

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

August 2020

Summer Insect Pests

Gardening is tough in the summer! Heat and insect pests can make it grueling for both people and plants. But there are still tasks to do now, such as the planting of fall warm season vegetables like tomatoes and squash. So try getting out early in the morning when it's cool (or at least not AS hot) and keep an eye out for summer insect pests.

Grasshoppers have been a significant problem this year, and are hard to control because they just keep coming in from surrounding areas. Most severe outbreaks occur around landscapes in rural areas near farmland, so they may not be as bad of an issue in urban areas. Damage can be minimized by using barriers, insecticides, and resistant plants. According to Dr. Mike Merchant, Extension Entomology Specialist, homeowners can protect valuable plants, to some extent, through the use of residual insecticides. Another option—geotextile fabrics can be used as barriers to protect valuable vegetables and specimen ornamental plants. If grasshoppers are a repeated, annual issue in the landscape try plants that they tend to avoid. According to Dr. Merchant, some options include: artemisia, American beautyberry, crape myrtle, lantana, moss rose, purselane, turk's cap, and rock rose.

Mosquitos aren't plant pests but they certainly are a pain to the gardener. Be diligent about preventing mosquitos in the landscape, and protect yourself from being bitten, since they have the potential to spread disease. First, make sure there is no standing water in the landscape. Even small containers like unused pet dishes can collect water and provide a breeding site for mosquitos. For ponds, water troughs and other necessary standing water use a mosquito dunk – a control option that is safe to use in water with fish or that animals will drink. Use a reliable mosquito repellent and consider other control options such as traps, zappers and residual sprays. Visit tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture to see some resources for controlling both grasshoppers and mosquitos in the home landscape.

Other common landscape pests to watch out for include aphids, mealy bugs, scale, spider mites, and caterpillars. Not all caterpillars are pests, some are beneficial butterflies. But moth caterpillars can be destructive in the garden and landscape. Sophora worm on Texas mountain laurel, walnut caterpillar on pecan trees, and tomato horn worm on vegetables are just a few to scout for. Bt is a non-toxic pesticide that can be used to control pest caterpillars, and does not harm bees or other beneficial insects except butterflies; be sure to avoid getting it on butterfly food or nectar plants.

August To-Do's

- Lightly prune shrub roses and perennials to stimulate a fall flush of blooms; if they are looking stressed, prune more severely
- Provide water for backyard wildlife - songbirds, butterflies etc.
- Continue to deadhead annuals to stimulate new flowers
- Plant spring-blooming wildflower seeds

Pecan Update



Congratulations to our State Pecan Show Winners!

Bill Book - State Grand Champion,
Classic and New Division -
Burkett

Ernest Torres Jr - 1st Place
Ocone, 2nd Place Hopi

Cindy Hanks - 2nd Place Mohawk

Chester McCown—2nd Place
State Champion Native

Watch for pecan weevils which usually emerge in mid to late August
For more info:
pecankernel.tamu.edu

Edible Landscaping

Edible landscaping is a fun concept that promotes utilizing fruits, vegetables, herbs, etc in the landscape design in place of some traditional landscape plants. It's possible to create a landscape that is both beautiful to look at and also produces some delicious food!

Some of the fruit trees, shrubs and vines that do well in west Texas include pomegranate, pear, persimmon, jujube, blackberry, fig and grape. For a list of recommended varieties for the Concho Valley, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture>. Another very helpful website is <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>

Incorporating herbs into the landscape is a terrific way to have a source of delicious flavorings for food, and also provide good plants for butterflies and bees. Small herbs like thyme, oregano and marjoram are great for borders and edges while larger herbs like sage, lemon balm, rosemary and mint are good for large beds or as background plants. Cool season herbs like parsley and cilantro can really help brighten up a dreary winter landscape.

Some plants that are generally known only as ornamentals also have culinary use, such as edible flowers; but be sure to always properly identify a plant as safe to eat before consuming. Flowers like daylilies, hibiscus, impatiens, pansies and roses have edible petals that can be used to decorate desserts, be tossed in sal-

ads, or added as beautiful garnishes. Just treat edible flowers the same as herbs and vegetables and don't use pesticides that can risk health and safety.

To learn more about fruits for the home landscape, join us for the Fall Landscaping Symposium! This annual event provided by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners is a great opportunity to hear from top speakers from around the state. This year, the symposium is free to join and will be offered online. One of the sessions will be 'Fruit Production for the Home Landscape' by Tim Hartmann, Earth-Kind Specialist for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. See the attached flyer for more details, and visit txmg.org/conchovalley for registration info (coming soon). The event will be Saturday, September 12th from 9am to 12pm, and will also feature Skip Richter presenting "Organic Practices that Work" and Vikram Baliga 'Mulii-Purpose Landscape Design.'

Another learning opportunity for learning is the "Beautiful, Edible, Earth-Kind Landscapes" seminar series, focusing on both edibles for the landscape as well as general landscape design and maintenance. See the attached flyer, and visit tomgreen.agrilife.org to register. Cost to attend any or all of the nine seminars is \$30, and there is a limit of 10 attendees per session. Classes will be Tuesdays, 6:30-8:00pm from August 11 - October 6.

Plant Spotlight

Sunset Hibiscus

Hibiscus calyphyllus

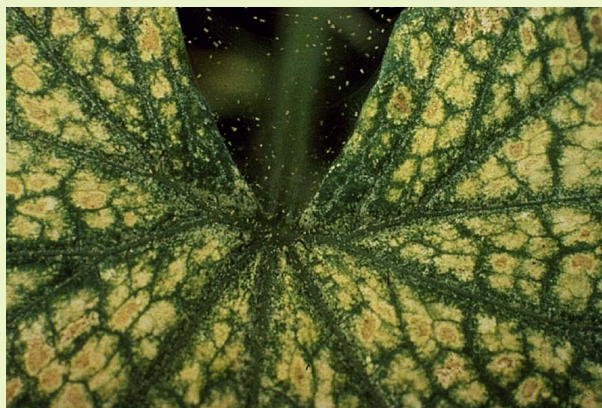
This beautiful perennial has large sunny yellow flowers all through the summer, is deer resistant and loves the heat. Also attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds!



Controlling Spider Mites

Spider mites can be a major plant problem this time of year. Spider mites are very small, almost too tiny to see without a hand lens or magnifying glass, but they can do a lot of damage to many plants and really thrive in hot weather. Since they're so small, they can be hard to diagnose and identify – but here are some things to look for.

The first sign of spider mite damage is often a pale discoloration of the leaf, turning bronze or silver. The upper sides of the leaves can also have a mottled discoloration that looks sandblasted, and this symptom is called stippling. The leaves continue to lose color, turn whitish and look stressed, and underneath the leaf, debris starts building up that looks like sand. Finally, webbing will start to appear and leaf tissue dies, turning brown and necrotic.



Spider mites do affect many types of plants, but there are some that are more prone to spider mite

damage so always be on the lookout. Some of the plants they often attack include tomatoes, peppers, beans, marigolds and milkweed. Inspect these plants for spider mites regularly, and any others that you tend to have problems with in the summer. Take a white sheet of paper and shake the plant over it – get a magnifying glass, and if you can see small brown specs moving on the paper, it's probably spider mites.

Spider mites are arachnids, not insects, so most insecticides are not very effective. Overuse of insecticides actually makes spider mite problems worse, because of destroying natural enemies, beneficial insects and predatory mites. Try spraying down the plants with a strong stream of soapy water, making sure to get good coverage underneath the leaves. Neem oil is labeled for mites and can be purchased at nurseries and garden centers. Just be sure to catch the problem early, or they will be impossible to control. If webbing has formed, that's usually a sign that it's too late – take the plant out so the pests don't continue to spread to other plants.

Time for Spring Bulbs?

Spring is probably the last thing on the mind of most gardeners right now. But when spring does come, it's always wonderful to have beautiful colorful bulbs popping up after getting through winter. And in order to have the showy spring blooms, they must be planted in the fall or early winter. Planting spring bulbs in warm soil causes them to rot, so don't plant too early. Garden centers and nurseries start selling them as early as August, so go ahead and buy bulbs when they're fresh and selection is good – just hold on to them until it's time to plant.



In Texas, some bulbs are treated as annuals because we don't get the long, cold winters required to set new blooms. If left for a second year more, they will just produce foliage but no flowers – or the warm weather can even cause the bulb to rot. Tulips and hyacinths are popular and beautiful, but should be pre-chilled – if they have not already been chilled by the producer, refrigerate for 60 days prior to planting. They will likely not rebloom after the first year.

Daffodils are dependable perennial bloomers in Texas and require no pre-chilling or special treatments. And they may be a little harder to find, but if tulips are what you want, there are a few varieties that are better perennials for the south – they will rebloom year after year even in our warmer climate. Look for selections such as Texas tulip and Lady Jane tulip. Other reliable options that will naturalize and rebloom in Texas include paperwhites and snowflakes.

If you do purchase bulbs early, store in a cool, dry location. A refrigerator can be good, whether they need chilling or not, to preserve freshness; but they cannot be stored in a fridge that also contains fruits



and vegetables, as the ethylene gas they emit will damage the bloom. Don't seal bulbs up in airtight containers, but in a brown paper sack so they can 'breathe.' Once the soil is cool, under 55 degrees, plant the bulbs. It takes a while to see the results, but it's well worth it in the spring.

Keep or Compost? Transitioning from Summer to Fall Color

We're in the peak of summer right now, but before long it will be time to start pulling out summer annuals from patio planters and flower beds to replace them with fall color, and also shear back perennials so they have a strong fall blooming period. Some summer annuals and perennials will look great all through autumn, and some are already looking rough, so changing annual color in beds and planters is a gradual process over the whole season.

Depending on the current state of your annuals, go ahead and take out any that are looking particularly stressed or that are pest-infested. Sometimes it's better to start fresh with a few new plants, rather than trying to hold on to annuals that will take time to recover or that will spread pests to surrounding plants. Take this chance to evaluate the planter and soil. If the plants struggled with root rot or other soil borne pests, replace with fresh potting mix. In beds, incorporate compost to enrich the soil.

For perennials that are looking healthy and happy, give them a light shearing to stimulate new growth and lots of fall flowers. Perennials that are especially damaged or weak can be pruned back more heavily, about a third or even half if they are well established and have a good root system.

When it comes to choosing what kind of plants to use, remember to be selective and choose plants that are known to do well in the local climate. Here are some examples of good fall flowers: zinnias, marigolds, celosias and pentas are great flowers for early fall color. Always try to buy plants that have buds but no flowers yet – plants that are fully blooming won't establish as well as plants that just have buds.

A little later in the season when it cools down will be a good time to plant dianthus and chrysanthemums. Dianthus are sold as annuals but if planted in the right conditions, some come back and live as a perennial. Chrysanthemums are perennial if you buy garden mums, florist mums are considered annuals. Autumn joy sedum is another nice option, it's a drought tolerant fall plant and has beautiful flowers. One of the quintessential fall perennials is fall aster, a true show-off during autumn.

Planting Sod

Sod can be planted nearly any time of year, but spring and early fall are better seasons for laying sod. Warm-season grasses need time to develop a good root system before cold weather arrives, so don't wait too long and plant too close to winter.

Plan ahead by measuring the size of the area that will be sodded. Sod is sold by the square foot, usually on a pallet of 450 square feet. Find a source to order the sod variety you want, and plan the timing carefully; it should be freshly harvested right before you pick up, then ensure you can plant immediately. Sod will perform best when planted within 36 hours of harvest.

Prepare the ground by controlling weeds and existing vegetation. Then loosen the soil by tilling or raking to improve root contact to the soil. Once the soil surface is smooth and well worked, lay the sod squares or rolls.

Lay the sod in a staggered, 'brickwork' pattern and push the squares tightly together, because the pieces might shrink as they establish. Quickly growing grasses like St. Augustine or Bermuda can be spaced out with bare soil in between sod, this is called plugging and the grass will fill in the bare spots if cared for properly. But sodding the entire area creates an 'instant lawn', and it's easier to keep weeds controlled. Zoysia is slow growing and the entire area should be fully covered.

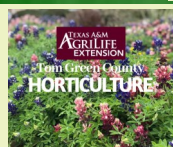
Use a weighted roller to press the sod into the ground to improve rooting and create a smooth, even lawn.

Water immediately after planting, and water several times a day for the first week. This might sound wasteful, but it's just a quick, light watering each time – just enough to keep the roots damp. Then begin to decrease how often the grass is watered but apply more each time until good roots are established. Well-established turf should be watered once per week in the summer, but it's a gradual process to get new sod to that point.

For more info click here: <https://agriflifeextension.tamu.edu/library/landscaping/ecological-turf-tips-how-to-select-and-install-sod/>

Upcoming Events

August 2020



As we resume in-person educational programs, we are making safety a priority—social distancing will be followed. **For August, 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, August 13, 2:00pm-4:00pm

Gardening Seminar—Plant Propagation

Location: Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 North US Highway 67, San Angelo

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Hands-on workshop to learn how to create new plants through stem cuttings and other methods! Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Thursday, August 20, 2:00pm-4:00pm

PPC Lecture Series: Use Less Salt—More Herbs

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

Cost: **Free**, donations accepted

Speakers: Allison Watkins and Courtney Redman

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to grow and use herbs for delicious, healthy meals!

Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, August 21, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Plants That Can Take the Heat

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Good plant selection is key to creating a beautiful, low maintenance landscape. Learn about some of the best selections for the Concho Valley! Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Tuesdays from August 11—October 6, 6:30pm—8:00pm

Beautiful, Edible Earth-Kind Landscapes—Seminar Series

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

Cost: \$30 to attend series

Speaker: Allison Watkins

See attached flyer, visit tomgreen.agrilife.org to register

Save the Date! Fall Landscaping Symposium

Saturday, September 12, 9am-12pm - ONLINE

Keep an eye on txmg.org/conchovalley for registration info - coming soon

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



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