

Concho Valley Horticulture Update

July 2021

Summer Landscape and Garden Tasks

The recent scattered showers sure have been a blessing to landowners and homeowners, and provided a nice soaking for plants that were starting to struggle in the heat. Now that July is here, the heat will make it more difficult to do large projects in the landscape but there are a few things to keep up with to keep the garden and lawn attractive and productive. First, keep mowing regularly – mowing frequently at the recommended height plays a huge role in creating a dense and weed-free lawn. Mow common bermudagrass 1 - 2" high, and hybrid bermudagrass 0.5 - 1.5" high. St. Augustine should be mowed higher, between 2.5 - 3". Mow often enough to not remove more than 1/3 of the height at once.

Automatic irrigation systems can be a huge help for keeping things watered and healthy, but be conscious of water use and stay in control of the watering frequency. Become comfortable changing the timer and adjust as needed for seasonal changes. The best setting to keep the timer at is 'off', and turn it on to run when needed. Well-established turfgrass can usually do well with one inch of water applied once per week. If the timer is left on, at least have a rain/freeze sensor hooked up to prevent the system from running while it's raining or just after a heavy rainfall.

Fertilize bermudagrass every 6-8 weeks as long as it's actively growing; slow down or skip fertilization during long periods of hot, dry weather. Replenish mulch throughout landscape beds and garden plots to a thickness of 4" to conserve water and reduce weeds. Organic mulch helps plants grow better, saves water and adds a finished, attractive touch to the curb appeal.

Other tips for improving curb appeal – finish cleaning up dead shrubs and tree branches from woody plants damaged in the winter storm. Plant heat tolerant annual color such as pentas, periwinkle and moss rose. For the vegetable garden, replant warm season crops like tomatoes and squash for a fall harvest. Purchase transplants in the largest container size possible – larger containers mean larger rootball, and more roots mean the plant will establish more easily and suffer less transplant shock when being planted in the heat of summer.

July To-Do's

- Check melons and cantaloupes for ripeness
- Audit irrigation system to check for problems
- Pick okra, peas and peppers often to maintain production.
- Watch for summer pests like chinch bugs and spider mites

Pecan Update



The Texas Pecan Grower's annual State Conference is July 18-21 in San Marcos, TX. It's a great opportunity to learn about pecan production, for info visit <https://tpga.org/tpga-events/>

Indoor Herb Gardens

Fresh homegrown herbs are wonderful to have handy for meal prep, craft projects and gifts. And when it comes to cooking, it doesn't get more convenient than having the herbs right there in the kitchen, ready to snip when needed. Indoor herb gardens are very popular and can be a nice feature in the kitchen – providing beauty, fresh fragrance and interest. While many herbs are easy to grow outdoors in the west Texas climate, it's important to remember that most herbs are not naturally suited to be houseplants. Many of the popular houseplants like pothos ivy and peace lily grow well indoors because they are adapted to shade, while most herbs require full sun.

That's not to say it can't be done, with some knowledge and practice an indoor herb garden can be successful. Start with finding the right spot where they can get six to eight hours of direct sun, like a south facing window. If that's not possible with natural sunlight, grow lights can be used to supplement. Keep the herbs from touching the windowpane when temperatures are extremely high or low.

Plant herbs in containers with drainage holes, and use a peat-moss based potting mix instead of real soil. Most herbs need good drainage and will not grow well in overly wet conditions. The best way to water potted herbs is to take the plant to the sink and thoroughly soak the rootball, then let it completely drain



before placing it back where it goes. When the soil feels dry to the touch, it's time to water again – the finger

test is helpful because every home and plant is unique and will have different watering needs. Even the weather outside can affect water needs of houseplants – dry, windy weather will increase the need for water and cool humid weather will decrease it. Drip trays can be used underneath the plant to protect tables and counters, but don't let them fill up with water that will wick back up to the plant.

Just about any herb can be started indoors, but not all can be permanently grown in small containers; many herbs grow to be large plants, like sage and rosemary. So either stick to smaller plants like basil, thyme and parsley or if growing larger plants just plan to start over every so often to keep plants small and manageable for an indoor garden. Once they outgrow their container, they can be planted outside or given away.

Plant Spotlight

Globe Amaranth

Gomphrena globosa

Also known as bachelor's buttons, gomphrena is promoted as a Texas Superstar by Texas A&M. It is a heat-loving summer annual, plant in full sun. Looks very striking in a mass planting or combined with other annuals and perennials. Makes nice long-lasting cut flowers.



Caterpillars in Trees

While we like to welcome butterfly caterpillars to our landscapes because we enjoy seeing them turn into beneficial adult butterflies, moth caterpillars are often a major nuisance. Pest moth caterpillars can build up into large numbers and do major damage on plants. Some common pest caterpillars to look out for this time of year include the tomato horn worm which can damage tomato plants, peppers, and others in the Solanaceae family, the sophora worm that feeds on Texas Mountain Laurel, the walnut caterpillar which affects pecans, and the fall webworm which can affect many types of trees; though it's named for fall it actually can get started in the late spring.

Caterpillars defoliating trees has been one of the most common issues coming into the Extension Office in recent weeks, so keep an eye out for them - they can quickly cause significant leaf loss. Often, they don't do enough damage to warrant treatment but it's best to watch for them just in case.

Fall Webworms are caterpillars that form webbing in tree branches to protect themselves from predators while they feed on the leaves. An easy way to get rid of webworms is to simply use a long stick to tear open the webbing to let birds take care of them. If a tree gets infested with many webworm colonies it's a good idea to break them open so they can be eaten by predators and stop damaging the tree.

Walnut caterpillars have been out in abundance this year and can do some damage to pecan trees and cause stress if they get out of hand. They can defoliate large sections of the tree, so treatment is occasionally needed.

Walnut caterpillars will congregate on the trunk at certain stages of their life cycle and this is the easiest time to treat them. If you see masses of walnut caterpillars try a contact insecticide while they're easily accessible.

Spinosad is a great option to use for any pest caterpillars, because it's very effective against them but is low in toxicity. Just be sure to not get the pesticide on butterfly plants because it can damage the kinds of caterpillars we do want to stick around.

Collecting and Saving Seed

For those of you that have a vegetable garden, it might be helpful to remember to save some of the seeds from your harvest to plant another crop next year. And when we get closer to fall, it will be a good time to save seeds from flowers and other landscape plants to share with friends and neighbors.

Not all plants make viable seeds, but many do - ranging from trees like Texas mountain laurel to garden vegetables like tomatoes and peppers. Just remember that if the garden plant is a hybrid or readily cross-pollinates, the seed will not grow a new plant exactly like the plant it came from. But if you planted true-to-type varieties or self pollinating crops, the seeds will come up the same.

Many cucurbits, for example, easily cross pollinate - so if there are different types of melons or squashes growing in the same vicinity their seeds will likely grow into new plants that are different that the fruit they came from.

To harvest vegetable seeds, select from fully mature fruit. Some crops like summer squash and okra are best harvested before they are full-sized for culinary use, so at the end of the season leave some fruit on the plant to fully mature in order to collect viable seed.

A good indicator that flower seeds are ready would be when the stem they are on is brown and dried at least halfway down. The seed head should be brown and dry as well. Don't pick seeds that are still moist, soft or fleshy if you plan on storing them.

If your plant is prone to having the seed head explode and release the seeds before you get a chance to collect them, try tying a paper bag or a knee high stocking over the maturing seed pod. Moonflowers and bluebonnets tend to pop open, scattering the seed when mature.

After the seeds are collected, allow them to dry completely. Then place in a sealed container and keep in a cool, dry spot until the next season. Silica gel packs, like those that come in vitamin bottles, leather goods and electronics, can be added to help keep the seeds dry. If there is moisture left during storage, mildew will develop and ruin the viability of the seeds.

Watermelon Season

Whether growing your own, or purchasing from a farmer's market or the grocery store – watermelons are a summer staple for many. Thanks to modern shipping we have access to watermelons year-round in the store, but getting fruit in-season makes a big difference in taste and quality. So enjoy some in-season melons to help cool down this summer!

Watermelons, as well as other cucurbits like muskmelons (aka cantaloupe) are a great choice for a home garden in west Texas because they love the heat – they require hot temperatures to develop sweetness. So if you didn't get a watermelon planted this year, make a note to get one of your own going next spring. A good time frame to plant is April through May, since they need several months to produce.

Depending on the variety, it takes about 90 days to harvest after planting. So now is the time to start checking for ripeness, and here are some tips to help determine when to pull the watermelon and enjoy (these can also help you choose a good one at the market or store). First, look for the small tendril near the fruit; it will dry up and turn brown when the fruit is mature. Next, look at the ground spot – it should be a creamy, buttery yellow color (not bright white). The stripes should be nice and wide, not narrow. The rind should appear dull, not shiny. Finally, you can thump it – give it a gentle tap, and a ripe watermelon will have a deep/dull sound, not high-pitched sharp tone.

A common question is 'how do they make seedless watermelon?' It is done through cross breeding – each seedless watermelon seed comes from a watermelon plant that was cross pollinated in a controlled way. One of the parent plants was treated with colchicine to double the number of chromosomes, then bred with a normal plant; the end result is a seed that will grow into a plant that will produce fruit but no viable seeds. It's quite a process, so the seeds are pricey. If you don't mind the seeds, taste tests have shown that seeded varieties are typically always sweeter and better quality.



Start Fall Vegetables

It's time to start fall warm-season vegetable crops like tomatoes and squash if you'd like to have a plentiful harvest all the way to the November frost! Some gardeners may have vegetables still going strong and showing no sign of slowing down, but many vegetables are struggling with insect and disease pest problems. Mid-July is a great time to start with fresh warm season transplants for fall harvesting; so if plants are struggling and stressed, chances are that production would be better if they were replaced with new plants.

Some of the potential vegetables that can be planted now include tomato, cucumber, summer and winter squash, eggplant, peppers, and okra. Hold off on planting cool season crops like leafy greens, carrots and broccoli until it cools down in late September or October.

Try to find large, healthy transplants – it may require a bit of searching and calling around since vegetables are not as popular in nurseries in the summer. But they can be found with a bit of effort. To keep them alive through the heat of summer, the plants will need light but frequent watering and lots of mulch. A three-inch-deep layer of wood mulch around the plants will help keep the soil cool and hold the water in; this will make a big difference in helping the plants survive. As the plants grow deeper root systems, reduce the frequency of irrigation but water deeper each time. It may also help to give the plants some shade in the afternoon until becoming better established with a good root system; cardboard can be used for a temporary solution and some gardeners use shade cloth.

Try to encourage healthy growth from the plants as quickly as possible, to get the best harvest before the November freeze. Don't fertilize immediately after planting, but after allowing time to get established, fertilize with light, frequent applications of nitrogen to help with growth. If you enjoyed a good spring harvest, then fall can be just as rewarding; and if the spring garden didn't work out well, don't give up – try a fall garden. Fall is better than spring for many crops and the plants will likely be more productive, because pest populations start to go down and temperatures become milder.

Upcoming Events

July 2021

Thursday, July 8, 2:00pm-4:00pm

West Texas Gardening 101—Insects in the Garden - the Good, the Bad & the Ugly

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

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Linda Rowe

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Find out which insects are good for your garden, and which ones to watch out for. To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

Friday, July 16, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Fall Vegetable Gardening

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; July is the time to get started on new warm season crops for fall production. Learn about what to grow when! To reserve a spot visit [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Save the Date:

Saturday, September 11, 8:00am-3:15pm

Fall Landscaping Symposium

Location: Texas A&M Center, 7887 N US Highway 87, San Angelo

Cost: \$30

Speakers: Felder Rushing, Dr. Becky Bowling, and John R Thomas

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners

Join us for a fun day of learning! Pre-registration required, deadline September 8th to sign up

Visit <https://txmg.org/conchovalley/> for more info and to register or call 325-659-6522

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.