

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

April 2021

Replacing Shrubs

It's so nice to see live oaks and other trees and shrubs leafing out after so much widespread brown. But there are still some dead and damaged plants to deal with, and it's time to start cleaning up and clearing out dead shrubs in order to replant. Pittosporums do not grow back well from the roots and should be removed. Indian hawthorns with brown, dead leaves that are hanging on do not have a good prognosis either. Evergreens that dropped leaves are more likely to recover and leaf back out than those with dead leaves that are still stuck in place. There are some plants that still look bad that should be given a bit more time to see how they will recover, such as Texas sage and Texas mountain laurel. Eleagnus and Japanese Ligustrum are also being slow to leaf out and some may need to be cut back, but give them another couple of weeks. Oleanders and nandinas are good at coming back from the roots, go ahead and cut them back to the ground or to wherever there is green healthy growth. Most roses are recovering well and leafing back out – especially at the base, where they were protected by a deep layer of snow. Boxwoods seemed to fare well in general, and most just need a light trim to remove some dead outer leaves.

Some homeowners may choose to replace with the same plants, others may choose to go with something more cold-hardy. Pittosporums are beautiful shrubs, and if you like them and want to plant more go for it. They are one of the most cold-sensitive shrubs that are widely used in the Concho Valley, so it is a good idea to have some frost cloth on hand for extreme cold spells in the future. For a list of recommended trees and shrubs for the Concho Valley, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on 'Recommended Landscape Plants.'

Shrubs are an important, hopefully long-lasting landscape feature – take some time to carefully plan and plant. Consider the desired end-goal of the overall design of the landscape – is a very formal look desired or is a more natural look suitable for the location? Shrubs that are pruned into spheres, boxes or topiaries are very elegant if done well, but are also a lot of work to maintain – it is extremely difficult to get each sphere to the same size and shape and match perfectly. Allowing shrubs to grow into their natural shape and form is very attractive and requires much less work, especially if the right type of shrub is chosen and it doesn't grow too large. A properly selected shrub will require very little pruning in its lifetime.

April To-Do's

- Deadhead flowering annuals and perennials to extend blooming period
- Replenish mulch as needed in all beds
- Apply bait for fire ants
- Fertilize lawn based on a soil test; if needed apply 5 pounds of 21-0-0 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet
- Plant warm season vegetables

Pecan Update



Check out the website pecankernel.tamu.edu/ for helpful information and updates on pecan pests and best treatments

Edibles in the Landscape

Last year provided booming business for nurseries! Many nurseries had the best sales year ever because so many people were spending more time at home, and gardening is a fantastic hobby. It is physically and mentally therapeutic and can be so much fun. And vegetable gardening in particular really took off in popularity. There are many ways to incorporate edible plants into the landscape, so even if you don't have a ton of space for a huge garden, it's not only possible but very beneficial and highly recommended to plant some vegetables, herbs and fruit in the yard. First, consider vegetables and herbs that can be planted now and will provide a pretty quick harvest. Also, take this opportunity to realize the advantage it is to have permanent edible plants in the yard, not just out of necessity but also for enjoyment even when grocery stores become easily accessible again.

Now is a great time to plant warm season vegetables; Texas A&M promotes the Earth-Kind method of gardening, to reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides and water. Earth-Kind helps promote personal health and safety as well as the conservation of natural resources. In my opinion, some of the spring and summer vegetables that can best be grown in an Earth-Kind manner include okra, peppers, sweet potato, magda variety squash, and heat tolerant tomatoes. These can all take the heat of west Texas and will grow well without excessive inputs. Magda squash is

a specific variety with a nice nutty flavor that is less prone to squash bug infestation (but not immune).

Five more Earth-Kind suited vegetable that are for the cool season and should be planted later in the fall or winter, include carrots, swiss chard, onions, spinach and asparagus. The herbs I recommend as the best Earth-Kind options and the most usable for cooking include sage, rosemary (dwarf varieties are recommended for smaller spaces), basil, chives, oregano, thyme, and mint. Parsley, garlic, and cilantro are great choices for fall/cool season planting.

Tim Hartmann, Texas A&M Extension Program Specialist – EarthKind, appeared on a Facebook Live video broadcast from the page 'Aggie Horticulture' to provide tips on growing fruit at home. While these options won't produce immediately and are more of an investment for the future, he said some of the easiest to grow fruits for Texas include Asian persimmon, fig, blackberry, pear (be sure to choose the right variety – contact your local county Extension Office), and grape (juice or jelly varieties, like champlel).

Plant Spotlight

Forest Fire Salvia

Salvia coccinea 'Forest Fire'

This beautiful annual is perfect for beds or containers, attracts hummingbirds and butterflies, and has striking deep red flowers. Grows 18"-24" tall, plant in sun or part shade.



Tree Care Myths

Trees are the most valuable, permanent element of a home landscape. In west Texas, large mature shade trees are especially loved and valued. Unfortunately, they sometimes start to decline with stress and dieback – and when they do, it is often difficult to diagnose why.

Dr. David Appel, Plant Pathology professor at Texas A&M University shared a list of common tree myths in a webinar training. This list of myths is helpful for understanding good tree care practices and can give insight on why it can be so difficult to precisely identify the cause of tree damage. The myths are: 1 – trees just die; 2 – there are sprays that will fix tree problems; 3 – pruning: commercial wound paints should be applied to wounds, flush cuts are best, topping of trees is a viable practice, and trees heal their wounds; 4 – oak wilt: old, stressed oak trees are more susceptible, fertilizers and soil amendments will protect trees, and fungal spores of oak wilt pathogen go out through the chimney.

It is important to understand why these statements are all false and considered myths. First myth – ‘trees just die.’ Trees do not just die of ‘old age.’ If a tree dies, there is a cause – but it’s usually not a simple, clear-cut single reason. More often it is a combination of factors that can be difficult to nail down. Trees can also be very slow to respond to things that cause the stress – it could be years after the fact. As Dr. Appel said “just because we cannot diagnose the problem doesn’t mean there wasn’t a cause.” Good tree species selection will go a long way to helping trees thrive in the local environment; and providing good cultural management to reduce stress as much as possible is important. But when a tree does become stressed, it may be more important to consider the overall prognosis than specific diagnosis when it is hard to discern the cause.

Number two – ‘there are sprays that will fix tree problems’ is incorrect because again, there are usually multiple factors causing the problem. The best options for controlling tree disease include proper cultural management –correct pruning, fertilization, watering, and mulching, in addition to direct pathogen control such as fungicides.

The pruning statements listed in number three are commonly thought to be true but are all incorrect. Pruning incorrectly has a significant effect on the health of landscape trees. Finally, number four regarding oak wilt – we actually do have some very effective tools for mitigating oak wilt, and prevention is the most important. In a nutshell, the oak wilt prevention options are: avoid wounding in the spring, use spray paint on cuts, be cautious with moving oak firewood; direct control measures include trenching and injection with fungicide. Please contact your local Extension Office if you have questions regarding tree care.

New Texas Superstar Plants

Try some of these reliable plants, newly designated Texas Superstar Plants for 2021!

Tomato ‘Celebrity’



Rock Rose



Black Stockings Napier Grass



Rosemary ‘BBQ Skewers’



Spring Pecan Care

Pecans are beautiful, popular landscape trees in the Concho Valley. I get many questions asking how to get a better crop from a home landscape or small orchard planting – they are wonderful native trees, but pecans usually need a bit of help to produce a large, high quality crop of nuts. The best thing that homeowners can do for their trees to produce well is to water thoroughly and frequently, and apply nitrogen fertilizer regularly throughout the growing season.

Young trees will need at least seven to ten gallons of water per week, and older trees will need as much as 50 inches of precipitation annually. Since we average around 20 inches of rainfall in the Concho Valley, that means a significant amount of irrigation is needed to maintain large trees and grow a nice crop of pecans. Adequate moisture is needed all through the growing season in order for the nuts to grow to full size, then fill well with kernel, and for the shuck to split open at the end of the season. So reliable, steady watering is important.

To provide the needed nitrogen, apply one pound of 21-0-0 fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter per tree, or $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of 33-0-0 fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter per tree. Start the fertilization program in the spring as buds begin to grow, and repeat every six to eight weeks through the season. Apply to the ground under the tree canopy, using a broadcast spreader to cover the whole rooting zone, then water in immediately.

Zinc foliar sprays are also very helpful for pecan production. Zinc is essential for maximum leaf expansion, and larger leaves help produce better pecans. Apply foliar zinc frequently in the early part of the growing season. Because zinc sulfate can seriously damage the leaves of many types of plants, use zinc nitrate on pecan trees in home landscapes to avoid damaging surrounding plants.

Keep an eye out for pests that damage the nuts - the pecan nut casebearer in the spring, and the pecan weevil later in the summer. If the tree has a heavy crop set in the spring, it's ok to not treat for casebearers because an overloaded tree could benefit from a crop reduction. If treatment is needed though, the timing of the spray is very precise. We manage a mailing list regarding the proper timing and recommended spray dates for case bearers, visit tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture to sign up.

Beneficial Insects

Something interesting that I've noticed at homes that ask for my help with pest problems, is that the ones that have the worst infestations are often the ones that use the most pesticides. Insecticides can be very useful for protecting landscape and garden plants, but if over applied can risk damaging the populations of beneficial insects. Beneficial insects are the ones that don't harm plants, but are predatory or parasitic to insects that do harm plants – and they are often more sensitive to insecticides.

Beneficial insects exist everywhere in nature, and using an insecticide can change the balance of insect populations. If a broad spectrum insecticide is used, especially too often or in combination with other types of insecticides, it can kill many of the beneficial insects, and it can make the original problem worse. Or even create new problems.

Killing beneficial can also cause secondary pests- which are insects that were not causing problems, but when the predator insect is killed they come in and causes trouble to your plants.

So when you see insects out in the yard or garden, don't be too quick to get out the insecticide. Only consider pesticides if the insect is a known pest. If you are not sure if the insect is a pest, take a picture and email it or bring it to the extension office for identification before trying to kill it.

Some of the best beneficial insects that are commonly found in the yard are dragon flies, lady bugs, spiders, tiger beetles, ground beetles, praying mantis, and green lacewings

These beneficial insects can even be purchased to release in the garden, but there's a possibility that they fly away and not stick around to help. That's why conservation of existing natural enemies is important.



Upcoming Events

April 2021

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

Saturday, April 10th, 8:00am until sold out

Master Gardener Plant Sale

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

For plant list and more details, visit txmg.org/conchovalley

Sunday, April 18, 2:00pm-4:00pm

West Texas Gardening 101—Gardening for Wildlife

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

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Kay Thompson - Owner, Concho Natives

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

Friday, April 23, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Woody Ornamentals

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; The foundation plants are important to anchor your landscape. Find out what varieties work best. 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:



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.