

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

January 2021

Earth-Kind Landscaping and Gardening

Now is a season when many are making goals and seeking out ways to improve their lives and their surroundings, and something to keep in mind is the Earth-Kind program recommended by Texas A&M. Whether you're one to make New Year's resolutions or not, it's always a good idea to make efforts to protect the environment – and making small choices and changes at the home level can make a big difference over time.

Not only is Earth-Kind better for the environment, but it can also increase success with home gardening and landscaping: attractive beds, productive vegetables. The Earth-Kind plan promotes research-proven techniques - it is a combination of both traditional and organic gardening practices. The main goals are to conserve water and energy, reduce fertilizer and pesticide use, and reduce landscape wastes ending up in landfills.

For example, when planning a fertilizer application for the yard, think about whether plants truly need any fertilizer or not, what kind to use, how much to put out, and when to apply it. The easiest way to answer some of these questions is to do a simple soil test through the Extension office. In the Earth-Kind plan, usually only the lawn and some vegetables should need fertilizer. With good plant selection and proper soil management, flower beds, shrubs and trees will generally not require fertilizer. When needed, only apply the recommended amount and be careful to not let any end up in the street.

Water conservation is also a big part of Earth-Kind landscaping. Utilize drip irrigation and mulch as much as possible and use sprinkler nozzles that are designed to lose less water to evaporation.

As far as pesticides go, a good strategy to use is an integrated pest management system (IPM for short). In a nutshell, it means to use all available control methods instead of only resorting to chemical use, and also preventing pests in the first place. While an Earth-Kind landscape doesn't completely rule out the use of all pesticides, they should be reduced and limited to the least toxic option.

There are several fundamental principles for Earth-Kind landscaping: good planning and design, soil management, practical turf areas, appropriate plant selection, efficient irrigation, use of mulch, appropriate maintenance, and rainwater harvesting. Each of these tools can help improve home gardening results, as well as improve the environment and protect natural resources. Visit the website earthkind.tamu.edu and take the Earth-Kind challenge!

January To-Do's

- Plant bare root fruit trees
- Prune shade trees if needed
- Need to move a plant in the yard? Now is the time - while dormant. Works best if the plant is young and small
- Order seeds from catalogs and online for spring

Pecan Update



Thank you to everyone who entered the Concho Valley Pecan Show!

Results are available:
tomgreen.agrilife.org

Cold Weather and Plants

Choosing tough, cold tolerant landscape plants instead of tender or marginally hardy plants can help increase confidence that the landscape will make it through winter like a champ. And if there are favorite, beloved plants that are not especially cold hardy, and you want to try them anyway – go for it! Nothing says every plant must last forever or you're a failure; part of the fun of gardening is trying new things. But for foundation plants like shrubs, good plant selection can go a long way to keeping the yard looking happy, healthy and not having to replant every few years.

Here are a few things to keep in mind regarding cold weather. In the spring and fall, when unusually late or early freezes come around, the best way to cover a plant is to use frost cloth or row cover, and don't tuck it up around the plant stem. Covers actually don't insulate from the frost but slow the plant's cooling by utilizing heat trapped in the soil earlier in the day. At sunset, drape the cloth loosely over the plant, tent-style. Try to cover as much ground as possible to utilize more radiant heat rising during the night.

Frost cloth can be very useful for winter vegetable gardens; most cool season crops can tolerate freezing weather, but some may need to be covered to protect from extreme cold fronts, especially any young, tender newly planted vegetables.

For large, permanent ornamental plants that are prone to freeze damage, like palm trees, pitosporum, and oleander, try to plant them in more protected areas of the yard, or warmer 'microclimates,' such as protected from the north wind and up close to the home to receive radiant warmth.

Tender perennials such as Pride of Barbados, hibiscus, and lantana can greatly benefit from a thick layer of mulch placed over the roots at the beginning of winter. Mulch helps insulate the roots and can sometimes even mean the difference between coming back the next spring or not.

For more information on plants and cold weather, visit tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture and click on "Frosts and Freezes."



Plant Spotlight

Natchez Blackberry

Rubus fruticosus 'Natchez'

This Texas Superstar is a delicious thornless cultivar. Natchez has the largest fruit of the thornless options, and fruit quality is excellent. Root cuttings can be planted now, try some in your yard!



January To-Do List

What is there to do in the landscape and garden in January? It may be surprising to some, but there is a lot that can be done now! Starting with the vegetable garden: now is your chance to get onion transplants, asparagus crowns, artichoke crowns and snap peas planted. Asparagus is a wonderful addition to a home landscape because it's one of the few perennial vegetables. It makes a nice fine-textured plant and produces delicious fresh asparagus spears to harvest every spring. The only catch is that the plant needs a couple years to get established before harvesting, so get it in the ground now to have a plentiful harvest later.



Artichoke plant

Onions are biennial crops, and if started from seed should be planted in the fall – it then takes until the second spring after planting to harvest full-sized onions. To get onions in one season, plant transplants (also called onion sets) now and harvest in the late spring/early summer. To learn more about home vegetable gardening, visit <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable>.

For curb appeal, there is still time to plant snapdragons, pansies, stock, cabbage, kale and other cool season annuals to bring color and interest into an otherwise dormant landscape.

Winter is a good time of year for pruning shade trees if needed, just remember not to top them. Topping is a poor pruning practice that causes an unappealing appearance and stresses the tree. Don't even top crape myrtles – they are the most commonly topped plant but there is no good reason to do so.

Winter Landscape Interest

Winter foliage and berry plants are important to have in the landscape for interest throughout the dormant season, and they are also beneficial for desirable birds. When many of our plants go dormant and leave the landscape looking dreary, a few good plants that keep going all winter long will really brighten up the yard. Plants that make great berries in the winter time include yaupon holly, possumhaw holly and pyracantha. There are lots of evergreen options from junipers, hollies, boxwoods and nandinas.

Nandinas are very easy to grow, they look tender but are actually pretty tough. Different types of Nandinas have different colored foliage at different times of year, ranging from green to yellow, red, and orange. They also have very attractive red berries that add a pop of color and interest to the landscape. There are a lot of size options for Nandinas, ranging from dwarf varieties that are short all the way up to 5 foot tall shrubs.



The possum-haw holly is a deciduous holly, which means it drops its leaves in the winter. This is unusual, since most hollies are evergreen. But in the winter it also has beautiful showy red berries that generally last all winter long. It's a large shrub or small tree, and can be trained to have a single trunk or multiple trunks. It's very easy to grow and is adaptable to

a wide range of conditions, from soggy soil to dry soil.

Pyracantha, also called firethorn, is also a beautiful plant but be careful – it has really large, very sharp thorns. It's not good if planted close to a sidewalk or anywhere with foot traffic, but if planted out of the way it provides good winter color with red-orange berries. It has a sprawling form, and is good planted up against a fence or wall.



Keep On Gardening

Nurseries and garden centers all had a very successful year with lots of revenue, due to more people staying home – more free time and a desire to grow food helped encourage a lot more gardening this year. I would like a return to normalcy as much as anyone, but I do hope that the gardening trend continues. Taking care of plants, growing food, and creating a beautiful landscape is a healthy hobby that provides many benefits. Winter is here, but it does not mean gardening has to end. Increase the potential food harvest in the landscape by planting asparagus, onions, cold-hardy herbs, fruit trees, and cool season vegetables like kale, lettuce and radish. Add to the curb appeal and brighten up the yard with ornamentals like shrubs, cool season annual flowers, and trees.

Consider incorporating a blackberry plant or grape vine into the landscape design. Both will need plenty of room and full sun. Blackberries are very thorny so carefully choose where to plant, or go with a thornless variety like Natchez, Arapaho, or Navaho. A favorite variety for many growers is Kiowa, which is thorny but produces an abundant harvest of large fruit. Blackberries are biennial, and each stem needs two years to make fruit and then dies. Don't prune stems until after fruit formed and is harvested, then cut to the ground. Grapes require a sturdy structure to grow on – a strong fence, arbor, pergola etc. Grapes set fruit on the current year's growth, so prune back heavily each year to keep the plant under control and to produce a good crop. Champleve is a nice variety for landscapes and makes nice jelly. Table grape varieties that are recommended for the area include Mars, Reliance and Flame seedless.



If there is room for a fruit tree, there are plenty of delicious options that will grow in the Concho Valley such as peach, apricot, plum, apple, pear, pomegranate, fig, and persimmons. Visit the website <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/> for info on how to grow these and visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> to see a list of recommended varieties for the Concho Valley.

Moving Plants



Many people think once a plant is in the ground, it's there forever. But plants can often be moved successfully if they are not in the ideal spot or the design plan has changed. If shrubs are under 4 feet tall, and trees are an inch or less in diameter, they can often be successfully moved within the landscape if they came up or were planted in the wrong spot. It's always best to carefully consider where to plant a new tree or shrub and get it in the right spot first, but plants can be surprisingly forgiving.

The steps to start prepping the plant begin in the fall with digging around the rootball to sever some of the roots. This would stimulate the plant to grow more fibrous roots near the trunk. The more roots you can take with the transplant, the better the chances for success. Now it's a good time to complete the task and finish moving the plant.

Even if you didn't start working on your transplant back in the fall, it's still ok to transplant. Starting ahead of time just helps decrease transplant shock and increase chances for success.

Dig up a cylinder shaped rootball about 16 to 20 inches in diameter around the plant, but be sure that the soil around the roots stays together - if it crumbles and falls away, exposing roots, there's much less chance for survival.

After creating the rootball by digging the cylinder, dig up and remove some of the soil around the rootball you created so you can get it out without damaging it. Immediately wrap the rootball in burlap to transport, and plant in the new spot right away.

It's best to have the new hole dug ahead of time, that way you can get it planted immediately. Water in well, apply mulch and consider pruning back some of the top - depending on how much of the root system was lost.

Upcoming Events

January 2021

Check out an extensive list of free educational videos provided by Texas A&M here:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/AggieHorticulture/videos>

Please be sure to call ahead to attend programs; due to increasing COVID-19 cases schedules may change with short notice.

Thursday, January 21, 2:00pm-4:00pm

West Texas Gardening 101—All About Trees

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

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about planting new trees, caring for mature landscape trees, and how to grow fruit trees in west Texas. To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, January 8 18, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - The Moonlit Garden: Landscaping for Evening Enjoyment

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Learn how to make the landscape pop at night for evening entertaining and enjoyment! To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

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



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