

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

July 2019

What To Do Now in the Landscape

Deadhead flowers as they fade to keep them blooming well. Also, plant some summer color to keep the yard looking fresh and bright now that it is really heating up. Some good heat tolerant flowers to consider include lantana, pentas, yellow bells, Mexican heather, rock penstemon, purple fountain grass, and Pride of Barbados. For the vegetable garden, it's a great time to plant peppers, okra, cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, squash and small watermelon varieties.

With all the recent rain comes a lot of vigorous growth, so some plants are in need of fertilizer. Nitrogen and iron are the biggest concerns right now; apply nitrogen to the lawn at a rate of one pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet. To know how many pounds of fertilizer are needed, convert the first number on the analysis (for example 21-0-0) to a decimal and divide one by that number. For instance, you would need about five pounds of 21-0-0 fertilizer to get one pound of nitrogen. Be very careful to not overdo it with nitrogen, as excessive application can increase disease problems. There are also plants showing signs of iron deficiency, so apply a chelated iron product to plants as needed to keep them green.

Unfortunately, there are several pests to keep an eye out for. Spider mites have already come out with a bang, so watch out for them and spray off with a strong stream of water and treat with insecticidal soap. They are very small and extremely hard to see, but the symptoms they cause include stippling of the leaf (small specks of discoloration, a sand-blasted look) progressing to a burnt or scorched looking leaf. There has been an abundance of various types of pest caterpillars, including walnut caterpillars in pecan trees. Pest caterpillars can be treated with spinosad or Bt, but be careful not to damage butterfly caterpillars.

The best method for keeping the lawn and garden healthy is to use integrated pest management, or IPM, and it starts with scouting. Keep an eye on plants, and make a plan to intentionally inspect them regularly. Just passing by every day isn't enough to catch problems early, it requires a specific effort to look for potential problems. For a brief intro to IPM practices, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on 'IPM Intro.'

July To-Do's

- Check melons and squash (frequently!) for ripeness
- Audit irrigation system to check for problems
- Pick okra, peas and peppers often to maintain production.
- Watch for summer pests like chinch bugs and spider mites

Pecan Update



Keep an eye out for second generation pecan nut casebearers—no treatment is likely needed for heavy crops, but light crops may need treatment.

Visit pecankernel.tamu.edu for more info.

Summer Tomato Care

Tomatoes are a popular, beloved gardening crop in Texas and it has been a good year for growing tomatoes so far. The rainfall and (mostly) cooler temperatures helped the plants grow vigorously and make lots of good fruit. But even with the good conditions, there are always pests and problems that can pop up. This year there was a bit more fungal disease, such as early blight, which caused stress in some plants. Spider mites got going pretty early, and then of course birds have been helping themselves to the fruit. A good resource to check out when tomato issues start is the 'Tomato Problem Solver' from Texas A&M – see <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/problem-solvers/tomato-problem-solver/>

A fungicide labeled for vegetable gardens such as Daconil or neem oil can help with fungal diseases, and if birds are damaging the fruit bird netting should be put over and around the plants. Neem oil or insecticidal soap can help protect against spider mites.

For those that haven't had good success or haven't tried growing tomatoes yet but want to, see the 'Easy Gardening – Tomatoes' publication from Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, which can be found at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable>. The first steps to good tomato growing success include variety selec-

tion and soil preparation. Variety selection is important for tomatoes because they don't produce fruit well in high temperatures. Some will do better than others, so choose heat-tolerant varieties such as 'Celebrity' or 'Heatwave'; smaller tomatoes also fruit better in heat than the large types. The Concho Valley Master Gardener offered a new variety at their plant sale this year called 'Tycoon' which has been performing well.

Soil preparation is an often-skipped step, but can make a big difference in vegetable production. If planting in the ground, prepare the soil by breaking up and tilling heavy compacted soil; then incorporate three inches of good quality, well-finished compost. After planting, apply a three-inch layer of wood mulch to keep weeds out and increase water retention. If planting in pots or containers, only use potting mix, not soil from the ground or bagged garden soil. Potting mix is peat moss based and has a much better structure for potted plants.

Vegetables do best with steady, even moisture so install drip irrigation and water regularly when there's no rain. Light, frequent applications of fertilizer can also keep plants growing vigorously, but don't overdo it or the plants may be damaged or not set fruit as well.

Plant Spotlight

Yellow Butterfly Vine

Mascagnia macroptera

This low maintenance plant is the newest Texas Superstar to be announced by Texas A&M University. The attractive yellow flowers turn to large papery seed pods that look like butterfly wings, which can be fun for kids and used in crafts.



Fall Gardening Starts Now

It may be hard to believe that July is an appropriate time to plant vegetables, because the heat makes it challenging for small transplants to get established, but for a good fall harvest now is the time to start! It's always worth it when fall does arrive.

There are actually two categories for fall garden crops – warm season and cool season. Many of the warm season crops that are usually planted in the spring can be planted in July and produce a good harvest up until the first freeze in November. These include cucumber, eggplant, peppers, squash and tomatoes. The cool season crops like beets, kale, lettuce, broccoli and carrots should wait to be planted until at least September and can grow through fall and into winter.

Try to find large, healthy transplants – it may require some calling around since vegetables are not as available in nurseries in the summer. But they can be found with a bit of checking. To keep them alive through the heat of summer, the plants will need light but frequent watering and lots of mulch. A three-inch-deep layer of wood mulch around the plants will help keep the soil cool and hold the water in; this will make a big difference in helping the plants survive. As the plants grow deeper root systems, reduce the frequency of irrigation but water deeply each time. It may also help to make a little cardboard tent to go over the plants to give some shade in the afternoon until becoming better established with a good root system.

Try to get as much healthy growth from the plants as quickly as possible, to get the biggest harvest before the November freeze. After allowing time to get established, fertilize with light, frequent applications of nitrogen to help with growth. If you enjoyed a good spring harvest, then fall can be just as rewarding; and if the spring garden didn't work out well, don't give up – try a fall garden. The plants will be more productive, pest populations start to go down, and it can be a more worthwhile endeavor.

Summer Turf Tips

Lawns are not going to look their best in the hot, dry weather of west Texas summer but there are some things to do that can help grass survive this harshest season, even without wasting water or breaking the water restrictions for those in the city limits.

Dr. Becky Grubbs, an Extension Turfgrass Specialist for Texas A&M University has provided a "Water-Wise Checklist" for home lawns, and it can be found at <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture>. Here are some highlights.

First, mow at the higher end of the best mowing height range for the specific type of grass in the lawn. The recommended mowing height ranges for turfgrasses are: 2.5 inches to 3.5 inches for St. Augustine, 1 to 2.5 inches for common bermuda, and 0.5 inch to 1.5 inches for hybrid bermuda. Taller grass grows deeper roots, which helps give the grass access to more water. Along with mowing height is frequency – follow the 1/3 rule and never cut more than a third of the height of the grass at one time.

The watering schedule should be deep but infrequent. Water thoroughly when needed, then don't water again too soon. One inch of water, applied once per week is adequate even during the hot weather. Heavy clay soil can reduce infiltration and make it harder to water deeply all at once; if water starts to run off before an inch is applied use the 'cycle soak' method. This just means to take breaks during the watering period to allow the water to soak into the soil and not run off and be wasted. And finally, make sure the irrigation system is in good working order and has no broken or misaligned heads; be sure to not let the sprinkler run during or after a rainfall!

Disease has also recently been a problem – along with take-all root rot in St. Augustine that is frequently seen locally, grey leaf spot is also common this time of year. Correct diagnosis is key in treating disease, if a fungal disease is suspected consider sending a sample to the plant disease lab at Texas A&M: plantclinic.tamu.edu.

Dry Creek Beds

Dry creek beds are a popular landscape feature for local landscapes, especially in desert style yards, but they can be nice in traditional landscapes as well. A dry creek bed can provide the appearance of having water flowing through the property without actually having any.

Dry creek beds can also be functional, and provide a solution for drainage problems or other water related issues on the property - they can be used to redirect the flow of water in order to keep it in the landscape instead of flowing off-property, or direct it toward streams.

Dry creek beds really compliment a water conserving landscape and really go well with the style of many landscapes here in this part of Texas. They are not that complicated to build, but it can be hard work to grade the land and place heavy rocks.

The first step to build a dry creek bed is to grade and sculpt the soil. Just sculpt out a long creek that integrates well with the flow of your landscape, or the existing flow of water if there is already water draining through the landscape. It doesn't have to be that deep, it just depends on how much water flow you have, how deep you want it to look, or how large of rocks you want to use.

Place large river rock at the ends, sides and bottom of the dry creek. Then place larger rocks or small boulders along the top edge. Just be sure to not keep the creek bed feature flat, it needs to look natural and be visible to be a good landscape feature. Plants can be used to accent the dry creek bed and make it look more natural. Use plants like native grasses or colorful perennials, but choose plants that can take heat.



Low Maintenance Yards

Nobody ever asks about how to make a landscape more difficult to maintain – they always want to know ways to save time and effort but still have a good yard. There's no such thing as a maintenance free yard, but there are some ways to make it a bit simpler to care for.

And remember, that putting out rocks instead of a landscape isn't maintenance free either – weeds will still come up no matter what you do.

The first thing to know is that lots of small beds are hard to care for. Small beds often happen when we go to the nursery without a plan and buy things we like without having a place for them. When the new plant gets home, and there's nowhere to put it, a new little flowerbed gets made to put it in. Lots of small beds are hard to mow around and require more trimming around.

So try to incorporate your plantings into large sweeping beds, and try to get tree trunks in there too. The less to trim around the better.

For the lawn, just let the grass clippings stay on the lawn - it's less work for you, and it's good for the lawn (as long as the grass didn't get too high and the clippings are too thick). For leaves –rake them into flower beds to be used a mulch instead of bagging them up.

Mulch has a huge impact on reducing yard maintenance. A thick layer of mulch really helps keep out a lot of weeds.

Along with mulch is drip irrigation. It takes a lot of work to water plants by hand, so think about investing in a drip irrigation system. It's not complicated or difficult to set up, and will save you a lot of work down the road.

Upcoming Events

July 2019

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

Thursday, July 11 2:00pm

Gardening Seminar—Plant Diagnostics and Texas Superstar Plants

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

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Ron Knight

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; learn about two great practices for a successful landscape—how to properly diagnose plant problems, and great plant selection with the Texas Superstar program. Please call to RSVP: Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, July 19, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Alternative Water Sources

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; learn about other ways to water plants besides municipal and well water. Find out how to use grey water and A/C condensate for plants. For more info call Susan at 325-656-3104

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



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