

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

June 2020

Summer Vegetable Gardening

The recent hail storm was very damaging for homes and cars, as well as gardens. Extreme weather can make gardening discouraging but don't give up! Some plants may recover and those that don't can be replanted. Now is a good time of year to plant heat-tolerant vegetables like cantaloupe, watermelon, okra, southern peas, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and other squashes.

For vegetable plants that got pelted with hail, check to see if they put on new growth. They may be able to grow out of the damage – just keep an eye out for diseases and insect pests. Damaged plants will be much more susceptible because of the wounds and torn stems; a preventative treatment with an appropriate product that is safe for vegetables such as neem oil might be a good idea. Consider replacing with healthy new transplants if the damage is severe so production isn't delayed due to recovery time.

Watermelons are especially delicious for the summer and they grow well in the west Texas heat. High temperatures ensure the fruit is sweet, but be sure to water adequately. Plant in rich, well-drained soil, or incorporate compost if soil is heavy and sticky. High quality plant-based compost will loosen up soil, increasing aeration to plant roots and also allow for better drainage. Incorporate a fertilizer high in phosphorus in a banding pattern along the row before planting. Weed control is essential for high yields, so plan ahead for a good weeding strategy. A four-inch deep layer of organic mulch can keep many weeds at bay, or go out daily with a scuffle hoe to disturb weeds before they grow large. Just don't cut too deeply into the soil and disturb the watermelon plant roots.

Okra is another great vegetable to plant for summer production. They are tough, easy to grow plants that can provide a lot to eat once they start producing. Okra is fairly drought tolerant, but will produce more if irrigated regularly. Once the plants start producing pods, be sure to harvest daily. Leaving them on the plant too long will allow them to get tough and stringy, and will also slow down production.

While okra is self pollinating, watermelon and all the other cucurbits (squashes, cucumbers etc) require insect pollination. If plants are flowering but not setting fruit, consider planting something to attract bees such as catmint or salvia. For more info on these and other home garden crops, visit aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu.

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



Summer and Fall Blooming Bulbs

Early spring-blooming flowers like daffodils and tulips are usually the first things that come to mind when thinking about planting bulbs. But there are many different types of bulbs that bloom in other seasons as well, and right now is a good time of year to plant summer and fall blooming bulbs.

'Bulb' is a specific botanical term – true bulbs are swollen underground stems that have layers (like onions). But 'bulb' is used more commonly to refer to any underground structure that new plants can be grown from, such as iris rhizomes, caladium tubers, and gladiolus corms. So while it is good to know the difference for planting and propagating purposes, it's ok to lump them together and call them all bulbs when referring to planting these various types of underground stems.

If you have a friend or neighbor with these flowers, ask if they are willing to share. If you don't have a source to share from, many can be ordered online or found in local nurseries. Some examples of bulbs to dig and divide now include crinums, spider lilies, rain lilies, oxblood lilies, lycoris, and Philippine lily. Later in the year, in the early fall, will be time to dig and divide things like iris, daylily, amaryllis and snowflakes.

Crinums are a personal favorite of mine because they

are beautiful but also very tough.

Texas A&M University Horticulture Professor Dr. Bill Welch famously told Southern Living Magazine that

"no crinum has ever died." While that may have been said tongue-in-cheek, they are very hardy plants. Some varieties to consider would be 'Milk and Wine,' 'Ellen Bosanquet,' 'Bradley,' and 'Summer Nocturne.' While they are tough once established, crinums are slow to get going. So don't expect blooms the first year and give them a few years to really start flowering well.



Rain lilies are also a lot of fun to have because they pop up so suddenly after a warm summer rainfall. There are many wild rain lilies in Concho Valley lawns, but larger and more colorful improved varieties are available in nurseries and online.

Pass-along plants are such a fun tradition to share with friends and neighbors; not only can they handle being divided and shared but they thrive on it. When planting, prepare the soil well by digging and loosening it up and incorporate some high-quality compost.

Plant Spotlight

Blue Daze

Evolvulus glomeratus

Blue Daze is the latest plant to earn the "Texas Superstar" designation given by Texas A&M. It is an annual that loves heat and sun, and makes a nice addition to pots and raised beds because of its trailing habit. For more details, visit

<https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/05/08/blue-daze-named-texas-superstar/>



Khaki Weed and Take-All Root Rot

It is the time of year to discuss two of the most common landscape questions that local homeowners ask about – how to control khakiweed and how to manage take-all root rot in St. Augustine lawns.

Khakiweed (*Alternanthera pungens*) is not up yet, it is too early in the season; but it is one of the most annoying weeds in west Texas yards. Homeowners that have struggled with it in the past should get a head start and make plans for prevention and control now. Khakiweed grows flat, spread out on the ground with oval-shaped leaves and produces painful, annoying burs. It is very opportunistic and grows well in bare spots and thinned out turf, so the first and most effective means of control is to ensure something is occupying the soil. Deep mulch, dense groundcovers and healthy thick turf are the most important things that can keep khakiweed from taking over the landscape.

Khakiweed is a perennial, meaning it comes back from roots so pre-emergent will not totally control it – but pre-emergent can be helpful if applied in the late winter to prevent more plants from coming up by seed. Post-emergent herbicides that contain a combination of 2,4-D with mecoprop, carfentrazone, dicamba, or metsulfuron (for example, Fertlome brand Weed Free Zone) are effective for controlling existing plants. Apply early when the plants start to emerge, while they are still small; large mature plants will not be easily controlled with herbicide and should be physically removed.

Take-all root rot is a fungal disease that affects mainly St. Augustine grass, and causes roots to decay. Symptoms usually show up in the early summer – starting with yellowing that eventually turns brown, leaving large dead patches. The pathogen thrives in alkaline soil, with frequent irrigation and excessive nitrogen. So to manage it in the home landscape, first start with good cultural management of the grass. Water deeply and as infrequently as possible, instead of watering several times per week. Apply nitrogen fertilizer based on a soil test only and not just on a set schedule. Beyond cultural control, additional treatments should be based on the time of year the pathogen is active. Some experts say the disease is active in the spring, while others say fall. If take-all is a significant problem, try treating in both spring and fall. Recommended treatment includes top-dressing with sphagnum peat moss and applying a fungicide such as azoxystrobin, as well as a micro-nutrient fertilizer that contains manganese.

For more detailed info on these common landscape nuisances, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/>

Hanging Basket Tips

Potted plants and hanging baskets can really add a lot of curb appeal and beautify a porch or patio, but can be a challenge 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 home landscape.

For hanging baskets that will be in full sun, choose plants that are drought tolerant and thrive in heat. Some good options for tough hanging basket plants that can take lots of sun include: dew plant, ice plant, trailing white or purple lantana, moss rose, blue daze, bougainvillea, trailing rosemary, sedum, and sweet potato vine. These are all heat and drought tolerant, and there are other nice choices as well at local nurseries.

Choices for shady areas, plants that can thrive under a porch roof, include things like 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 potted plants to dry out fast and they will need to be watered often. If plants are stressed they often go into survival mode and will not have new growth - so to get the attractive, healthy growth and have the plants cascade well down the pot, water thoroughly when the soil dries out on top.

For hanging baskets that are held onto and overwintered, it can help to refresh them each year. Replace the potting soil and repot into a one-size larger pot if it looks rootbound. 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 – peat-based mix is better for potted plants.

Be sure not to let the potting mix dry out too much because the peat moss in most mixes will tighten up, shrink, and 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.

Establishing Turf

The lawn is often an integral part of a home landscape. For those that prefer not having to mow and water as much as lawns require, there are alternative options like utilizing more groundcover, mulch and hardscaping – simply do an internet search for ‘no lawn yard’ for design ideas. A landscape without turf is definitely a possibility and can be done in a very beautiful, functional way. In fact, a yard full of shrubs, groundcovers, perennials etc. is much more interesting and attractive than a yard with nothing but grass. But many homeowners enjoy the lawn and find it necessary to have at least some turf; and while it is a good idea to limit the area turfgrass covers to about a third of the landscape to conserve water and reduce the need for fertilizer, etc. lawns do provide certain benefits that some want in their yard.

So for those that want to rejuvenate a thinned out lawn or want to start over and plant new turfgrass, this year is a good opportunity to plant grass. Once established, lawns can be ‘trained’ to be more water efficient by starting with good soil preparation and by watering correctly. But it does take frequent irrigation to get a lawn started, so those that would like to create a thick, healthy lawn should plant it soon so that it can grow in well while we are blessed with so much rainfall.

This is an especially good time right now to start from seed. Seed is less expensive than sod, and warm season grass seed like bermuda grass will germinate best in warm temperatures so early summer is ideal. Sod can technically be planted any time of year, but is best planted in spring or late summer/fall. Whichever method is used, start with good soil preparation to ensure success and also to conserve water after the lawn is established. Deeper rooted plants are more drought tolerant and healthier in hot weather, and the first step to growing deep roots is to prepare the soil. Clear the area of all plant matter and debris, then apply compost over the ground and till it in. Spread the seed according to the label instructions, or place the sod in an alternating pattern (like how bricks are laid) and water lightly and frequently at first. As the seeds sprout or the sod roots in, reduce the irrigation frequency but water more deeply. For more information, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on the ‘Establishing Turfgrass’ link.

June To-Do List

June is usually the month when landscaping and gardening tasks slow down a bit and gardeners just focus on surviving the summer, but there are plenty of different things to keep in mind right now to keep the landscape healthy and happy.

First, deadhead flowers as they fade to keep them blooming well. Also, plant some summer color to keep the yard looking fresh and bright when it heats up in July and August. Some good heat tolerant flowers to consider include lantana, pentas, yellow bells, Mexican heather, rock penstemon, purple fountain grass, and Pride of Barbados.

With 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 started coming out, 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 sandblasted look) progressing to a burnt or scorched looking leaf. There has been an abundance of various types of pest caterpillars, including mesquite cutworms and Sonoran tent caterpillars among others. 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.’

Upcoming Events

June 2020



As we begin to slowly resume in-person educational programs, we will make safety a priority—social distancing will be followed. For June, programs will be limited to 10 people in attendance. For the most up-to-date info, follow the Facebook Page "[Tom Green County Horticulture](#)."

Thursday, June 18, 2:00pm-4:00pm

Gardening Seminar—Don't Throw Away That Orchid (How to care for orchids and other gift plants)

Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, 416 South Oaks St

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; learn how to keep and care for orchids, Easter lilies, poinsettias and other gift plants. We will also cover basic houseplant care.

Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, June 19, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Top Tips for Summer Landscaping

Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, 416 South Oaks St

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to keep the landscape alive and thriving through the difficult hot summer weather. Without wasting water!

Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

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



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