-emergent, the grass cannot use fertilizer until it is actively growing. Wait until the lawn has had to be mowed twice - then the grass is ready to use fertilizer. Also, avoid 'weed and feed' products which contain fertilizer plus post-emergent herbicide - some of these types of products can be damaging to existing landscape plants such as shade trees.

## February To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals
- Apply pre-emergent herbicide
- Plant and/or prune rose bushes
- Water 24 to 48 hours before hard freezes to protect plants
- Run irrigation system check
- Prune shade trees and shrubs as needed
- Check mowers and other lawn equipment; sharpen mower blades, get tune-up if needed

## Pecan Update



February is a good time of year to start germinating pecans, if you'd like to try growing some from seed. Just be aware that improved, named varieties are propagated by grafting -and trees grown from seed won't be the same as their parent. They may turn into pretty nice trees though!

## Winter Patio Color

Just because it's winter doesn't mean we should give up on having a nice colorful porch or patio. Many landscape plants are dormant and brown, but having a few large planters around the outside of the home will really kick up the curb appeal, and will be nice to enjoy on the warmer days when it feels good sit outside.

There are several really good winter annuals like pansies, stock, larkspur, alyssum and snapdragons. Cyclamen is another great winter annual. Cyclamen from a garden center, not a florist, will do well in outside planters.

Cyclamen comes in various shades of pink, red and white. So if you want to give someone some flowers for valentine's day, consider some garden cyclamens that can be enjoyed for months. They will be able to handle cold temperatures down to about the high 20's, so if a hard freeze comes they should be protected.

Dianthus, also called pinks, are another good flower for winter patio color. They are generally considered annuals, but in conditions that are just right they may come back as a perennial. Dianthus come in different shades of pink and white, and will bloom through the rest of the winter into the spring until it gets hot. When planting patio pots, you can make some stun-

ning flower displays if you use different sizes and shapes of plants. Remember the term 'thrillers, fillers and spillers.' Plant one thing in the center that draws attention, the add filler plants and spiller plants to go down the sides of the pot like the alyssum.

Always use a potting mix for container plants, don't buy a bag labeled garden soil or use soil dug from the ground. Potting mix is peat moss based, and real soil turns hard like a brick when used in pots.



## Plant Spotlight

### Mexican Buckeye

*Ungnadia speciosa*

This tree makes a wonderful addition to the landscape; it is a small, deciduous tree with fragrant blooms in the spring.



## Late Winter Trimming

February is a good time of year to work on cleaning up the landscape and start getting it ready for spring. Some of the common tasks to consider doing include: prune shade trees and shrubs, trim groundcovers, cut back dead perennial tops, clean up leaves (add to compost or use as mulch in beds), and replenish mulch in landscape beds to a depth of three to four inches.

As for pruning shrubs, remember that it's better to start with the right plant in the right spot in the first place so that extensive pruning is not needed every year. Choose shrubs that grow to the height needed instead of too-large plants that constantly have to be trimmed so they don't cover windows etc. In many cases, dwarf shrubs that don't grow larger than three or four feet tall are ideal as foundation shrubs for the average home landscape. Also, don't prune shrubs that bloom in the early spring until after they finish flowering or they won't have many blossoms.

Old shrubs that are overgrown and not as healthy and vigorous as they used to be might be rejuvenated with 'gradual renewing' pruning. Remove a third of the oldest, tallest branches – cut them back almost to the ground, right now before new growth starts. This will stimulate fresh new growth, and the process can be repeated each year until the shrub is back into the desired condition.

Groundcovers can also benefit from a winter trimming, it will help them stay neat and tidy. Asian Jasmine is a popular and common groundcover, for good reason – it's a nice size and texture, is fairly easy to grow, can handle shade, and doesn't need tons of water. A severe trim (as low as six inches) can help it grow back denser and thicker in the spring, but will cause it to look ugly for a while. A hedge trimmer is best, and a string trimmer can work but is more uneven and can accidentally dig up runners.

Mondo grass can be mowed once a year with a mower at the highest setting (no lower than four inches) to keep it looking dense and healthy. It also will look rough until spring growth fills it back in.

Neither mondo grass or Asian Jasmine need any trimming to keep a more informal, natural look, but if they are damaged and need to be rejuvenated, or if a formal look is preferred, trimming now can help achieve that.

## Planting Roses

Now is a great time of year to plant a rose bush if you'd like some color in your yard. Here are some planting tips to give your rose bush the best possible start.

First, choose where to plant. Roses will need full sun and good airflow to stay healthy and beautiful. Allow plenty of space between roses so they can get the sun and air they need, and keep in mind that they often get bigger than the label says.

When digging the hole, make it the same depth the rose was growing at and don't plant the rose too deep. For container grown roses, just make it as deep as the root ball. For bare root, look for the soil stain which shows the depth the rose was at before.

The width of the hole should be wider than needed, so you have room to improve the soil by mixing in some compost or other organic matter.

If planting bare root roses, get them planted soon after purchasing. It's also helpful to soak the roots in a bucket of water for about an hour right before planting. Also, don't wait too late into the season for bare root roses – once we get into spring time it's too late for bare root plants.

For container grown roses, check the root ball and gently loosen it up by hand or with some hand pruners. The roots should not stay in a tightly woven mass, they need to be loosened up so they can spread out once planted.

Place the plant in the hole at the right depth and carefully refill the hole with soil mixed with the organic matter amendments. When about halfway filled, add some water to help settle out any air pockets. The finish filling the hold, pack the soil firmly, and water thoroughly. Add 3 inches of mulch, but pull it away from the trunk a few inches.





## Growing Cauliflower and Broccoli

It's time to get cole crops planted in the garden! 'Cole' crops is

a term for a family of cool season vegetables including broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts and cabbage. Broccoli and cabbage are pretty easy to grow, while brussels sprouts and cauliflower are more challenging but possible.

Mid February through Mid March is the ideal window for planting these cool season vegetables, don't wait too long to get them in the ground and start with a nice large transplant to have the best success. If planted too late or if started with seed or a small transplant, they may not produce a good crop before it gets too warm. High temperatures cause bitter flavor and bolting, which means they flower prematurely and stop producing.

Plant the transplants at the same depth they were growing at in the pot, not too deep or too shallow. Apply a good layer of mulch after planting, and water in well.

Water them regularly and keep the soil moist, but not soaking wet. The mulch will help keep the weeds out, but keep an eye out and pull weeds if they do come up. About four weeks after planting, apply nitrogen fertilizer and water it into the soil. Repeat the nitrogen application after another 4 weeks to get the most vigorous growth and good produce.

Cauliflower should be blanched before harvesting – that means that when the cauliflower head is easily visible, take the longest leaves and gather them over the top and tie them down – the shading will prevent the white cauliflower from turning a yellow green color.

Harvest broccoli when the head has just the slightest yellow color, and leave the side sprouts to grow larger for a later harvest. For more info on growing these cool season vegetable crops, visit the website [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu) and click on the vegetable gardening link.

## Attracting Songbirds

Many people enjoy seeing birds in the landscape, especially colorful ones like blue jays and cardinals, and love to hear songbirds chirping. If you would like to attract more desirable birds to your yard, try planting some trees and shrubs that they like, in addition to putting out bird feeders. It's especially important to provide food for birds in the winter when they have much less to choose from. Here are some tips to get started.

First, provide a variety of food. Not all birds eat the same thing, so use various types of seed. And in addition to seeds, throw out some peanuts, cracked corn, or bits of fruit. Birds eat earthworms and insects, so don't be too hasty with the insecticides. If you have insect pest problems harming your plants, try cultural controls first, things like spraying the pests off with soapy water. Avoid broad spectrum insecticides.

Also try to plant shrubs and flowers that provide seeds, fruits, nuts and berries, as birds like to eat these. Good examples would be plants like American beautyberry, hollies, sunflowers and persimmons. If you have crops that you don't want birds to eat, such as your tomatoes, you may need to use some bird netting to protect your harvest.

When it comes to providing water, there are a lot of options such as bird baths, drippers and misters. Any of these will work, it's up to your preference. Shelter is the third important need for birds, and providing a birdhouse is not the only way to do it. They also like dense foliage plants such as hollies, wax myrtle and juniper. Native and ornamental grasses are good for ground dwellers, and open lawn areas are also important for birds to find worms and insects. To attract a specific type of bird, do some research to provide what they prefer.



# Upcoming Events

February 2019

## **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.

Thursday, February 7, 2:00pm– 5:00pm

## **Green Thumb Seminar—Vegetable Gardening**

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

Cost: \$25

Speakers: Allison Watkins, Susan Stanfield

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Find out how to be successful with growing food crops in the Concho Valley and get ready for spring planting! Call to pre-register: 325-656-3104

Friday, February 15, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Edible Landscaping**

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Discuss all the various edible crops that can be incorporated to the landscape to make the yard both beautiful and productive!

Saturday, March 16

## **Beautiful, Edible Earth-Kind Landscapes**

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

Cost: \$30, or \$20 for half-day

Speakers: Dr Steve George, Debbie Frost, Allison Watkins, Monte Nesbit

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. See flyer (attached) and call 325-659-6522 to RSVP.

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



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