# Concho Valley HORTICULUTION August 2021

# Controlling Armyworms and Fireants

Caterpillars of all kinds have been out in abundance this year, starting with early populations of webworms, other leaf-eating caterpillars like sophora worm (feeding on Texas Mountain Laurel) and walnut caterpillars (feeding on pecans). The major nuisance right now is the fall armyworm. They have emerged early and strong, which is unfortunate for some home lawns and pastureland.

Armyworm outbreaks are usually short-lived, but memorable when they happen. They are generally kept under control by insect and animal predators, weather conditions and other factors. But when the conditions are just right, they can devour a lawn quickly.

Watch out for armyworms in the lawn, and apply an insecticide as soon as possible if they appear in large numbers or significant plant damage is observed. Insecticides with low toxicity and limited impact to beneficial insects include Bt, spinosad and halofenozide. Conventional pesticide options include bifenthrin, carbaryl, parmethrin and esfonyalerate. Apply in



permethrin and esfenvalerate. Apply in the early morning or late evening for best results. For more info on armyworm control, visit <u>https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture</u>.

Fire ants are also out in abundance, which is normal this time of year. Not only are fireants painful to people when we accidentally come across them in the yard, they can also find their way into the home or electrical equipment, and can even damage plants such as turfgrass and vegetable gardens.

The 'Texas Two-Step' method recommended by Texas A&M includes both mound treatments and baits, visit <u>https://fireant.tamu.edu/controlmethods/twostep/</u> for details. An insect growth regulator such as methoprene (trade name Extinguish) is a good way to control fire ants without damaging other insects, but there are many effective product options to choose from. More important than which particular product to use, is proper application. Apply a bait formulation lightly and evenly through the entire landscape. Then us a contact/mound treatment formulation directly on visible mounds.

# August To-Do's

- Lightly prune shrub roses and perennials to stimulate a fall flush of blooms; if they are looking stressed, prune more severely
- Provide water for backyard wildlife songbirds, butterflies etc.
- Continue to deadhead annuals to stimulate new flowers
- Start plant springblooming wildflower seeds

# Pecan Update

Congratulations to our State Pecan Show Winners!

- Bill Book 1st Place Burkett
- Chester McCown 1st Place State Champion Native; 3rd Place GraTex; 3rd Place Waco; 3rd Place Cheyenne
- Eldroado Pecan Orchard 1st
  Place Western
- Olsak Farms 1st Place Pawnee

Controlling Khakiweed Some of the most common questions I receive from homeowners are about identifying and controlling khakiweed. Khakiweed is a broadleaf, warm-season perennial plant that grows low to the ground in a flattened out, prostrate manner; it has small white flowers in the summer that develop into prickly burs in the fall. The burs break apart into small 'spears' that can easily attach to animals, clothes, shoes and equipment. Khakiweed has a thick, deep taproot that helps it survive drought, and it can be challenging to control.

The number one factor in keeping khakiweed at bay is to have something to occupy the ground space - it thrives in bare spots and thinned out turf. Whether it be a thick healthy lawn, deep mulch, groundcover, etc., there needs to be something to intentionally cover the ground to reduce weed growth. This can really help prevent new khakiweed from coming up, but here are some suggestions for controlling existing plants and other ideas to help with prevention.

First, use gloved hands or a garden hoe to physically pull up large, mature plants – be sure to get the taproot. Herbicide will not be very effective at killing fully grown plants. For smaller, actively growing young plants a herbicide that contains a combination of several active ingredients is more effective that just a 2,4-D broadleaf weed killer. Try a product that has a combination of 2,4-D with mecoprop. carfentrazone, dicamba, or metsulfuron (for example, Fertilome brand 'Weed Free Zone').

Since khakiweed is a perennial, meaning it comes back from roots, pre-emergent will not fully control it; but pre-emergent is still very helpful if applied in the late winter (around February) to prevent new plants from coming up by seed. There are no pre-emergent herbicides labeled for khakiweed specifically, but a Texas A&M bulletin written by Scott Nolte, David Graf and Becky Trammel recommends trying a product with the active ingredient isoxaben (for example, trade name 'Gallery'). See https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/ to view the full publication. Always follow label directions when using any type of weed killer product.

Another tip - don't scalp the lawn or mow too low, as this plant loves to grow out flat on the open ground. Raise the mower a and cut the grass a little higher so the turf can shade it out. In summary, now is the time of year when khakiweed begins to be the most troublesome because the burs really start to develop – but control efforts need to start in the late winter with pre-emergent, and early spring with broadleaf herbicide when the plants are still small.



# Plant Spotlight

Red Valerian, Jupiter's Beard Centranthus ruber

Does well in full sun and alkaline soils, tough and drought tolerant once established.

Great butterfly plant, deer resistant. Blooms in summer.



### Summer Landscape Tasks August is a stressful month for plants and for

August is a stressful month for plants and for people working outside. The main landscaping and gardening tasks are watering, watching for pests and praying for fall rains to come. But to help plants make it through the hot, dry summer here are some tasks to get done in late summer.

First, replenish mulch in all planting beds and vegetable garden beds to a depth of three to four inches. This will really conserve water, prevent weeds, and help plants look better through the heat. Organic mulch, such as bark chips or shredded tree limbs, is recommended in many situations over inorganic mulch like shredded rubber or rocks; as it breaks down over time, wood mulch provides rich organic matter that improves the soil. Mulch is also beneficial for potted plants, though many don't think to use it in containers. Try adding mulch to planters, it will likely help the plants get through the hot days without as much stress.

Consider converting from spray irrigation to drip irrigation in shrub, flower and groundcover beds. Drip irrigation is much more water efficient and it's better for plant health because it applies the water straight to the soil for the roots to absorb instead of spraying on the foliage.But only switch to drip if the whole irrigation zone is converted, as drip and spray heads have very different run times and cannot be mixed in a zone. To convert, cap off some of the spray heads and install an adapter to the remaining heads (the number needed depends on the size of the bed) and connect drip tubing to the adapter. Change the time clock to allow the zone to run longer than before, since drip irrigation applies water more slowly than sprinklers.

Summer-stressed roses and perennials can benefit from being cut back to allow for healthy new growth for fall, just cut back about one-third, or more if needed to remove the damaged branches and stems. The monarch migration begins in the fall, so plant some butterfly bush or Greg's Blue Mist to provide for them when they come through the area.



# Rainwater Harvesting



It may not rain as often as many of us would like in the Concho Valley, but when it does rain sometimes it really comes down hard! Whether it's a downpour or a light sprinkling, harvesting rainfall can really help the landscape during dry periods - and also conserve potable water, which will save money on the water bill. In addition to providing a source of stored water when needed, rainwater harvesting has the potential to reduce stormwater runoff and keep fertilizers, debris and other pollution out of the rivers so it's also good for the environment.

Rainwater harvesting just means collecting rainfall off a surface (usually the roof but could be pavement or other surface) and diverting to a storage tank for later use.Harvested rainwater is often used for landscaping but can be treated and pressurized to use inside the home. It's possible to collect quite a bit of water from rainfall, more than many might think. One inch of rain provides 0.6 gallons of water per square foot of catchment area. So a 1,000 square foot home has a roof that could collect 600 gallons of water for every inch of rain – that's more than 12,000 gallons of water in an average rainfall year.

Catching rainfall can be simple or extensive – some homeowners are incorporating large systems with tanks that hold thousands of gallons, and others are starting with a small rain barrel. Whether large or small, rainwater harvesting systems can really help conserve water and keep plants alive during drought. For more info, including a helpful calculator to determine tank size, gutter size etc. visit rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu. There are also rainwater harvesting demonstrations created by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners that are open to the public located at the Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67. Stop by to see the tanks and how they are set up and get ideas for a home system.



## Summer Plant Stress

Some plants thrive in the most extreme summer heat – pride of Barbados and sweet potato vine for example. In landscape planning, remember that diversity is good – include a variety of plants with different strengths and requirements in order to have something showy and happy all year long. For plants that aren't thriving right now, take the time to evaluate irrigation methods and timing. Summer heat certainly causes plants to need more irrigation than cooler seasons; but proper watering (deep and infrequent) throughout the year can help plants develop deeper roots, which can help them withstand summer temperatures.

If you suspect something other than just summer heat, consider all the possibilities – weed killer damage, nutrient deficiency, insect pests, disease, etc. Disease can be difficult to diagnose in plants, try sending a sample to the Texas A&M Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. Visit <u>plantclinic.tamu.edu</u> for info and to print the submission form. The charge is \$35 for routine diagnostic service, and this can be a big help in determining the cause of plant stress.

But what is causing the trouble for many plants right now is simply heat and drought. Add plenty of mulch for planting beds, and even container-grown plants, to conserve moisture in the soil. Cut back perennials now to get a flush of healthy new growth for fall blooms. Give pecan trees extra water – they are not drought tolerant plants. There is a term called 'August Drop' that is used to refer to pecans dropping nuts and leaves in late summer – this is a pretty common occurrence and is just a response of the tree to high temperatures, not a sign that the tree is dying.

If plants have yellow, stunted leaves with green veins, this is probably a sign of iron deficiency – try spraying the leaves with a liquid iron fertilizer, and work on increasing organic matter in the soil around the plants. Iron chlorosis is especially common on hollies, pears, and junipers but can affect many others. Iron deficiency is caused by the high soil pH but is also made worse by water imbalance – too much or too little.

# Late Summer Pecan Care

Many homeowners have questions about why they didn't get any good pecans from their trees in a given year. Pecans need steady, even irrigation all the way from bud break to shuck split for good quality nuts; they also require fertilization and pest management. If you would like to grow a good crop of pecans to pick up this fall, be sure to soak the drip line of pecan trees with two inches of water every two weeks, keep an eye out for nut-damaging pests like the pecan weevil, and apply 10-20 pounds of ammonium sulfate fertilizer in August and September for heavily loaded trees. For homeowners that just want to enjoy the tree as a landscape feature and don't harvest the nuts, irrigation is still important – pecans are prone to branch dieback if they are not irrigated regularly.

Three major pecan nut pests that can reduce the crop are the pecan nut casebearer (active in the spring), the hickory shuckworm (active in summer and fall) and the pecan weevil (active in late summer and fall). Now is the time to start watching out for the pecan weevil. In August, adult weevils start to emerge from the soil where they overwintered. They crawl up the tree and feed on the nuts. Nuts in the gel stage will drop off the tree, nuts that are passed the gel stage are susceptible to egg laying. The infested nuts will stay on the tree while the developing larva eats the pecan kernel. The larva then emerge from the nuts in late fall through a hole they chew through the shell. This results in pecans that look full-sized but have no kernel inside to enjoy. Monitoring is important to catch this pest and know when to treat – their emergence depends on environmental conditions and can be different each year. They usually emerge in August, but can be delayed by drought-hardened soils. Homeowners can consider applying an insecticide such as carbaryl or bifenthrin to the trunk every 10 days in the latter half of August to prevent the kernel damage this year, if weevils have been a problem in the past. Visit tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture for more information on the pecan weevil, and to learn about monitoring and control measures.





Friday, August 13, 12:00pm Lunch N Learn Class - Planting WIIdflowers

Location: People/Plant Connection Headquarters, 416 South Oaks St, San Angelo Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; August through October is a good time of year to plant springblooming wildflowers! Learn about planting techniques and which flowers do well in west Texas. To reserve a spot visit <u>Click Here</u> or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Thursday, August 26, 2:00pm-4:00pm <u>West Texas Gardening 101—Greenhouse Management</u>

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 manage a hobby greenhouse from pest control to heating and cooling and more. To reserve a spot visit <u>Click Here</u> or call Susan Stanfield 325-656-3104

#### 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 <u>https://txmg.org/conchovalley/</u> for more info and to register or call the Extension Office at 325-659-6522

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



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