

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

March 2019

Spring Flowers

After freezing weather has passed (perhaps a few weeks from now but it's always hard to predict!), it will be time for planting spring plants like warm season vegetables, perennials, and colorful annual flowers. Annuals are the plants that will only live one season or year, but many have particularly bright, showy flowers and provide a lot of 'color pop.' Perennials are the flowers that will come back year after year, but some will have shorter blooming periods or may not provide as much concentrated color that annuals might. A well-designed landscape will utilize both annuals and perennials, and find a good balance of the two.

Annuals are very attractive in the landscape and even a small pocket of annual color can have a big impact in the landscape if placed right. Annual flowers can be a lot of work and quite expensive to plant every year if used to fill up large beds, but large numbers of annuals aren't needed if used strategically. To get the most out of a few annuals, try to only use one color, or at most two colors. Plant them on opposite sides of the entrance to the home to draw the eye up to the door. Some great warm season annual color plants for our area would include marigolds, moss rose, zinnias, periwinkles, pentas and petunias.

If you like to start from seed and want to get a head start, seeds can be started indoors now. Sow seeds in a fine-textured potting mix, keep moist and place in bright light. When it's time to transplant, harden them off first by placing the planters outside to get used to the new conditions.

Some prep work will go a long way to achieving healthy, successful plants—first, incorporate compost into the soil before planting. Organic matter does a lot to improve soil structure and water holding capacity, and will promote healthier roots. After planting, apply a layer of mulch to keep weeds out, and water in the soil. Even potted/patio plants can benefit from mulch.

Speaking of spring planting be sure to save the date for the Concho Valley Master Gardener's Annual Plant Sale! Join us Saturday, April 6th at 8am at the Tom Green County 4-H Center - 3168 North U.S. 67 (next to the animal shelter). This will be a great opportunity to obtain locally grown landscape plants that are good for this area, as well as recommended vegetable and herbs. The Master Gardeners are proud to offer a new tomato variety 'Tycoon' at this year's sale. Proceeds from the sale help support educational gardening projects. For more information, contact the A&M AgriLife Extension office at 325-659-6528.

March To-Do's

- Divide summer and fall flowering perennials and ornamental grasses
- Avoid purchasing bare-root trees and roses this late in the season - instead choose container grown or B&B
- Prepare soil in beds by tilling in 3 inches of compost
- Don't plant frost-sensitive plants too early. The last frost in the Concho Valley can be as late as mid April, but is usually in late March

Pecan Update



Spring is a good time to start fertilizing. Once leaves emerge and the tree is actively growing, apply nitrogen fertilizer. If you'd like a good crop of pecans, applying zinc is very beneficial - apply any time there is new growth in the leaves. Start at bud break; Zinc must be applied as a foliar spray, and is not absorbed well through the soil.

Do an Irrigation Audit

Irrigation systems can be a huge asset to a home landscape because they make plant care easier. But they do need some maintenance, knowledge and effort to keep them working and efficient, so they don't waste water.

To get your system ready for spring, check out how it runs and get it adjusted or repaired if needed. The automatic timer should be turned off in the winter time. Plants will need to be watered occasionally, but not by the timer—only water when they need it. So to audit your system and inspect how well it's working, turn the timer on for a test run. Make each station run and go out and watch.

First, make sure each station turns on, and all sprinkler heads popped up, rotated, and sprayed correctly. If not, check for obstructions such as grass or soil. You may need an irrigation professional to take a look. If you have a geyser, get it fixed right away - that's a huge waste of water.

Next, look carefully at where the sprinklers are spraying and see if they are aligned properly. If any sprinkler is watering the driveway or street, adjust it to only water the plants.

If there are any problems you can't fix yourself, call an irrigation contractor out to make repairs. Now is a

good time to get someone; they are really busy in the spring.

Another step is an efficiency audit. Water costs money, so you don't want to waste it. You can do a basic one yourself, or get a professional to do an in-depth audit.

To do it yourself, evenly set out low flat cans such as tuna or cat food cans. You will audit one station at a time. Turn the station on, and run it 30 minutes. Measure the depth of water in each can. If each can has the same amount of water, you have even distribution. If not, the system needs some work to water more evenly.



Plant Spotlight

'Tycoon' Tomato

Solanum lycopersicum 'Tycoon'

Tycoon tomato, awarded the designation of being a 'Texas Superstar Plant' by Texas A&M, is a very productive and delicious tomato. It is an exceptional large round tomato variety that is known for its heat setting ability. Determinate, 3 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide.



Planting Roses

Roses are a beautiful addition to the home landscape, and while they have a reputation for being hard to grow many roses are easy to cultivate if given the right environment. It may be too early to start a lot of spring planting, but now is a good time to plant container-grown roses. It's a bit late for planting bare-root roses, which should be planted by January or February. Container grown plants will establish quicker and go through less transplant shock. Here are some do's and don'ts to have the best success.

The first step to growing a beautiful rose bush is cultivar selection. Some roses require extensive pruning and/or are more susceptible to diseases, while other roses do well with little to no pruning and are resistant to common pests. So how do you find the best type of rose? Start with the list of Earth-Kind roses, which are rose cultivars that have been through extensive testing with Texas A&M University and have been proven to grow very well with no fertilizer, no pesticides, and less irrigation than is traditionally given. Visit the website earth-kind.tamu.edu to find out more about Earth-Kind roses. There are also other roses that can thrive in the local climate, for instance many old-fashioned roses require little maintenance. Check out the Earth-Kind rose trial at Kirby Park in San Angelo; some of my personal favorites from that trial that are beautiful and stayed very healthy include Innocencia Vigorosa, Pomponella Fairy Tale, and Raspberry Vigorosa.

Choose a spot in the yard that has full sun and plenty of room to grow. Roses need lots of air flow and don't do as well when planted too close to buildings or other plants. Incorporate compost into the soil before planting and use good planting technique – dig a hole that is wide but not too deep (only plant the rose as deep as it had been growing in the nursery container). Apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of wood mulch around the plant but pull it away from the stem.

Don't fertilize at planting – Earth-Kind roses won't need fertilizer anyway, and it's a general rule of thumb to wait until plants have had time to establish, start to grow roots and new shoots before applying any fertilizer.

Then water the plant in well, and water as needed when there is no rain. Newly planted plants will always need to be watered more frequently than established plants, so keep a close eye on it and water every few days for the first few weeks. Then, how often to water depends on a lot of factors such as soil type and weather, but train the rose to grow deep roots and be more drought tolerant by watering thoroughly but not too frequently – wait until the soil is dry before watering.



Earth-Kind Rose Trial at Kirby Park, taken April '15



Innocencia Vigorosa rose



Raspberry Vigorosa rose

Spring Lawn Care

There have been many questions lately about lawn weed control, and unfortunately, it's too late to utilize one of the best options for controlling the common weeds that are up now; pre-emergent applied in the fall helps prevent many of the weeds troubling homeowners right now such as henbit, wild mustard and rescuegrass. If these and other cool season weeds have been taking over this year, try pre-emergent next fall to prevent them from coming up in the first place. The good news is that they will soon be on their way out and will start fading as temperatures warm up, so don't worry too much about them at this point – just mow them down and focus on getting ready for spring. While pre-emergent won't fix the problem of weeds already up, now *is* a good time to apply it to prevent spring weeds from popping up. Only use pre-emergent on well-established landscapes, not where new plants will be planted or seeds will be sown in the next few months, and always read and follow all label directions.

Also keep in mind that a dense, thick, healthy lawn is the best defense against weeds. It's not so much that weeds come in and ruin the lawn, it's that weeds are more able to pop up in lawns that are already stressed and thinned out. So focus on rehabilitating the lawn and getting a good stand of turfgrass established and that will greatly reduce the number of weeds that grow.

The practices that have the biggest impact on keeping a lawn thick and healthy are proper mowing and irrigation. Frequent mowing at the correct height (about 0.5 inch for hybrid bermudagrass, 1 inch for common bermudagrass, and 2.5 inches for St. Augustine), often enough so that no more than 1/3 of the height of the grass is removed at once will have a big impact on improving turfgrass density and appearance.

Irrigation should be deep and infrequent – meaning water deeply when needed but don't water too often. A general rule of thumb is to apply one inch of water once per week when it's hot in the summer time and every two to three weeks in the spring and fall when it's cooler (but not at all if it has rained that week, of course). To find out how long to water to get one inch, set out some catch cans (or even some clean empty tuna cans) and water until an inch is measured in the cups. Lawns that are watered too frequently, or more than once per week, have shallow root systems and are not able to make it through the hot, dry summer weather. Deep-rooted grass will be much better and surviving the summer heat and also help conserve water.

Tomato Tips

Tomatoes are the most popular vegetable for a home garden, but are not the easiest crop to grow. Here are some tips to help you get the most out of your tomato endeavors. First, choose a location that has full sun—shade will decrease fruit production. Next, improve soil by adding organic matter ; just till up the area to be planted, and incorporate compost to get a healthy start before putting in the plants. Or for pots, use a nutrient rich potting mix.

Next is variety selection. This is very important in areas that are prone to common diseases, and if you have dealt with disease problems in the past. The letters that follow a variety name stand for the diseases that it's resistant to. The more letters, the more pest resistance. At the very least, check for VFN after the name - this means it's resistant to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt, and nematodes.

Variety selection is also important for warm climates like west Texas, as tomato plants don't set fruit well when it's hot. The larger the tomato, the less likely it is to set fruit in the heat. So try small to medium sized tomatoes, and don't count on the extremely large ones. Phoenix, Sun Master, Heat-wave and Tycoon are good varieties to try in our hot weather.

It's almost time to plant transplants directly outside, so purchase large transplants from your local nursery (or at the Master Gardener Plant Sale!). Starting with a large transplant instead of starting from seed will mean lots of production before it gets too hot. Transplants will get the best start if planted on a cloudy day or late in the afternoon. Also, keep them protected from wind and extreme temperatures for the first week.

Vegetables grow best with light, frequent applications of fertilizer and with steady, even irrigation. Keep the garden weeded to prevent competition for nutrients and water. A three to four-inch deep layer of mulch will help a lot with weed control and water retention. If you put in some effort to set the garden up well in the beginning, and pay a little attention to the garden every day, it won't be a ton of work but if it's left to get overgrown with weeds it can be very frustrating and difficult to manage.

Upcoming Events

March 2019

Tuesday, March 12, 5:30pm-6:30pm

Pumpkin Contest Kickoff and Educational Event

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

Cost: Free

Speaker: Dr. Russ Wallace, Texas A&M AgriLife Vegetable Specialist

Learn all about growing pumpkins, especially how to grow large pumpkins! General vegetable gardening info will also be provided. Pick up giant pumpkin seeds offered by the People/Plant Connection and try your hand at growing a record-breaking pumpkin! For more info call Susan at 325-656-3104

Friday, March 15, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Sprig Vegetable Gardening

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Growing your own food is a lot of fun, but can be a challenge in west Texas; learn the basics of how to be successful with growing vegetables in the Concho Valley

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: Jeff Floyd, 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.

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

Green Thumb Seminar—Vermiculture and Compost

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

Cost: \$25

Speakers: Linda Rowe, Susan Stanfield—Master Gardeners

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn all about how to make your kitchen scraps and yard waste go to work for you instead of filling up the landfill! Compost is 'Black Gold' for gardeners. Call to pre-register: 325-656-3104

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



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