

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

February 2021

Time to Plant Roses

The snow that slowly melted was great for landscapes! Inches of snow does not equal the same number of inches in rainfall, but enough snow fell to provide a good dose of water for plant roots. And it can provide a better impact than a quick heavy rainfall because it infiltrates so slowly as it melts, instead of some being lost to runoff.

So with an encouraging start to the season, it's a good time to consider planting a rose bush. Container-grown roses can be planted any time, but fall-winter is better for good establishment. And the dormant winter, January-February, is the only recommended time to successfully plant bare-root roses. Bare-root plants have the benefit of being less expensive than container-grown but require particular timing and good planting technique to work well.

With Valentine's Day coming up, a rose bush to plant in the ground that will flower year after year may be a good choice for a gift rather than a cut bouquet! Roses have a reputation for being hard to grow, but there are many roses that do well in the Concho Valley without much input. For example, try one of the Earth-Kind designated roses which have undergone scientific that shows they can survive with very little care - no fertilizer or pesticides, and little water or pruning. Visit the website earthkind.tamu.edu to see the list, which includes pictures and details such as size and color. Old-fashioned or antique roses are also known to be tough and hardy.

No matter what kind of rose you choose, plant in full sun and with good air circulation. This will go a long way to reducing fungal diseases on the leaves and will encourage good blooming. Don't plant too close to other plants or structures. Incorporate compost into the soil before planting and use good planting technique - dig a hole that is wide but not too deep (only plant the rose as deep as it had been growing in the nursery). Apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of wood mulch around the plant but pull it away from the stem.

Don't fertilize at planting - Earth-Kind roses won't need fertilizer anyway, and it's a general rule of thumb to wait until plants have had time to establish, start to grow roots and new shoots before applying any fertilizer. Then water the plant in well, and water as needed when there is no rain. Newly planted plants will always need to be watered more frequently than established plants, so keep a close eye on it and water every few days for the first few weeks. Then, how often to water depends on a lot of factors such as soil type and weather, but train the rose to grow deep roots and be more drought tolerant by watering thoroughly but not too frequently - wait until the soil is dry before watering.

February To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals
- Apply pre-emergent herbicide
- Plant and/or prune rose bushes
- Water 24 to 48 hours before predicted hard freezes to protect plants
- Run irrigation system check, repair if needed
- Prune shade trees and shrubs as needed
- Check mowers and other lawn equipment; sharpen mower blades, get tune-up if needed

Pecan Update



Keep an eye out for Regional Pecan Show results, which will be posted at <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/> as soon as they are available



Attract Desirable Songbirds

Many people enjoy seeing birds in the landscape, especially colorful ones like blue jays and cardinals, and love to hear songbirds chirping. If you would like to attract more desirable birds to your yard, try planting some trees and shrubs that they like, in addition to putting out bird feeders. It's especially important to provide food for birds in the winter when they have much less to choose from. Here are some tips to get started.

First, provide a variety of food. Not all birds eat the same thing, so use various types of seed. And in addition to seeds, throw out some peanuts, cracked corn, or bits of fruit. Birds eat earthworms and insects, so don't be too hasty with the insecticides. If you have insect pest problems harming your plants, try cultural controls first, things like spraying the pests off with soapy water. Avoid broad spectrum insecticides.

Also try to plant shrubs and flowers that provide seeds, fruits, nuts and berries, as birds like to eat these. Good examples would be plants like American beautyberry, hollies, sunflowers and persimmons. If you have crops that you don't want birds to eat, such as your tomatoes, you may need to use some bird netting to protect your harvest.

When it comes to providing water, there are a lot of options such as bird baths, drippers and misters. Any

of these will work, it's up to your preference.

Shelter is the third important need for birds, and providing a birdhouse is not the only way to do it. They also like dense foliage plants such as hollies, wax myrtle and juniper. Native and ornamental grasses are good for ground dwellers, and open lawn areas are also important for birds to find worms and insects.



Plant Spotlight

Artichoke

Cynara cardunculus var. *scolymus*

Artichoke is a distinct-looking plant that makes a great accent in the landscape. It grows quite large, so leave plenty of room. Grow just for ornamental value, or grow for culinary use. Plant crowns in late winter or fall.



Pre-Emergent Application

February is a busy month in the landscape and garden, it's the time of year for pruning, cleaning up beds, and soil preparation. Another important step that can be done is application of pre-emergent herbicide. Pre-emergent is a type of herbicide that kills seeds as they germinate. It won't work instant miracles in a weed-infested yard, but if used correctly over a period of time pre-emergent will greatly reduce the amount of these troublesome pests in the lawn.

Pre-emergent is most affective against annual weeds, plants that come back only from seeds each year. Perennial weeds grow back from the roots, and pre-emergent will not kill existing plants. The key to achieving good control with pre-emergent is correct timing and proper application. The product must be applied before weeds come up; for winter weeds, apply in the fall (September) and for spring weeds apply in the late winter (February 15-March 1). An additional application can be made in May to prevent grass-burs ('stickers') which pop up in the summer, if needed.

Pre-emergent is helpful for lawns - it does not harm established, existing plants as long as it is applied following label directions. So there is no danger of harming the grass, shade trees, shrubs, or other landscape plants as long as they are well-established. Don't apply pre-emergent to anywhere seeds or transplants will be planted in the near future.

Pre-emergent can be purchased at garden centers, nurseries and horticulture supply stores. Some examples include Dithiopyr (trade name Dimension), isoxaben (Gallery), pendimethalin (Pendulum, Pre-M), benefin (Balan).

Don't be tempted to fertilize the lawn at the same time as applying pre-emergent, the grass cannot use fertilizer until it is actively growing. Wait to fertilize until the lawn has had to be mowed twice - then the grass is ready to use fertilizer.



Winter Irrigation



Watering the landscape is a fine balance between applying enough and not too much. Believe it or not, it's possible and even fairly common for plants to be overwatered even here in dry west Texas. So be careful not to overdo it and waste water, but many landscape plants benefit from occasional watering through the winter.

When plants are dormant, they don't use nearly as much water as they do during the growing season. And colder weather greatly reduces evapotranspiration even for evergreen plants that still have their leaves. But the plants are still alive and can't go for a prolonged period of time without water. A lack of water also makes damage from cold snaps worse, so make sure that plants aren't dry if there is a predicted deep freeze.

A good rule of thumb would be to water if there has been no rain for 3 weeks or so. If the landscape is particularly drought tolerant or consists of desert plants, they won't need it that often. But for an average landscape, in an average year, two to three winter waterings may be needed before spring.

Be sure to turn the time to manual mode if you have an automatic sprinkler system. Only turn it on when needed because the water needs of plants will be much less and very irregular compared to the warm season. And sprinklers shouldn't run when it gets below freezing - another good reason to turn the automatic timer off in the winter.

Now that spring is on the way, it's a good time to audit and evaluate the sprinkler system to make sure that everything is in good working order, before it's time to really start watering.

Winter Trimming and Pruning

February is a good time of year to work on cleaning up the landscape and start getting it ready for spring. Some of the common tasks to consider doing include: prune shade trees and shrubs, trim groundcovers, cut back dead perennial tops, clean up leaves (add to compost or use as mulch in beds), and replenish mulch in landscape beds to a depth of three to four inches.

As for pruning shrubs, remember that it's better to start with the right plant in the right spot in the first place so that extensive pruning is not needed every year. Choose shrubs that grow to the height needed instead of too-large plants that constantly have to be trimmed so they don't cover windows etc. In many cases, dwarf shrubs that don't grow larger than three or four feet tall are ideal as foundation shrubs for the average home landscape. Also, don't prune shrubs that bloom in the early spring until after they finish flowering or they won't have many blossoms.

Old shrubs that are overgrown and not as healthy and vigorous as they used to be might be rejuvenated with 'gradual renewing' pruning. Remove a third of the oldest, tallest branches – cut them back almost to the ground, right now before new growth starts. This will stimulate fresh new growth, and the process can be repeated each year until the shrub is back into the desired condition.

Groundcovers can also benefit from a winter trimming, it will help them stay neat and tidy. Asian Jasmine is a popular and common groundcover, for good reason – it's a nice size and texture, is fairly easy to grow, can handle shade, and doesn't need tons of water. A severe trim (as low as six inches) can help it grow back denser and thicker in the spring, but will cause it to look ugly for a while. A hedge trimmer is best, and a string trimmer can work but is more uneven and can accidentally dig up runners.

Mondo grass can be mowed once a year with a mower at the highest setting (no lower than four inches) to keep it looking dense and healthy. It also will look rough until spring growth fills it back in. Neither mondo grass or Asian Jasmine need any trimming to keep a more informal, natural look, but if they are damaged and need to be rejuvenated, or if a formal look is preferred, trimming now can help achieve that.

Starting from Seed

Whenever spring comes (and stays), it will be an exciting time for gardeners to start planting and sprucing up the landscape. One way to get a head start on that now would be to start seeds indoors. While there will certainly be a good selection of transplants available at local nurseries, and transplants are preferable to seeds in some cases, seeds can be a more inexpensive way to start a flower or vegetable garden. There are many more varieties to choose from when selecting seed from catalogs, and growing those seeds indoors ahead of time instead of direct-sowing outside in the planting bed in the spring time can improve success.

Start with high quality, fine-texture potting mix. When dealing with tiny seedlings it's important to keep everything as clean and sterile as possible, as they are more sensitive and susceptible to diseases and pests. A brand-new bag of potting mix is a good way to go, or to use old potting soil it should be pasteurized. Just place in a shallow pan, cover with foil and bake in the oven until the mix reaches 180 degrees F for 30 minutes. This can create a long-lasting earthy odor in the oven so it's usually better to just buy new for seed starting.

Almost anything that can hold potting mix can be used to start seeds, but again it needs to be clean. Sterilize pots with 10% bleach solution before starting. Seeds starting trays can be purchased at local nurseries and garden centers, or improvise with egg cartons, cups, milk cartons etc. Punch holes in the bottom so that water can drain and place some kind of tray underneath to catch the excess water.

Seeds packets should indicate the optimal germination conditions, but in general seeds need soil that is damp and warm but not too hot. An air temperature of about 75 degrees in the day and 65 at night is good. Provide ample light for the seedlings to grow well, and begin transplanting into individual pots after the first true leaves are formed. Allow a strong, deep root system to grow, then harden off outdoors before planting in the landscape or garden.



Upcoming Events

February 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.

Every Tuesday, February 2nd through May 25th, 12pm-3pm

Master Gardener Training Class

Learn all about gardening and landscaping in west Texas! Visit txmg.org/conchovalley for details and to register.

Thursday, February 11, 2:00pm-4:00pm

West Texas Gardening 101—Hummingbirds and Butterflies

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

Cost: \$20

Speakers: Carol Sturm, Susan Stanfield

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to attract these beneficial pollinators to your yard! To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, February 19, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Don't Throw That Orchid Away

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Learn how to care for the orchid you received as a gift, and other house plant tips. 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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