

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

May 2015

## Edible Landscaping

Many homeowners are looking to use more and more food producing plants in their landscaping, so that their yard can be both attractive and productive. A full blown vegetable garden or fruit tree orchard isn't necessary to have plenty of fruits and vegetables to eat, edible plants can be incorporated into the existing design of the yard to create an edible landscape.

One way to do this is utilize edible flowers. Flowers that are safe to eat can really add interest and color to a meal, and is sure to spark conversation.



It's best to use fresh flowers and eat them the same day they're picked, and be sure to not use pesticides on the plants if you want to use the flowers in your food. They must be treated like vegetable garden plants. Also, don't eat them if they came straight from the nursery – make sure they've been growing in the yard a while without pesticide treatments.

Some commonly available flowers that are edible include chrysanthemums, daylilies, roses, dianthus, hibiscus, impatiens, marigolds, pansies, redbud tree flowers, nasturtiums, and yellow squash blossoms.

Nasturtiums are less commonly found in the landscape, but are often found in restaurants in salad greens. They have a beautiful orange color and brighten up salads. When eaten, nasturtium first has a sweet taste followed by a peppery flavor.

Squash blossoms taste mildly like the vegetable, and are a common Mediterranean dish. They can be stuffed with breadcrumbs or ricotta cheese and fried.

Other ways to create an edible landscape would be to incorporate a tough, easy to grow fruit tree like a pomegranate or a pear, and maybe include a blackberry bush in an out-of-the-way spot. Vegetables don't have to be grown in a special vegetable garden, as long as there's a spot with full sun, tomatoes and other vegetables can be incorporated into flower beds. Grape vines can be attractive additions over an arbor or pergola.

## May To-Do's

- Change irrigation timer over to summer watering from the spring schedule
- Apply glyphosate ('Roundup') carefully around bed edges to keep bermuda grass from creeping in
- Replenish mulch around beds to conserve water and maintain plant health

## Pecan Update



There are several species of June beetles...that feed on pecan foliage. Adults move to pecan foliage after dusk so during the day foliage damage may be observed but no sign of the damaging culprit. To check for this pest you will need to observe foliage after dusk.

From the Texas Pecan Pest Management Newsletter, by Bill Ree

## Growing Grapes

One horticulture crop that you don't hear about as much here in the Concho Valley is grapes. Grape vines can do pretty well here in West Texas, whether on a large scale commercial vineyard or a few vines planted on an arbor in a landscape. One reason is the dry climate. Excess rainfall can cause vine to grow too vigorously, which can interfere with production and harvest.

Some of the recommended wine grape varieties for the area include Riesling, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, and Tempranillo. American grapes that would be good on arbors would be Black Spanish, Champlel, and Golden Muscat. Seedless grape varieties are Reliance, Venus and Mars.

At planting, prune back to two to three buds. Allow the summer growth to develop into what will be the main trunk. Grapes are fruitful on one year old wood, so the next year select two one-year-old canes to become the fruiting canes.

Heavy pruning every spring will help keep the vine balanced, and provide the required one-year old growth. Remove most of the vine, leaving just a couple of canes to produce next year's crop. Grapes do not perform well with bermudagrass competition, so keep the ground weed-free around the trunk. Most grapes will not need heavy fertilization, but might need a light application of nitrogen depending on soil. If birds cause problems by eating the grapes before you can harvest, try bird netting. It has to be pinned together tightly or they can still get in.

There are several disease pests but most are not very common in this area. Grapes are susceptible to cotton root rot though, so they can't be grown in areas that have it in the soil.

For more information on growing grapes, look up: [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu). Be sure to plant on a sturdy arbor, pergola or training system.

## Plant Spotlight

### Pomegranate

#### *Punica granatum*

This tree is beautiful as well as productive! Pomegranates are well-adapted to our climate and perform well here.

Try to look for good fruiting varieties such as:

Surh Anor

Salavatski

Al - sirin - nar

Sumbar



© TopTropicals.com

## Diagnosing Plant Problems

Figuring out what's wrong with a plant can be like playing doctor or crime scene investigator - sometimes it's hard to figure out what exactly is causing the problem, and it can be a mystery.



Whatever the problem, we tend to want a quick and easy fix and often that doesn't happen - plants can be tricky and there needs to be just the right balance of conditions such as water, light and nutrition.

The three broad types of plant problem causes are insect, disease, and cultural practice. Insect and disease are usually the easiest to figure out because there are often clear symptoms. The first thing to check is to see if there are any visible insects on the plant, or evidence of them having been there such as webworm webbing or spider mite debris. If there are insects on or around the plant, get them correctly identified in order to effectively control, if needed.

Also take a close look at any visible signs on the plant such as spots, powdery substances, cankers, lesions, galls or mosaic patterns. These can be indicators of insect or disease pests.

If insect or disease have been ruled out, the other possibility is cultural problem - and this is hard to figure out because there are so many factors - soil type, nutrients and fertilizer, sun or shade, water, weed killers, weather, and so on.

First, ask yourself if the plant is in the ideal location - does it have the recommended amount of sun, water, drainage and other environmental requirements? Next, look back and ask yourself if you properly prepared the planting bed. The soil should be tilled and well worked, and for many plants organic matter should have been incorporated.

Other common contributors are over fertilizing, and over or under watering. Too much can be as bad as not enough!



## Tree Issues

Whenever spring comes back around and trees put on new leaves and start their new growth, there are lots of questions and concerns about tree health. There are several things that can cause stress in trees - too little water, insect pests, diseases, nutrient deficiency, or herbicide damage.

It's been a good spring this year, but there are lots of trees with dead branches and other problems brought on in previous years. Even trees that were irrigated have damage, because irrigation water isn't as good as rainfall. High night temperatures also caused problems, most plants need cooler temperatures at night, but the last few summers there have been nights when it was over 90 degrees at midnight. Some trees seem to be recovering, they just need to be given some time. As we go into another hot, dry summer, be sure to water even mature trees occasionally. And the water should be applied at the drip line, not the trunk.

There have also been some signs of borers - if your tree has had bubbling, foaming sap and lots of butterflies and other insects are attracted to it, it's probably borers. Look to see if there are exit holes and/or sawdust. Apply some imidacloprid - a systemic insecticide - to control them. Some trade names would be Merit, or Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control.

If your tree has some unusual or unexplained die back or problems, herbicide damage may be the cause. Always be careful with weedkillers - they can damage trees if applied incorrectly. Some can be safe to use near trees, but you have to carefully follow label directions.

We all recognize that water is usually the biggest issue - especially in young or newly planted trees. Surprisingly, evergreens such as junipers and arborvitae have shown extreme stress and even death from the previous years droughts.

## Growing Sunflowers

Sunflowers are a great addition to the summer garden. In the home landscape, they provide a bright pop of color and interest and also provide food for desirable birds. Sunflowers are an important agriculture crop, and are grown in fields to produce seeds and oil. They are also edible, and were an important food crop to native people in the American continent.

These summery bloomers range in size from a few feet tall to 15 feet tall, and there are many different varieties with varying colors.

Some sunflowers are perennials, while many are annuals. You can tell the difference by looking at the root system – annual sunflowers have a simple fibrous root system, looking like small strings, while a perennial sunflower will have roots that thicken into tough storage tubers.

Sunflowers need full sun to grow, but are pretty adaptable to other conditions such as soil type, and are fairly drought tolerant.

Sunflowers are great to grow with children. They love to watch the giant varieties grow fast and like to track their heights. You can also plant them in a circular pattern and create a teepee style playhouse space for the kids to hide out in. It's fun to watch how the flower heads can move throughout the day, always staying facing the sun as it tracks across the sky.

Sunflowers can be used for bright, cheerful flower arrangements, and there are special varieties that have been developed to have no pollen – so that the arrangements don't cause a mess.



## Plant Pumpkins

Pumpkins are a big icon for fall and Halloween. They are also a lot of fun to grow, and kids especially like them because the seeds are large, they germinate fast, and produce a large plant with big leaves rather quickly.



If you'd like to try growing some pumpkins of your own this fall, it's time to get them planted. Depending on the type of pumpkin, it can take anywhere from

two and a half months to four months to grow a mature pumpkin. The average first frost in this area is mid-November, so now is the time to get large pumpkins planted.

Pumpkin plants are very large, so you'll need to have plenty of room for them to spread out. They like to have well drained soil, and don't do as well in heavy soils with poor drainage.

You'll need a spot of full sun that's about ten feet by ten feet. Plant on two foot spacing; this will be more plants than you need, but some seeds might not come up, and extras can be thinned out.

They will need to be kept moist when germinating, then decrease the frequency of watering. Once established, the plants will need a deep thorough watering every week or two, depending on the weather.



The People/Plant Connection, a local non-profit organization, is hosting a giant pumpkin and sunflower growing contest this year, and are giving out free giant sunflower and pumpkin seeds. Contact the People/Plant Connection for more info at 656-3104.

# Classes & Programs

May 2015



Saturday, May 2, 9:00am

## Saturday Seminar - Using Texas Natives in Your Garden

Instructor - Kay Thompson, owner of Concho Natives

Location: San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, 1 Love Street

Cost: \$10

From the People/Plant Connection. A "Talk and Tour" session, a one hour lesson will be given by Kay Thompson. Then we'll caravan to the nursery for a tour. To pre-register, call 656-3104.

Friday, May 15, 12:00pm

## Lunch N Learn Class - The Edible Landscape

Instructor - Allison Watkins

Location: Tom Green County Commissioner's Courtroom

Judge Edd B. Keyes Bldg, 113 W Beauregard

Cost: \$5

Find out how to incorporate edible plants into an attractive landscape - and create a beautiful and productive yard!



Tuesday, May 19, 6pm

## Backyard Basics Seminar Series - Fruit Trees

You don't have to live in the country to grow your own fresh fruit! Join us for a new series of classes on urban production. See attached flyer for details .



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

**TEXAS A&M**  
**AGRILIFE**  
**EXTENSION**

**Allison Watkins**

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension

Tom Green County

113 W Beauregard

San Angelo, TX 76903

325-659-6528

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