Concho Valley Horticulture Update

September 2020

Grow Cool Season Vegetables

It's still hot, but fall weather will come eventually – right? I sure hope so! When it does cool down, it will be a great time to plant cool season vegetables. We are lucky that in the Texas climate we are able to grow food pretty much any time of year, we just need to adjust the crops based on the season. Warm season crops like tomatoes, squash, cucumber and peppers can do really well in the fall before the first freeze of November but have to be planned ahead of time and get planted in the late summer. Then when temperatures start to drop, it will soon be time to focus on winter crops like spinach, kale, and carrots– for the most part, all the leafy greens and root crops.

Some of the cool season fall- and winter-planted vegetables that we can grow include artichoke, asparagus, beet, bok choy, broccoli, brussels sprout, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, chard, collard greens, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, onion, snap pea, radish, shallot, spinach, and turnip. What a list! There is something there for just about any household to enjoy. And these cool season crops don't have to be planted in a large garden plot, they can also be incorporated into the existing flower beds around to home. Many of them are very showy and pretty, bringing some fresh greenery to an otherwise dormant winter landscape.

Most should be planted around late September through early November, and again in February. Although some can be planted any time – even in the middle of winter. Radish, spinach, lettuce, kale, and chard are particularly cold hardy and even young new plants can handle cold weather. Onions should be planted around October if starting from seed, and sets (transplants) are planted in January. Asparagus crowns should be planted in January. For more info on growing a specific crop, visit https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/ to see a list of helpful info sheets. Start looking at the different crop options and choose a few to include in the home landscape - plant next month to enjoy some home-grown healthy food!

September To-Do's

- Purchase bulbs while selection is good, but wait until November to plant
- Plant wildflower seeds
- Divide spring blooming perennials such as iris and daylily
- Adjust irrigation as temperatures cool down
- Apply Pre-emergent weed control for winter weeds

Pecan Update

Late season pests to keep an eye out for:

Pecan Weevil - timing depends on variety, treat when nuts enter dough stage and repeat 10 days later

Stink bugs/leaffooted bugs: pyrethroids give best control

Black Pecan Aphid: continue to monitor and control through September

Controlling Khakiweed

Some of the most common questions I receive from homeowners are about identifying and controlling khakiweed. Khakiweed is a broadleaf, warm-season perennial plant that grows low to the ground in a flattened out, prostrate manner; it has small white flowers in the summer that develop into prickly burs in the fall. The burs break apart into small 'spears' that can easily attach to animals, clothes, shoes and equipment. Khakiweed has a thick, deep taproot that helps it survive drought, and it can be challenging to control.

The number one factor in keeping khakiweed at bay is to have something to occupy the ground space – it thrives in bare spots and thinned out turf. Whether it be a thick healthy lawn, deep mulch, groundcover, etc., there needs to be something to intentionally cover the ground to reduce weed growth. This can really help prevent new khakiweed from coming up, but here are some suggestions for controlling existing plants and other ideas to help with prevention.

First, use gloved hands or a garden hoe to physically pull up large, mature plants – be sure to get the taproot. Herbicide will not be very effective at killing fully grown plants. For smaller, actively growing young plants a herbicide that contains a combination of several active ingredients is more effective that just a 2,4-D broadleaf weed killer. Try a product that has a combination of 2,4-D with mecoprop, carfentrazone, dicamba, or metsulfuron (for example, Fertilome brand 'Weed Free Zone').

Since khakiweed is a perennial, meaning it comes back from roots, pre-emergent will not fully control it; but pre-emergent is still very helpful if applied in the late winter (around February) to prevent new plants from coming up by seed. There are no pre-emergent herbicides labeled for khakiweed specifically, but a Texas A&M bulletin written by Scott Nolte, David Graf and Becky Trammel recommends trying a product with the active ingredient isoxaben (for example, trade name 'Gallery'). See https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/ to view the full publication. Always follow label directions when using any type of weed killer product.

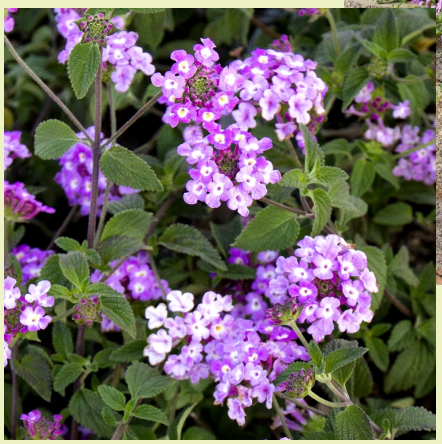
Another tip - don't scalp the lawn or mow too low, as this plant loves to grow out flat on the open ground. Raise the mower a and cut the grass a little higher so the turf can shade it out. In summary, now is the time of year when khakiweed begins to be the most troublesome because the burs really start to develop – but control efforts need to start in the late winter with pre-emergent, and early spring with broadleaf herbicide when the plants are still small.

Plant Spotlight

Trailing Lantana

Lantana montevidensis

Trailing purple lantana is a great low-growing, mat-forming perennial that trails nicely over retaining wall or sprawls and fills up landscape beds with nice vibrant purple color. It is a good for butterflies and bees, is deer resistant, and also very tough and tolerant to heat.



Need to Move a Plant?

Whether a desirable native plant sprouted up in a less than ideal place or a landscape plant needs to be moved to a different spot, plants don't have to stay in their initial spot forever. Moving the same plant shouldn't be done multiple times in a short period of time but many plants can be successfully relocated if needed. Successful plant relocation isn't a spur of the moment decision though, it takes some planning ahead and a bit of work to ensure the tree, shrub, or perennial will survive the transition.

There are professional tree movers that can even move large, mature trees but it's quite an ordeal and is expensive. It takes a lot of planning ahead but can be done for trees that have special importance and can't stay put. For an average gardener or homeowner, stick to moving smaller plants – try to move trees before they have a trunk that is an inch in diameter, and move shrubs before they reach about four feet tall. The younger/smaller the plant, the better.

Start by root pruning a full season before moving. Many plants can be moved just about any time of year as long as the process was started well in advance, but summer is the worst time of year for transplanting. Start with the root pruning in the fall, work toward building up a good rootball close to the trunk, then dig and move the plant in the winter for best results. To prune the roots, use a spade to partially dig the rootball. Think of digging in a dotted line around the plant, severing some roots but leaving others. This pruning stimulates roots to branch out and can increase the amount of feeder roots inside the rootball that will be dug later. Water the plant well and keep it growing healthy until time to move. This will help reduce transplant shock and increase the speed of recovery after replanting.

A few months later, finish digging the rootball and be sure to lift it carefully – don't let it crack or fall apart. Have the new hole dug ahead of time and ready to go, plant immediately and water in well. Add mulch over the roots. Be sure to settle the filler soil in well around the roots, but don't tamp down too hard – this can break the small threadlike roots that are needed to absorb water and nutrients. After transplanting, prune the canopy of the plant back a bit to help compensate for root loss and encourage new growth.

Rain Gardens

'When it rains it pours' is a good phrase for the fall season in west Texas! It is certainly very dry through the summer, but in the fall we often get heavy rain events that tend to cause flooding issues. In home and commercial landscapes, flooding and stormwater problems can be mitigated through the installation of rainwater harvesting systems and rain gardens. Many gardeners are familiar with rainwater harvesting and already utilize rain tanks; in addition to providing a source of water to use later when needed, rainwater harvesting also has the potential to reduce stormwater runoff, and keep fertilizers, debris and other pollution out of the rivers.

Less commonly discussed is the topic of rain gardens. A rain garden is an area designed to slow down storm water; it is an artificial depression in the landscape that collects and stores storm water runoff until it can infiltrate the soil.

A rain garden is a type of 'passive' rainwater harvesting, as opposed to 'active' harvesting which is storing the water in a tank for later use. It is an approach that can prevent flooding and erosion and turn storm water problems and flooding into water supply assets by slowing run-off and allowing the water to soak into the ground. Rain gardens are not ponds and do not continue to hold water after the rain stops. They are usually planted with deep-rooted native plants that are hardy and attractive, and help channel the water into the ground. Plants in a rain garden can give color to the landscape throughout the year and can be attractive landscape features. Rain gardens can be designed for an individual yard or for a whole neighborhood. They also provide a habitat for desirable wildlife including birds, butterflies and other insects.

To create a rain garden, dig a shallow depression in the soil and create a berm around the back to hold in water. Plants should be selected carefully; choose plants that can handle both wet and dry conditions. Some examples include: skullcap, wax myrtle, holly fern, cardinal flower, rudbeckia, and blue mist flower. Visit rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu to find out more information on both rainwater harvesting tanks and rain gardens. Also, visit the Concho Valley Master Gardener's demonstration garden at the Tom Green 4-H Center in San Angelo, located at 3168 N. US Highway 67. There are three 3,000 gallon tanks around the building, a smaller rain tank at the front, a rain garden, and a 'wildlife guzzler' demo. Those interested in rainwater harvesting can stop by any time to take a look.

Order Strawberries Now

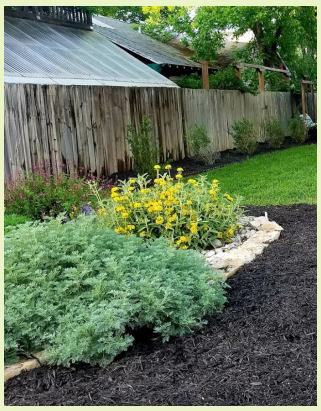
It's not exactly strawberry season, but just like other iconic spring garden favorites like daffodils and bluebonnets, strawberries should be planted in the fall to have a good spring harvest. Strawberries are cool-weather plants and don't produce well when it's hot. Research done at the Texas A&M Research Center in Lubbock shows that strawberry plants planted in October that are protected from freezing temperatures are much more productive than if planted in the spring. So now is the time to order plants!

It gets too hot, too soon for spring-planted strawberries to grow well in Texas and many gardeners only get a few berries before the plants give up. But the cooler weather and rain that comes in the fall is the perfect setting to establish new plants, and then in the early spring they will produce early enough to get a better crop. It may be hard to find transplants in the fall, since strawberries are traditionally planted in the spring, but try ordering online or from seed catalogs – the plants can be shipped. Some of the recommended varieties include Festival, Chandler, Seascape and Radiance.

Plan ahead and have a good system in place that is convenient and effective for freeze protection. Strawberry plants (with no flowers or fruit) are cold hardy and can withstand freezing temperatures down to 15 degrees, but cold weather will slow down growth. A small hoop house or 'low tunnel' structure is a good choice; clear plastic can be secured snugly around the structure when needed to trap warmer air and protect from cold winds. Be sure to remove the covering promptly when temperatures warm up, otherwise it gets to hot inside when the sun comes out. In the late winter, when the plants start to flower and make fruit, they need to be protected from even just a light frost.

Strawberries prefer high quality, well-drained soil so amend with compost if planting in the ground and create mounds so the plants can grow on top and have better drainage. A steady, even fertilizer and irrigation regimen will help encourage healthy plants. For a helpful guide on fall planted strawberries and instructions with photos for creating a low tunnel, visit https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/.

Earth-Kind Soil Management



Earth-Kind landscaping simply means using techniques that reduce the need for fertilizer, pesticides, and water - and also reducing yard waste entering landfills. Soil management has a lot to do with creating an Earth-Kind landscape, and is pretty simple - in the most basic terms it comes down to improving soil with compost and utilizing organic mulch.

Organic matter in soil can reduce the need for fertilizer, and when combined with good plant selection many landscape beds won't need any fertilizer. Just remember the phrase 'compost once, mulch forever.'

When creating new beds or planting new plants, incorporate good quality plant-based compost and mix into the soil well. After planting, add 3-4 inches of wood mulch. Mulch does many good things for plants and soils - such as breaking down into additional organic matter, moderating soil temperature, preventing weeds, and reducing the need for water by preventing evaporation.

September is an excellent time of year to replenish mulch in beds to the recommended 3-4 inches deep. There is no need to remove leftover mulch, or till in it. Simply apply the new mulch on top.

So what exactly is mulch? It can be any material laid out on the soil surface - it can be organic or inorganic material.

Organic mulches are things like wood chips, shredded bark, composted cotton burrs, peat moss, compost, pine needles and sawdust.

The different inorganic mulches are shredded rubber tires, plastic film, crushed rock, pea gravel, or anything else used to cover the soil. There are appropriate uses for these kinds of mulches, but a wood mulch is often the best bet for a traditional landscape.

Don't be upset when mulch breaks down and disappears after a year or so, this is actually a good thing - it means the mulch is improving your soil and making it more fertile.

Upcoming Events

September 2020

As we resume in-person educational programs, we are making safety a priority—social distancing will be followed. For the most up-to-date info, follow the Facebook Page "Tom Green County Horticulture."

Thursday, September 10, 2:00pm-4:00pm

West Texas Gardening 101—Turf Talk

Location: Bes-Tex, 4510 Adobe, San Angelo

Cost: Free, donations accepted

Speaker: Monte Sims, owner Bes-Tex Supply

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to keep the lawn growing and thriving in west Texas! Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, September 11, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Rain Gardens: Another Way to Harvest Rainfall

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

Cost: $5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Learn how to keep the rain that falls on your own property, instead of running off.

Reservation required: Call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Fall Landscaping Symposium

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

Register now! Visit txmg.org/conchovalley to sign up and to see details

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

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