

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

March 2021

Winter Damage and Recovery

Homeowners across the Concho Valley and the state of Texas have a lot to deal with right now, from lingering power outages, lack of water supply, broken pipes, and more. But when the urgent tasks are settled, many have started asking questions related to landscapes damaged by the extreme, long-lasting freezing temperatures. Here are few things to keep in mind for the landscape as it thaws.

It's too early to know the total extent of plant damage and death. Start out by carefully assessing and dealing with any broken branches on trees, so they do not fall and hurt people or property. For future reference, when tree branches are weighed down with ice or snow and are at risk of breaking, it is better to let the ice melt slowly, or carefully lift/prop up the branch up before shaking off the snow/ice. Shaking a weighted branch without support can cause it to break. Patience is key for everything else, don't get in a hurry to prune back anything until after a few weeks pass – then you can have a better view of what needs to be trimmed.

Some of the plants that are commonly used in the Concho Valley that are likely to be damaged include pittosporum, palm trees, oleander, rosemary, lantana, yellow bells, hibiscus, crape myrtle, certain rose cultivars, and daylilies. Some may just have tip dieback, some may die to the ground but come back from the roots, and some may have total root death.

Even plants that appear to have made it through unscathed or with minimal damage, be aware that there may be damage that is not apparent until summer hits. Some plants may have damaged vascular systems that can still handle cool weather, but when it heats up later in the year they won't be able to transport enough water to keep the plant cool.

Don't be discouraged, if you lost plants take the opportunity to try something new and support the local nursery industry. Garden photographer Marina Schinz said "Gardening is an exercise in optimism. Sometimes, it is a triumph of hope over experience."

March To-Do's

- Divide summer and fall flowering perennials and ornamental grasses
- Avoid purchasing bare-root trees and roses this late in the season - instead choose container grown or B&B
- Prepare soil in new beds by tilling in 3 inches of compost
- Don't plant frost-sensitive plants too early. The last frost in the Concho Valley can be as late as mid April, but is usually mid-to late-March

Pecan Update



Congratulations to our local growers who participated in the West Region Pecan Show!

- *Bill Book - 1st place Burkett
- *Chester McCown - 1st place GraTex, State Champion Native, and Waco; 2nd place Hopi and Cheyenne
- *Eldorado Pecan Orchard - 1st place western
- *John Wilde - 1st Place Kiowa
- *Olsak Farms - Grand Champion Commercial, Pawnee; 3rd place Cheyenne

Spring Lawn Care

Right now is normally the time of year we recommend applying pre-emergent to lawns to prevent winter weeds. But after the winter storm, it's a little more complicated. Pre-emergent herbicides are products that help prevent annual weeds from popping up from seed; there are a number of different products that can be used on a healthy, well-established lawn that won't hurt the turfgrass or other well-established plants if applied correctly. But the key point is that they are designed to be applied on healthy turf – the products labeled for home lawns are root inhibitors and can slow down recovery if the turf is stressed. Some lawns may be damaged from the extreme freeze, especially St. Augustine lawns. So wait and see if the lawn is stressed or damaged from winterkill before applying pre-emergent. If the lawn is stressed, focus on other methods of weed control (such as mechanical – hand pulling and hoeing may be the best bet).

Also, the timing is delayed a bit because of the cold snap. The recommendation from Texas A&M turf specialists is to apply pre-emergent when the soil temperature reaches 55 degrees F for several days. We hit that mark right before the winter storm, but then the soil temperature 5-day average has dropped back down. The current soil temperature and the 5-day average can be viewed at the website <https://www.greencastonline.com/tools/soil-temperature>.

High-value, intensely managed turfgrass can be assessed for winterkill by digging up plugs, planting in containers in a warm, sunny spot. Water and care for them and see what percentage of the plugs survived and how vigorously they grow.

Most homeowners will probably prefer to just wait and see how spring green-up goes. Just water appropriately when it warms up, keep an eye on the turf, and don't fertilize too early – wait until the lawn has needed to be mowed twice before fertilizing. Keep an eye out for pests, and just give the turfgrass some good TLC through the spring to help it bounce back if damaged.

As much as we want to find as many silver linings as possible to the problematic deep freeze, the cold spell will likely not have a huge impact on insect pests. For example, fire ants burrow deep into the ground and most likely avoided the deadly temperatures.

To learn more about spring landscaping in west Texas and recovery from winter damage, save the date for a seminar on trees, lawns and edible landscape crops – Thursday, March 18. Visit the website tomgreen.agrilife.org for details and to register.

Plant Spotlight

Pincushion Flower

Scabiosa columbaria

It's important to fill the landscape up with plants that are well adapted to the west Texas heat and drought, but leave some room for a few plants that like the cool weather too. Pincushion flower is not blooming right now but it made it through the winter storm just fine and will start blooming soon. It looks attractive in the spring and fall, but gets stressed in the summer heat.



Planning a Vegetable Garden

Growing your own food is such a fun, rewarding project. It can be done in just about any situation, even if there's not a lot of space - many vegetables can be grown in containers on a patio. But if there is space for a larger garden plot, here are some tips for where to place vegetables so they can be the most productive.

Sunlight is an important part of successful vegetable gardening, because the majority of vegetable plants will not flower well and produce fruit without lots of bright light. You'll need a spot that gets 6 to 8 hours of full sunlight each day.

Some exceptions to the full sun requirement would be leafy greens, these will be still be fairly productive in part shade, but not deep shade. A little shade is even beneficial to these when it gets hot, because if it gets too hot they can become bitter. Shade helps cool them off and stay sweet.

The garden site should be as well drained as possible, with well prepared, deep soil. Hard rocky soil or sticky clay soil should be amended with lots of organic matter to make it easier to work and better for plants. It should also be near a water source, and away from trees and shrubs. They would compete for water and nutrients, which can be stressful on your vegetable plants.

Take a little time to plan the layout of the garden on paper before planting, and draw out what will be planted where. Run garden rows east to west if possible, and space them far enough apart to maximize sunlight and increase production - the proper spacing will depend on each crop. Melons, cucumbers and squash for example will need quite a bit of space, while peppers can be planted closer together. Check the plant label or seed pack for spacing recommendations.

Design the plot so that tall plants won't shade out smaller ones, and group crops together based on how fast they grow and mature. This way, as one crop finishes another can be planted to replace it.

Crop rotation is helpful for reducing pest problems. Move plant families around year after year, and don't keep planting the same thing in the same spot.

Landscape Design and Spring Prep

Now that we are going into March, gardeners will have to decide when to start planting warm season vegetables and flowers; many will also be wanting to replace plants that were damaged or killed from the winter storm. For frost-sensitive vegetables and flowers, be sure to keep an eye on the forecast and have a plan for freeze protection ready to go just in case. The average last frost is late March but it has historically been as early as late February and as late as mid-April.

Think of areas in the yard that need improvement, or additions that could benefit the family. It helps to draw the property out to scale, using graph paper. A healthy, beautiful landscape in west Texas does require knowledge and effort, but it's definitely possible - the lawn doesn't have to be just stickers and weeds. And while desert style landscapes can be very beautiful if done well, cacti, agaves and rock aren't the only option.

A well-designed landscape, with good plant selection, efficient irrigation methods, and other proper landscaping practices, has the potential to be attractive even in the challenging and changeable climate of west Texas.

A well-designed landscape will have layers and beds should be in broad, sweeping curves - not a single row of shrubs in rectangular beds. Plant foundation shrubs in the back of the beds and choose dwarf varieties to reduce the need to prune constantly. Then in front of the shrubs, plant perennials in order from taller 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.

To get ready for spring, clean up old brown perennial tops, rake up leftover leaves to use for mulch or compost, and start mowing the lawn to keep the turf dense and thick and help prevent weeds from going to seed. Check the irrigation system and perform an irrigation audit, to ensure everything is in working order. Consider converting spray irrigation in flower and shrub beds to drip irrigation to conserve water and to improve plant health. Take the lawn mower to have the blade sharpened, and have any other equipment serviced if needed.

Irrigation System Audit

Irrigation systems are an asset to a home landscape because they can make plant care easier. But they do need regular maintenance to keep them working and efficient. An irrigation audit should be done at least annually to keep everything in good working order, but is especially important to do this spring before warm weather hits - systems may have been damaged by the winter storm. The deep freezing weather we experienced has caused many irrigation lines to burst.

Licensed irrigators are going to be busy repairing systems, so if you need a professional be sure to get on their waiting list soon. But it's not complicated to do a simple system check yourself. To audit your system and inspect how well it's working, turn the timer on for a test run. Make each station run and go out and watch.

First, make sure each station turns on, and all sprinkler heads pop up, rotate, and spray correctly. If not, check for obstructions such as grass or soil. Make sure each head is intact and that there are no geysers or busted underground lines causing water to pool.

Next, look carefully at where the sprinklers are spraying and see if they are aligned properly. If any sprinkler is watering the driveway or street, adjust it to only water the plants.

Another step is a water distribution audit. Besides being a precious resource necessary for life, water costs money, so you don't want to waste it. To check distribution uniformity, evenly set out 8 low flat cans such as tuna or cat food cans. You will audit one station at a time. Turn the station on, and run it 30 minutes. Measure the depth of water in each can. If each can has about the same amount of water, you have even distribution. If not, the system needs some work.



Efficient Irrigation

Texas know now more than ever how important it is to have easy access to potable water. As spring and summer arrive, let's all remember to conserve water as much as possible to protect our reservoirs and water sources. Landscape irrigation makes a large impact on total municipal water use, but there are some fundamental practices be more efficient such as: drip irrigation, a rain/freeze sensor, efficient spray nozzles, a knowledge of how to adjust an automatic time clock, and mulch. Drip irrigation is the best way to water plants because it applies the water slowly, directly to the soil so that it does not evaporate like spray irrigation. Not only does it save water when compared to spray irrigation, plants like it and most will perform better with drip. Plants absorb water best through the roots, so spraying leaves is unnecessary; and consistently spraying leaves can potentially increase fungal disease pressure. Drip irrigation can be a do-it-yourself project and with a little practice any homeowner can have the power to save water and keep plants irrigated without wasting water. Professional irrigators can also be hired to install drip systems.

Subsurface drip irrigation can be utilized for turfgrass as well, and can be a great choice but is a little more complicated than above-ground drip lines; it's worth looking into, especially for anyone starting from scratch with a new system. For those that have existing sprinkler systems or just want to stick with spray heads for the lawn, check out the various types of efficient sprinkler nozzles. One good example is multi-stream technology. Multi-stream sprinkler heads spray small jets of water, instead of droplets into the air. Multi-stream nozzles have a lower precipitation rate so they take a longer amount of time to water, but they use less water overall due to better uniformity and less evaporation (the smaller the droplet, the faster it evaporates).

It's distressing see sprinkler systems running during or right after a nice long, heavy rainfall. A rain/freeze sensor can help prevent this from happening, and is fairly inexpensive and simple to add to an existing system. If you have an automatic system with a timer, practice changing it and learn all the details of how it works. Control the irrigation timer, don't let the irrigation timer control you! Finally, three to four inches of wood mulch in all planting beds and even in potted plants can help with water conservation; it also looks attractive and adds a finishing touch to the yard.

Upcoming Events

March 2021

Please note - masks and social distancing are required at all programs

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

West Texas Gardening 101—Begin with the Basics - Soil

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

Cost: \$20

Speakers: Susan Stanfield, Linda Rowe

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to amend the west Texas soil to help your gardening be more successful. To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Thursday, March 18, 6:00pm - 9:00pm

Spring Earth-Kind Landscaping Seminar

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

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Let's talk about landscape recovery from winter damage, and also learn about lawn care, tree care and growing edibles in the landscape in the Concho Valley. See attached flyer. To register, visit tomgreen.agrilife.org or call 325-659-6522

Friday, March 19, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Spring Vegetable Gardening

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Grow your own food! Learn about what, when and how to plant to have the best success. To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Save the date

Master Gardener Plant Sale - Saturday, April 10, 8am until sold out

For details and news, visit txmg.org/conchovalley

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



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