

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

June 2019

## Summer Landscaping and Gardening

What a promising beginning to the growing season, the rain has been abundant and plants are thriving with active spring growth. Keep an eye out for insect and disease pests though, because humidity and rain can increase their presence.

But now summer is here and it is always hot and stressful on plants as well as gardeners. Most planting is best done in spring or fall, but there are still some tasks to get done and things to keep an eye on during the summer months. First, be sure to replenish mulch in all beds to a depth of about four inches. Mulch is often applied too shallow; if not deep enough, it won't have much impact on plants. But properly applied mulch can have a huge effect on plants by conserving water, moderating soil temperature, preventing erosion, keeping weed populations down, and enriching soil.

Deadhead perennials to keep them blooming well, and if some get stressed later in the summer they can be trimmed down about a third so they can put out healthy new growth.

A summer vegetable garden would be a good idea this year; some summer planted crops that can go in the ground now include cantaloupe, okra, peppers, watermelon and squash. Till in organic matter before planting, and if using transplants, mulch over after planting. If planting seeds, wait until they emerge before mulching.

Keep an eye out for insect pests such as spider mites, pest caterpillars (but be careful not to kill butterfly caterpillars), stink bugs and leaf-footed bugs. Learn to identify before attempting to control, since effective control measures are very dependent on proper identification. Also, there are many beneficial insects in the yard and garden working hard to pollinate and control pests, and haphazard insecticide sprays can damage their populations. Some common beneficial insects include bees, lady bugs, green lacewings and mantids. For help identifying potential garden pests, contact the Extension Office.

For homeowners needing a new lawn, this year seems to be a good opportunity to plant one. Whether planting seed or sod, good soil preparation and proper irrigation are key to getting a healthy lawn going. Warm season grass seeds germinate better at warmer temperatures, so June is a good month. Apply light but frequent irrigation until leaves emerge, then reduce frequency and increase volume.

## June To-Do's

- Continue to dead-head flowers
- Replenish mulch as needed
- Keep beds weeded to eliminate competition for nutrients, sun and water
- Watch for chinch bug & grub damage in lawns

## Pecan Update



Keep an eye out for walnut caterpillars, for more info click here:

[http://lubbock.tamu.edu/files/2015/05/Walnut\\_caterpillar\\_2015.pdf](http://lubbock.tamu.edu/files/2015/05/Walnut_caterpillar_2015.pdf)



## Hanging Baskets

Potted plants and hanging baskets can really beautify a porch or patio, but can be hard to keep healthy when it gets hot. Selecting the right plants for hanging baskets and following some simple guidelines will help increase the health and beauty of these plants that have such a big impact on the curb appeal and enjoyment of the yard.

Some good options for tough hanging basket plants that can take full sun would include: dew plant, ice plant, trailing white or purple lantana, moss rose, blue daze, trailing rosemary, sedum, and sweet potato vine. These are all heat and drought tolerant.

Choices for shady areas, plants that can thrive under a porch roof include airplane plant, begonia, Swedish ivy, coleus, bolivian jew, impatiens and ferns. A mixture of several of these makes quite a showy basket!

Even after using good plant selection the hot, dry wind of west Texas summer will still cause them to dry out fast and they will need to be watered

often. If plants are stressed they go into survival mode and will not have new growth - so to get the good growth and have the plants cascade well down the pot, water when the soil dries out on top.

For hanging baskets that are held onto and overwintered each year, it can help to refresh them. Replace the potting soil and repot into a one-size larger pot. Potting mix can break down and wear out over time, so replenish the container with potting mix that has lots of rich organic matter. Don't use bagged garden soil or soil dug from the ground.

Be sure not to let the potting mix dry out too much because the peat moss in most mixes will tighten up and shrink, not letting water filter through. It can become hydrophobic—meaning no matter how much you run the hose over it, it just doesn't moisten the roots well. If that happens, place the plant, pot and all, in a tub filled with water and let it soak for a few hours.

## Plant Spotlight

### New Look Celosia

*Celosia argentea* (Plumosa Group) 'New Look'

This beautiful annual was newly designated as a Texas Superstar Plant by Texas A&M University, It is very heat tolerant and blooms all summer long. Looks great in beds or containers, and makes a nice cut flower.



## Drip Irrigation for Potted Plants

Potted plants can be pretty low maintenance because they don't need to be weeded. But they do need to be watered somewhat frequently, compared to plants in the ground. Growing plants in pots limits the size of the plant's root system, and being in a pot instead of the ground also exposes the roots to dry wind. This means that potted plants usually require more frequent watering, which can become a burden.

One solution you might not have thought about is using drip irrigation for pots - a drip system can be created for your containers that will make watering them very easy after it's set up.

Drip irrigation can really help you out by making irrigation easier, but it's also good for the plants. It applies the water straight to the potting mix instead of splashing it on the plants.

Making a drip system for containers is not difficult and is a good way to learn how to use drip irrigation systems.

All you need to do is put a splitter on a faucet, attach blank tubing with no emitters to one of the connections of the splitter and run it behind the potted plants.

Use a punch tool to make one hole on the drip line for each pot. Insert a small lateral line emitter, also called spaghetti tubing, into each hole.



Place the emitter in the pot at the top of the soil. A small stake can be used to hold the tubing in place. The emitters can be placed so they come in at the back of the pot, and are not visible.

Now all you have to do is turn on one faucet and all your plants will get watered at once. For even more convenience, use an irrigation timer. When the plants need to be watered, you can set it to run for an hour or however long is needed and it will turn itself off when the plants are watered.

## Vegetable Garden Harvesting

There's nothing better than using delicious fruits and vegetables that you've grown yourself in your kitchen and to give away to friends, and one of the great things about growing your own is that you can harvest right when they're fully ripe - unlike much of what is at the grocery store, that has to be harvested before it's ripe for shipping.

In order to have the best tasting fruits and vegetables, it's important to time the harvest right. The best time to harvest is right before they are fully mature. You don't want to harvest too early, or they won't taste as good. You don't want to harvest too late, because they can lose their nice firm texture and can become soft and even rotten.

There are no strict rules when it comes to harvesting your home garden crops, but here are some general guidelines:

Harvest asparagus when spears are about 6-8 inches tall and as thin as your little finger. If you snap them off at ground level, new spears will continue to grow. Wait for two years before harvesting asparagus though if newly planted, so it establishes well.

Check snap beans daily. Pick them before you can see bulging seeds in the pod, and they should easily snap in two. Don't wait until they get tough.

Corn is ready when the silks dry out and turn brown, about three weeks after the silks form. The top of the ear will be more rounded than pointed.

Summer squashes, cucumbers and zucchini should be checked daily. They can easily get too large and overripe—pick when they are still small, and the skin is tender.

Pick tomatoes when they are fully colored and as soon as they feel tender to the touch.

For more info and harvesting tips for other crops, check out the publication *Harvesting and Handling Vegetables* at <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/>

## Vegetable Gardens—Food Safety

There seem to be more and more foodborne illness outbreaks in recent years from contaminated fresh produce. While the major outbreaks have been attributed to commercial production and not home gardens, some home gardeners get worried about the possibility of getting sick from their home grown vegetables and fruit.

There are two very simple and basic guidelines to follow to ensure that produce you grow is safe and not contaminated. First, don't use fresh manure around plants that will be eaten, and second always wash all produce before eating.

I recommend the addition of organic matter to soils to improve gardening success. It improves soil texture and nutrient availability. And manure can be a good source of organic matter, so many gardeners add it to their soil. But I recommend *not* using manure as a soil amendment for edible crops and instead use other sources. Manure applied around vegetables can get splashed onto the produce, spreading microbes to the food that can cause illness.

So either stick with another type of organic matter, and avoid manure in the vegetable garden altogether, or make sure the manure is very well aged and composted and then till it into the soil well.

The composting process heats up and breaks down organic matter such as manure. The heat will kill many organisms and makes it safer to use. So again, just be sure to only use well-composted manure in a vegetable garden. If you are unsure, just use other sources of organic matter like composted cotton burr hulls.

In attempts to conserve water, many gardeners have started utilizing grey water from the washing machine and recycling it to irrigate plants. Grey water is considered safe, as long as some rules are followed. It can't be sprayed with sprinklers, and can't be stored or allowed to puddle. Grey water is considered safe for vegetables if it isn't sprayed on the edible portion of the plant, but shouldn't be used if root vegetables are grown.

## Prevent Oak Wilt

While we are fortunate in the Concho Valley to not have a widespread problem with the oak wilt disease, we want to keep it that way – and in recent years there have been several confirmed cases in one San Angelo neighborhood. Oak wilt is a deadly fungal disease that can affect any kind of oak, but is seen most in live oaks and red oaks.

Prevention is the key to keeping trees healthy and to avoid infection; there is a fungicide called propiconazole that is labeled for treatment of oak wilt, but is costly and not guaranteed to work especially on trees already showing symptoms.

There are several preventative measures that homeowners can do to keep their trees protected. First, prune only during the winter. There are sap-feeding insects that can spread the disease to wounds on freshly pruned trees, but they go dormant in the winter which makes it a safer time to prune.

Another preventative tip is to paint the cuts. Any cheap latex spray paint will work, it doesn't have to be the thick pruning paint. In general, painting pruning cuts is not needed for other trees, but oak trees are the exception. Use on all cuts of oak trees to inhibit infection, especially for any limbs cut down in the warm season.

Third, be sure that any equipment used on oak trees is sterilized and cleaned between trees. If you do the work yourself, use rubbing alcohol or a 10% bleach solution; if you hire someone, be sure to ask them to clean tools before working on your oak tree.

For more info, and to see pictures of what oak wilt looks like, visit the website [texasoakwilt.org/](http://texasoakwilt.org/). Oak wilt is not wide spread in Tom Green County, and we hope to keep it that way by taking these preventative measures.



# Upcoming Events

June 2019

Thursday, June 6, 2:00pm-5:00pm

## **Gardening Seminar—Edible Landscaping**

[Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, Wells Fargo Building Basement, 36 W. Beauregard](#)

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; learn about the edible crops that can be grown in the Concho Valley, as well as how to incorporate them into the landscape and how to utilize them in the kitchen.

Please call to RSVP: Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, June 14, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Native Texas Plants**

[Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, Wells Fargo Building Basement, 36 W. Beauregard](#)

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about native plants that are good choices for local landscapes.

For more info call Susan at 325-656-3104

Saturday June 29, 9am to 12pm

## **Water Conservation Seminar**

[Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 US Highway 67, San Angelo](#)

Cost: Free

Speakers: Allison Strube, City of San Angelo; Kay Thompson, CVMG; Allison Watkins, CEA—Horticulture

Learn about the City of San Angelo's water resources, landscape water conservation, and how to design rain gardens and dry creek beds

FMI call 325-659-6522

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



**Allison Watkins**

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