

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

April 2020

Spring Landscaping Tips

The beautiful spring weather we have been enjoying is a wonderful encouragement to get outside, and with the current importance of social distancing one of the best ways to enjoy the outdoors is to work in the yard doing some vegetable gardening and landscaping. Gardening is a wonderful activity that provides fresh air, sunshine, vitamin D, exercise and fun. Just be sure to use sunscreen and mosquito repellent and drink plenty of water when it's hot. Here are some tips to help you get the most out of your time at home:



First, add some color and interest to the front porch or the patio with a beautiful combination pot. Use the 'thriller, filler and spiller' technique to really create a showy container planting. The thriller plant would be something really eye-catching, like a tall spikey purple fountain grass. Then fill in around it with some mounding colorful annuals like petunias or begonias. Finally, add trailing plants as the 'spillers' like wooly stemodia or Cuban oregano. Potted plants will need to be watered more often than plants in the ground, so consider utilizing drip irrigation and mulch (yes it can work in potted plants too!).

Spruce up the curb appeal in the flower beds as well with some fresh annual color and beautiful perennials. Choose heat-tolerant plants and be sure to provide the right amount of light. Just remember that 'full sun' on the label doesn't always mean direct, all-day west Texas sun – a little afternoon shade is beneficial to many traditional bedding plants. But there are certainly plenty of options that can take the heat of all-day sun, like pride of Barbados, yellow bells, and lantana.

Keep an eye out for fire ants, as they will start coming out soon. Wait until you know they are out foraging before treating; there are many options ranging from organic products like spinosad to traditional pesticides. The 'Texas Two-Step' method recommended by Texas A&M includes both mound treatments and baits, visit <https://fireant.tamu.edu/controlmethods/twostep/> for more info.

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 warm season vegetables

Pecan Update



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

Summer Blooming Bulbs

When thinking about bulbs, most gardeners think of the early spring bloomers like daffodils and tulips that must be planted in the fall. But there are also some great bulbs that bloom in the summer and early fall, that should be planted now – in the spring.

The Crinum lily is a beautiful, old fashioned flower that is very striking and showy when it blooms. Crinums are pretty tough plants – they have an amazing ability where the bulb can pull itself deeper into the ground when conditions get really dry, to survive harsh circumstances. Then when a rain comes around, they pop back up and start blooming. Extension Horticulture Professor Bill Welch even claims “No crinum has ever died.” That’s a bold claim – especially in the rough conditions of west Texas, but they are definitely worth a try because they are tough as a boot! Some good varieties would be ‘Ellen Bosanquet,’ ‘Bradley,’ and ‘Summer Nocturne.’



The rain lily is another remarkable bulb, getting its name from the way it dependably blooms after a good summer rain. There are a lot of wild rain lilies in San Angelo, and they make quite an impact when they all pop up and bloom – some yards and vacant lots become a sea of small light pink or white blooms a few days after a storm. There are some improved varieties available, with larger, more colorful flowers such as *Zephyranthes grandiflora* and *Zephyranthes labuffarrosa*.

Some additional options include daylily, spider lily, and oxblood lily. These are all wonderful old-fashioned plants that are tough and will keep coming back year after year. Bulbs are a lot of fun to grow because they are often forgotten about when they’re dormant – when they pop up and bloom so beautifully, it’s a great surprise and joy. They also don’t require as much water to get established as most transplants, so they’re good options for a water-conserving yard.

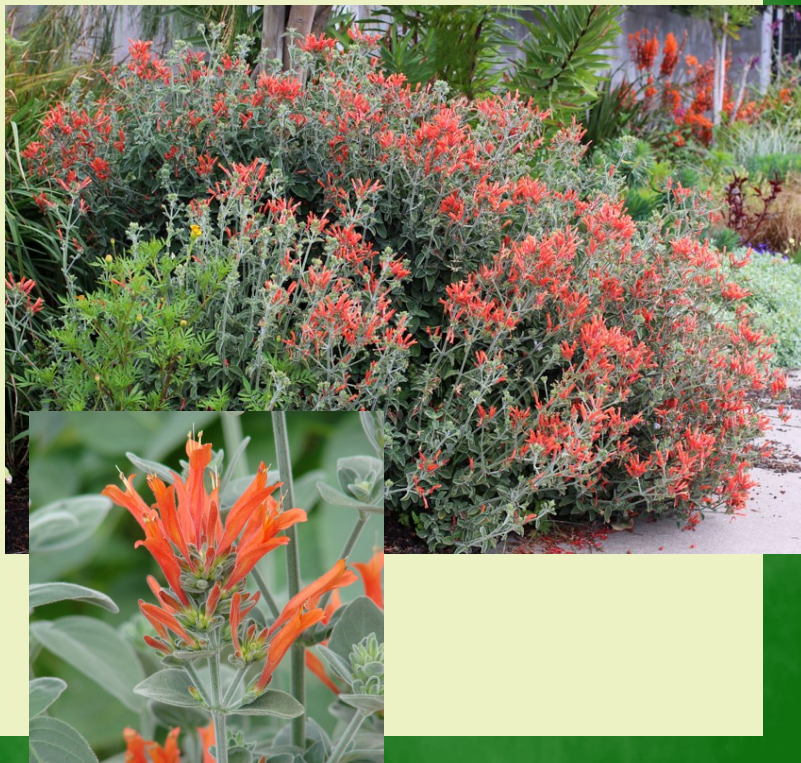
All the plants mentioned are good ‘pass along plants’ so they are great to share with friends and neighbors. They can be dug and divided now to be spread throughout the yard or given away. When planting, soil preparation is always a good step – incorporate some well-finished compost in the bed. Many of these summer bulbs can be found at local nurseries, or can be ordered online.

Plant Spotlight

Hummingbird Plant

Dicliptera suberecta

This striking perennial is drought and heat tolerant. It flowers in summer and fall, and attracts not only hummingbirds but also bees and butterflies. Grows two to three feet tall and wide, and is tolerant to sun or part shade.



Spring Pecan Management

Pecans are popular and beloved trees in San Angelo and the Concho Valley. Though they are not exactly low maintenance they can make a handsome addition to a home landscape; and they not only provide shade, but a delicious edible crop as well. Some of the most important maintenance tasks to keep in mind this time of year to maintain tree health and provide a good crop in the fall include nitrogen fertilizer, zinc fertilizer, irrigation and pecan nut casebearer control.

Young trees will need at least seven to ten gallons of water per week, and older trees will need as much as 50 inches of precipitation annually. Since we average around 20 inches of rainfall in the Concho Valley, that means a significant amount of irrigation is needed to maintain large trees and grow a nice crop of pecans. Adequate moisture is needed all through the growing season in order for the nuts to grow to full size, then fill well with kernel, and for the shuck to split open at the end of the season. So reliable, steady watering is important.

In order to count on a good crop of nuts, keep an eye out for the pecan nut casebearer in the spring, and the pecan weevil later in the summer. The pecan nut casebearer is a small moth that lays eggs in the developing nuts in the spring and can reduce the crop load. If the tree has a heavy crop set, it's ok to not treat because an overloaded tree could benefit from a crop reduction. If treatment is needed though, the timing of the spray is very precise. We manage a mailing list regarding the proper timing and recommended spray dates for case bearers, just contact the extension office at 325-659-6528 to sign up.

Zinc and nitrogen are also important considerations this time of year. Zinc should be sprayed on the leaves during active growth and nitrogen fertilizer should be broadcast on the ground around the drip line and watered in. Apply one pound of 21-0-0 fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter, or $\frac{3}{4}$ lb 33-0-0 fertilizer per inch diameter.

Pecans have been scientifically researched and have been proven to have great health benefits, and are a very valuable addition to the landscape. It's a lot of fun to grow and pick up pecans that you grew yourself. Visit the website <https://americanpecan.com/> to find out more about the health benefits of pecans, to see lots of tasty recipes, and learn about the history of pecans.

Spring and Summer Color

Warm season annuals such as begonias, impatiens and pentas really brighten up the landscape and increase curb appeal and enjoyment of the home. To increase success of growing annuals, as well as perennials, vegetables, shrubs, etc, apply good quality compost and till in before planting, and apply a three-inch-deep layer of mulch after planting to give the plant the best possible environment to grow a healthy root system. Water frequently after planting (even drought tolerant plants), and gradually reduce the frequency of watering but irrigate thoroughly when needed.

Annuals are plants that just live one season or year and don't come back (but some may leave seeds behind that come up the next year) and perennials have hardy root systems and will come back each year. Both are important and add to the curb appeal of a home: annuals generally have more intense color and flower almost constantly, but since they are short lived it's best to limit annuals to smaller sections or pockets in flower beds instead of filling up the yard with them. Perennials are more permanent but usually bloom for a shorter period or don't have as much color impact.

Good plant selection is even more important than soil preparation – for example, plants that need acidic soil like blueberries and azaleas won't survive in alkaline soil, and plants that need cold winters like lilacs won't handle our warm climate. Landscapes in west Texas need plants that can handle alkaline soil, hot temperatures and drought. Visit the website texassuperstar.com to see a list of both perennials and annuals that have been researched-proven to do well in Texas by Texas A&M University.



Preventing Take-All Root Rot Damage

Common turf diseases this time of year include grey leaf spot, take-all root rot, and brown patch. Take-all root rot is a very common concern and there are many questions on it every year. Take-all root rot is a fungal disease that can affect any type of turf, but is seen a lot in St. Augustine lawns. Like the name says, it causes the roots to decay which causes large dead areas, and it is most active in the spring and fall.

The pathogen really thrives in alkaline conditions, and prefers frequent irrigation and excessive nitrogen applications. It is also an 'opportunistic' pest, meaning it's usually not able to damage an otherwise healthy lawn, but if anything stresses the grass, the fungal spores are able to infect the grass.

Keeping the lawn healthy is key to preventing this disease; deep but infrequent irrigation is much better than light, frequent watering for other reasons but is also important regarding take-all. Don't over apply nitrogen – do a soil test to find out exactly how much, if any, nitrogen is needed. This is a good example of why identifying the cause is important, and why it's not a good idea to just give extra water and fertilizer to stressed turf.

Fungicides can be helpful for control, some of the fungicides that are labeled for and effective against take-all include azoxystrobin (trade name Heritage G), thiophanate-methyl (trade name Cleary's 3336) and propiconazole (trade name Banner Maxx). There are also other trade names and generic options available for each.

Research has shown that applying a micronutrient fertilizer with manganese at the same time as the fungicide seems to improve effectiveness. We don't yet have specific guidelines on how much, so follow the fertilizer label directions.

Another recommendation is to top-dress the lawn with peat moss. Peat moss creates a more acidic environment around the turfgrass, which is unfavorable to the pathogen. Apply one to two bales of peat per thousand square foot and rake into the grass. For more info, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/>.

Plant Pumpkins

Pumpkins are a fun crop for home gardeners to try and spring through early summer is a good time to get them planted, especially to grow large pumpkins that need a long growing season. Fall is the last thing on a gardener's mind since it's still spring, but to have home-grown pumpkins for fall decorating, baking and carving, it's time to get them started.

There are always plenty around to purchase when the time comes but growing them at home is worth a try if there's enough space. In the home garden, pumpkins are especially fun to grow with children – the seeds are large and easy to plant, they germinate fast, and the plant grows quickly. A pumpkin patch can be a good science lesson and kids can measure growth and chart progress as the plant and fruit grow.

Texas is actually one of the leading states in commercial pumpkin production, and there are 5,000 to 8,000 acres planted each year – mostly in west Texas. Many plants in the squash family (aka cucurbits) do well in our hot summers – besides pumpkins, other good options to try are watermelons, cantaloupes, and various other squashes such as yellow summer squash, cucumber and acorn squash.

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 larger the variety, the longer it takes. Choose varieties to plant based on what they will be used for – some examples include Dill's Atlantic Giant for large pumpkins, Small Sugar for baking, and Magic Lantern for carving.

The plants are very large and will take up quite a bit of space, so there needs to be plenty of room for them to spread out in a plot with full sun. The soil should be well drained, so till in some compost if it's heavy and compacted.

The pumpkin seedlings will need to be kept moist when germinating; then decrease the frequency but increase the amount given each time as the plants grow. Use drip irrigation to be efficient with water use, and also apply mulch after the plants emerge and become established.

The People/Plant Connection, a local nonprofit organization, hosts a giant pumpkin growing contest each year, and is giving out free giant pumpkin seeds. Contact the People/Plant Connection at 656-3104 to request seeds.

Upcoming Events

April 2020



Due to the circumstances of COVID-19 and the need for social distancing, the April calendar looks quite different! Here are some great online educational opportunities, and be sure to follow the Facebook Page "[Tom Green County Horticulture](#)" for educational posts and updates on other online class opportunities

Every Tuesday and Thursday, 5pm

Texas A&M Agrilife Water University—Free Online Classes

Visit <https://wateruniversity.tamu.edu/events> for classes and topics, and to see the links to join live (not viewable later)



Every Wednesday and Friday, 1pm

Aggie Horticulture—Facebook Live video classes

Visit the [Aggie Horticulture Facebook Page](#) to participate live, or view any of the videos after the broadcast finishes (Facebook account NOT necessary)



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



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