

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

November 2020

## Get Ready for Winter

It's still up-and-down as far as the weather goes, but it's safe to say that it's time to get cool season annuals planted and other late fall/early winter landscaping jobs done. Pansies, stock, and snapdragons are beautiful selections to keep the home looking bright and colorful even through the dreary wintery days. Also try growing some winter vegetables, whether in a dedicated vegetable garden plot or just throughout the existing landscape beds. Leafy greens like lettuce, spinach, swiss chard, kale, collards and cabbage are nice additions to flower beds – besides keeping the landscape green and interesting through the winter, they are also tasty!

This is a great time of year to plant trees and shrubs, giving them time to overcome transplant shock and start to develop a good root system before the hot summer arrives. Apply mulch around newly planted trees and shrubs, but not touching the trunk. Avoid the 'volcano' style of mulching as it can be stressful to the plant.

Whether planting flowers, vegetables or shrubs, always consider improving the soil first. If soil is hard to dig in and plants just haven't been able to thrive, incorporate plenty of organic matter before planting replacements. A good quality finished compost will help a lot. Just don't try to amend soil when planting shade trees, as they will eventually be too large to be able to amend all the soil their roots will inhabit; it can even prevent good root system expansion into the native soil.

Bring in some cuttings of berry plants such as hollies, and evergreens such as junipers, to enjoy inside the home. Pruning this time of year is fine and not detrimental to the plants, just don't cut extensively or damage the overall shape and form of the shrub.

To keep tools and equipment in good shape, do some winter maintenance before putting them up for the season. Drain gasoline from the mower and other equipment and run the engine until what's left in the fuel lines is used up. Clean and sharpen shovels, hoes, pruners, etc and oil them to prevent rusting.

As it gets colder and less enticing to work outside in the yard, start making plans for next year. Get a head start by perusing seed catalogs, and place orders before the spring rush hits. Also, keep the green thumb in use by adding some houseplants to the home such a philodendron, ficus, and sansevieria.

## November To-Do's

- Drain fuel from mower and other lawn equipment, or add a fuel stabilizer
- Plant trees and shrubs
- Utilize fallen leaves as mulch or add to compost bin
- Plant spring bulbs

## Pecan Update



We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan show on Friday, December 4th. Entries will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, December 2nd. This is a great way to learn what variety of pecans you may have and to receive information on growing pecans in our area.

For details on how to enter, contact the extension office at 325-659-6528 or visit [tomgreen.agrilife.org](http://tomgreen.agrilife.org)

## Winter Irrigation

Landscape water conservation may seem like it's only an issue in the summertime, but as we head into the winter season it's important to stay vigilant about saving water and not wasting it. The first step is to turn off the irrigation timer if you have an automatic system. Plants will not need as much, if any water throughout the wintertime. But some plants, like pecan trees, cool season vegetables and winter annual flowers, will appreciate occasional irrigation especially if it's a dry winter. So turn off the automatic timer, but be mindful of the water needs of plants throughout the winter; it will depend on the type of plant and what the weather does.

Ensure that automatic irrigation systems have a rain/freezing sensor installed. This will prevent the system from running if it rained recently, or if it is below freezing. Running irrigation when it's below freezing creates dangerous icy patches in the landscape,



sidewalks and street and can be damaging to the system itself. Also protect exterior faucets and exposed

pipes by wrapping to protect from freezes. A busted pipe will certainly waste a lot of water, and isn't so good for the water bill either.

Whether using an automatic system or not, when plants do need some water through the winter be sure to follow the same guidelines recommended for landscape water conservation through the summer. Such as: avoid fine droplets or misting in spray irrigation – larger droplets are more efficient. Utilize drip irrigation as much as possible instead of spray heads. Irrigate based on plant needs, not just a set schedule. Get to know your plants and learn to recognize when they are showing signs of water stress, and/or learn to feel the soil to know if irrigation is needed. Train plants to have deeper roots, by watering deeply and thoroughly but as infrequently as possible. Waiting until the plants really need the water and then watering them well can promote deeper root systems and helps them be more drought tolerant.

Drought stressed plants are more likely to be injured by cold winter temperatures, so be sure to water plants if they are dry a couple of days before a predicted hard freeze. Replenish mulch in all planting beds to a depth of about four inches deep, to help keep water in and also to moderate soil temperature and protect roots from freezing temperatures.

## Plant Spotlight

### Cilantro

*Coriandrum sativum*

Cilantro is a cool season herb and is at its peak in November! Heat causes the plant to go to seed and be done for the season, try growing some in the fall for fresh flavor in the kitchen.



*Grape Tomato & Cilantro Salad*



## Pecans

Pecans are native to about 150 counties in Texas, and can grow and produce in all counties. Pecans are beautiful landscape trees that also provide a delicious, healthy crop. They are rich in vitamins, antioxidants and can help improve cholesterol levels. Compared to other nuts, pecans are among the lowest in carbs and highest in fiber. A handful of Texas pecans – about 19 halves – is a good source of fiber, thiamin, and zinc, and an excellent source of copper and manganese. San Angelo can be considered one large pecan orchard because there are so many planted in neighborhoods. Visit the website [americanpecan.com](http://americanpecan.com) for some great recipes and ideas for utilizing pecans!

November is a busy month for pecan crop production because it's harvest time. Other tasks for fall and winter pecan tree care include watering and pruning if needed. Adequate rainfall or irrigation is required right up until shuck split – dry spells late in the season can cause shucks to stay closed and interfere with harvest. As it cools down, pecan trees use less water than during the growing season, but they will still need a thorough rainfall or irrigation about once per month during dormancy. If it's a dry winter, trees may need a deep watering several times before spring rains come.

For those that would like to add a nice landscape shade tree to the yard, fall is a great time of year to plant trees; some of the recommended varieties include Pawnee, Hopi, Sioux and Wichita – these will do well in the Concho Valley. Pecans perform best in deep, well-drained soil that is weed-free around the tree. Remove all vegetation and apply mulch to help keep weeds out for newly planted trees to establish quickly. Pecan trees in the home landscape should be spaced far enough away from hardscapes such as patios, driveways and home foundations - at least 15 feet away.

We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan Show on Friday, December 4th at the Tom Green County Extension Office – the deadline to enter is Wednesday December 2nd. The pecan show is a chance to have pecans judged for quality and compete with other entries for ribbons. Anyone who grows pecans is welcome to enter the show and there is no entry fee; for more details on how to enter visit [tomgreen.agrilife.org](http://tomgreen.agrilife.org) and click on the Concho Valley Pecan Show link. For more info, please contact the Extension Office at 325-659-6522.

## Planting Trees and Shrubs

As unpredictable as our weather is, it's always a sure bet that summer will be hot and dry. That's why fall through winter is the best time of year to plant trees and shrubs, because it gives them time to establish good roots and overcome transplant shock before the harshest season hits. An old proverb says that "the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the next best time is now."

Trees are the most permanent component of the landscape, and shrubs last long as well, so when installing these important foundation plants, do so with careful planning, good design and proper planting technique. Large shrubs should be reserved for the corners of the home, to help it look wider. Don't cover windows with tall shrubs, or stagger them between the windows, as that can break up the visual flow across the front of the home and make it look smaller. Use dwarf shrubs for the front of the home so they don't get too tall and require frequent pruning.

Depending on the specific landscape, a good general rule of thumb is to place trees at 45-degree angles off the front corners of the home – not in front, visually dividing the home into sections, but framing it to highlight the home. The right planting depth is very important – only plant trees as deep as the rootball; don't place in a deeper hole that requires soil to be filled in over the root ball. Sometimes nursery trees even have too much soil over the rootball in the container, so check to see if there is loose soil that can be scraped off the top. Remove excess soil until you see roots matted into soil, and dig the hole as deep as the roots are growing. Very large, heavy trees can even be planted slightly above grade because their weight will cause them to settle in a little deeper over time. Trees planted too deep will have significant issues later on.

Only the native soil dug from the hole should be used to fill after planting trees; they are too large to amend all the soil their roots will occupy, so choose well-adapted species that do well in the local soil and climate. Apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of mulch after planting trees and/or shrubs. Mulch helps trees and shrubs get established faster because it helps keep weed competition under control, moderates soil temperature, and conserves water.

## Plant Bulbs

Planting bulbs is an easy, inexpensive way to get great color in the springtime – now that the soil is starting to cool off, it's time to get bulbs into the ground. Nothing announces the coming of spring quite like bulbs popping up, almost forgotten because they were planted so far in advance.

When growing spring bulbs, it's important to remember that many will not rebloom after the first year, and are best treated as annuals. For example - it doesn't get cold enough in Texas for tulips to flower year after year; it's best to pull up the old plants when they finish blooming and plant new, pre-chilled bulbs the following year. But some will rebloom in the south, such as daffodil and grape hyacinth.

Store bulbs in a cool, dry spot until time for planting, preferably in a refrigerator. Just don't place bulbs in the same refrigerator as fruits or vegetables because that could damage the blooms.

Flowers like crocus, daffodil, tulips, and hyacinth are beautiful flowers and do well when planted mid-November through December. Tulips and hyacinth benefit from a 60-day pre-chilling treatment in the refrigerator prior to planting.

When planting bulbs, be sure to amend the soil in the beds with lots of organic matter such as finished compost. They can also be planted in containers with a nice well drained potting soil. They should go in about 6 inches deep, or twice the height of the bulb. They can be planted in full sun to part shade, just don't put them in deep full shade.

It's definitely not an instant impact in the landscape and takes patience to enjoy, but planting spring flowering bulbs in the fall will be well worth the effort and wait when spring comes.



## Planning Ahead

While there are certainly plenty of landscaping and gardening tasks that can be done through the winter, especially here in the south, many homeowners enjoy the break that the dormant season brings. Without regular mowing, watering and other warm season chores, winter is a great opportunity to work on plans for next year. Liberty Hyde Baily, an American horticulturist and leader in the Extension Service movement, said "A garden is half-made when it is well planned. The best gardener is the one who does the most gardening by the winter fire."

So whether your landscape needs a major overhaul or could just use some updates and improvements, there always seems to be something that can be done to make the yard more functional and beautiful. Planning ahead is the best place to start to make that happen, especially in west Texas where gardening and landscaping can seem difficult. Choosing the right plants and following the best techniques can take away a lot of that difficulty!

Aesthetically, a well-designed landscape will have layers, and beds will be edged with broad, sweeping curves - not a single row of shrubs in narrow, rectangular beds. Plant foundation shrubs in the back of the beds and choose dwarf varieties to reduce the need to prune constantly. Plant perennials to fill the rest of the bed, with the taller ones in the back to shorter in front to add depth and interest. Use annuals to add a pop of color near the front door to attract the eye and draw it to the entrance.

One simple technique to remember for better plant health is to 'compost once, mulch forever.' Soil improvement is an often-skipped planting step, but makes a big difference in the success of new plantings. When planting something new, loosen the soil well and incorporate a 3-inch layer of compost as deep as possible (one exception - don't amend soil when planting trees). From then on, keep mulch replenished to 3 or 4-inches deep. When thinking about spring and working on plans for next year, be sure to include soil improvement, drip irrigation, mulch, and all the basic but important aspects of a healthy garden bed.

# Upcoming Events

November 2020

Saturday, November 7, 10:00am-12:00pm

## **PPC Pumpkin Fest**

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

Cost: Free to attend

Stop by for some family fun! Free hot dogs, activities for kids. If you grew a pumpkin this year, bring it for the weigh-in and try for a ribbon! FMI [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Thursday, November 12, 2:00pm-4:00pm

## **PPC Lecture Series - Celebrate Recycle Week**

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

Cost: Free, donations accepted

Christy Youker will be talking about recycling through the holidays. You'll find out different things you can recycle to keep working through the holidays to keep the environment safe. To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Thursday, November 19, 2:00pm-4:00pm

## **West Texas Gardening 101—Fresh Rosemary Wreaths**

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

Cost: \$20

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about growing herbs in west Texas, and participants will be able to make a wreath to take home. To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, November 20, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Interiorscaping - Houseplants 101**

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; House plants add a lot of beauty and fresh style to a home. Learn the basics of how to care for plants like ficus, philodendron, orchid and more!

## **Concho Valley Pecan Show**

Deadline to enter pecans - Wednesday, December 2nd; Judging will take place Friday, December 4th.

For more info visit [tomgreen.agrilife.org](http://tomgreen.agrilife.org) or call 325-659-6528.

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



**Allison Watkins**

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Tom Green County

113 W Beauregard

San Angelo, TX 76903

325-659-6528

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.