

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

April 2019

## Planting a New Lawn

A healthy lawn is not only visually appealing but also functional. A nice lawn improves curb appeal and increases property value but is also enjoyable for every-day living from spring through fall. A thick carpet of turfgrass makes a great play space for kids and pets, and creates a very pleasant atmosphere for entertaining and even just lounging and enjoying fresh air on a nice day. It is important to ensure that lawns in west Texas are cared for in a water-efficient way, with proper irrigation that doesn't waste water, because it is easy to unintentionally over-water lawns or lose water through irrigation systems that are not very efficient. But with some effort and knowledge, lawns have a place in a well-designed landscape, and can be healthy and water-efficient even in west-Texas!

Here are some tips for establishing a new lawn –whether for a new construction home, filling in bare spots of an existing lawn, or renovating and redoing an existing lawn. First is timing – sod can be planted technically any time of year, but seed germinates better in warmer temperatures so don't be too hasty to plant seed. Wait until around May when soil warms up.

A well-prepared site or planting bed is important because it increases the success rate of getting turfgrass established. It also helps create a lawn that is more drought-tolerant, by encouraging deeper roots. First, clear out all debris - weeds, rocks, etc. Then till the ground to loosen and aerate the soil, making it easier for roots to grow through.

Planting can be done in several different ways. While some grasses can be seeded, like common bermudagrass or buffalograss, St. Augustine and hybrid bermuda varieties are only available as sod. For instant impact, purchase squares or rolls of sod and lay it right onto the prepared soil surface, creating an instant lawn. Plugging and sprigging are also options but require more time before the lawn fills in.

Whether planting seeds or sod, irrigate frequently and lightly at first, then slowly reduce the frequency when roots become well established but water deeper each time. Once the lawn is established, the key to good irrigation is 'deep but infrequent.'

For fertilization, a good first step is to do a soil test through Texas A&M University – see the website [soiltesting.tamu.edu](http://soiltesting.tamu.edu). That will give a recommendation on what nutrients are needed, but usually nitrogen is the main concern.

## April To-Do's

- Deadhead flowering annuals and perennials to extend blooming period
- Replenish mulch as needed in all beds
- Apply bait for fire ants
- Fertilize lawn based on a soil test; if needed apply 5 pounds of 21-0-0 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet
- Plant spring vegetables

## Pecan Update



Check out the website <https://pecankernel.tamu.edu/> for helpful information and updates on pecan pests and best treatments

## Soil Management

Soil preparation might not sound as fun as flowers and vegetable plants, but in order to have the most successful plants and productive vegetables, soil preparation is important and is too often skipped.

The soil that you plant in has the biggest effect on your plants – if the soil is in bad shape, many plants won't thrive no matter how well you fertilize, water, prune, and care for your plants. And unfortunately, many homeowners don't have naturally high quality soil in the Concho Valley.

Tilling up the soil and working in amendments are some of the most labor-intensive chores of gardening or working in the yard, but can be the most beneficial for the plants. The first thing to do when working on your soil is to do a soil test through the soil testing lab at Texas A&M University. You can contact the extension office for information.

The next thing to do would be to till or dig up your existing soil, and mix in amendments to improve the texture, aeration and nutrient content. The goal should be to get up to 10 to 12 inches of

good soil, but that goal may be out of reach in some locations. Build good soil as deep as you possibly can.

The best amendment to add to soil would be just some kind organic matter. There are a lot of good options – including composted cotton bur hulls, composted farm manure, plant based compost from a nursery or garden center, or your own home-made compost.

Just don't try to mix different soil types together. Adding sandy soil to clay soil or vice versa just ends up making things worse. If mixed together, they form a tighter harder structure than before. And if layered, one type on top of another, it creates problems with water infiltration.



## Plant Spotlight

### Orange Peel Cestrum

*Cestrum* 'Orange Peel'

Perfect selection for the long, hot summers of west Texas! This bright, beautiful semi-evergreen plant grows to about 6 feet tall; deer resistant. Get yours at the Master Gardener Plant Sale!





## Spring Pests

Now that spring is here, warm season landscape plants will start taking off. But along with our nice ornamentals, there can also be some unwanted pests that like spring too. Weeds, insect pests and plant diseases start becoming more active in the nice spring weather.

Pre-emergent herbicide is a good way to prevent weeds in the lawn, and can be effective at controlling annual weeds like crabgrass and grassburs ( or 'stickers'). It must be applied before they come up though, so mid-February through mid-March is a good time of year to apply it for warm season weed prevention. If you missed the opportunity, May is another good time to apply it for preventing summer weeds. There are several good options available at local nurseries and horticultural supply stores. Do not apply pre-emergent on newly established lawns, or anywhere where seeds will be planted. But when applied following label directions, it is not harmful to well-established plants.

Fire ants will be out when the warm weather arrives as well, and as soon as they can be seen foraging in the yard an application of insect growth regulator bait, such as methoprene can help keep them under control.

For nuisance mounds apply a mound treatment for quicker action, but a broadcast application of bait put out as the label directs will be the best bet for keeping fire ants out of the lawn.

If it's a dry spring, we probably won't have many diseases to deal with. But we always hope for rain! And if it's humid, we might have more diseases to take care of. Keep an eye out for fire blight on trees and shrubs, brown patch on turfgrass, powdery mildew, and other pathogens.

For help identifying and controlling plant pests, whether insect, disease or weed, contact the Extension Office.



## Easter Lilies



Easter lilies are beautiful flowers that are often purchased this time of year to decorate

the church for Easter, or to give as gifts or just brighten up the home. Easter lilies are not especially easy to grow, but can be planted in the ground and will rebloom the next year if cared for properly. Here are some tips to keep them blooming as long as possible, and after the lilies finish blooming, how to plant them and care for them in the landscape.

First, as soon as each flower opens up, pinch the anthers off inside the flower – this is the part with the pollen. It will keep the flower, and whatever table it's on, clean. Keep the plant moist, but not in standing water. To water, remove any lining around the pot, place in the sink and soak thoroughly. After draining, replace the wrapper and place back on display.

Easter lilies will flower the longest if placed in bright light and at cool temperatures. After it finishes blooming, plant in the flower bed in a spot that gets good morning sun, but shade in the afternoon. Amend the soil with good compost, and apply mulch around the plant.

The following year, it will bloom again – without the controlled environment of a greenhouse, it may not flower until a bit after Easter though. Easter lilies can last in the landscape for several years, but probably not for the long term because the summer heat and extreme climate is rough on them.

So enjoy your beautiful Easter lily in the home until it stops flowering, and if you want to keep it going longer, just give it a spot in the flower bed for a few more years of enjoyment.

## Staking New Trees?

Spring and fall are great seasons to plant trees. Fall is actually the best time, but many people like to plant in the spring and it's also good. When planting trees, there are many things to consider – such as the type of tree, location, selecting a healthy tree at the nursery, good planting techniques, and so on. Another important consideration is whether to stake the tree after planting or not.

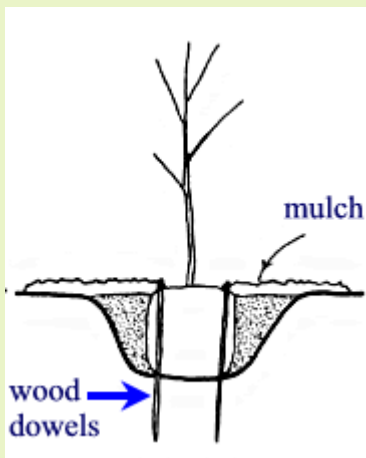
Many people think it's automatically the best thing to do, but staking is actually not recommended if the tree can get by without it. And if a tree does need staking, it should be done properly and carefully, and left on for no more than one year.

Trees generally don't need to be staked just because the trunk is weak and it sways in the wind. But staking isn't needed just for the top of the tree moving around.

Trees actually get their strength from moving in the wind – movement triggers certain cells to grow to develop more strength and sturdiness. If the tree is staked tightly, and doesn't move, it doesn't build strength as quickly.

The main reason that staking would be a good thing to do would be if the wind blows strongly enough for the rootball to tip out of the ground, or if the rootballs shifts and moves around for any reason. It is important for the tree to develop a strong root system and it can't do that if the rootball is moving around.

So in that case, stake the tree with some sturdy T posts sunk well into the ground, and tie it a little loosely with some cabling that has some rubber around it wherever it touches the tree. Then be sure to check it frequently, and don't let the staking material choke or girdle the trunk.



Or an even better option would be to stake the roots only, using wooden dowels or commercially available products that are driven through the roots into the soil underneath. This holds the roots in place but doesn't risk girdling the trunk.

## Desert Style Landscapes

Designing a landscape to look like a desert is not the only style option for yards here, but many people enjoy the look and the low maintenance aspect of cacti, rocks and yucca.

We're located right in the middle of the east Texas climate and the west Texas desert, so we can go either way in the landscape. Desert landscapes can be very unique and interesting, because there are many plant options that have bold colors and distinctive shapes.

A desert style landscape needs good design and a good plan for it to be successful and attractive – not just a flat yard with rocks spread over it. A desert style yard needs height, depth and dimension – so incorporate berms and boulders in a natural, flowing pattern.

And remember that while desert plants use very little water, they will require some supplemental water, especially when they are newly planted and need to become established.

So it's important to remember to water desert plants until they're established. It won't take a whole lot of water, but don't forget about them when the weather gets dry. This will keep your plants looking great almost all year.

When choosing desert plants, it's important to keep cold hardiness in mind. Many desert plants are susceptible to cold weather so pick the ones that will survive the winter.

Some good trees to pick are things like desert willow, Texas mountain laurel, sweet acacia, and stone pine. Some accent plants or shrubs to choose would be desert bird of paradise, opuntia, prickly pear cactus, Texas sage, woolly butterfly bush.

There are many different types of agaves to choose from like century plant, and a lot of yuccas – like red yucca or softleaf yucca.

Good flowering plants would be blackfoot daisy, different salvias and sages, rosemary, Indian blanket, and esperanza.

# Upcoming Events

April 2019

Saturday, April 6, 8:00am—until sold out

## **Master Gardener Plant Sale**

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

Don't miss your chance to buy locally grown plants that are good for the area at low prices!  
For more info, call the Extension Office 325-659-6522

Friday, April 12, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - West Texas Lawn Care**

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Growing a healthy, beautiful lawn is a challenge in west Texas but is definitely possible! Learn the basics of how to have a thick, dense lawn without having to waste water. 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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