



# Concho Valley

October 2021

# HORTICULTURE UPDATE

## Falling Leaves

Pecan leaves have really been falling early this year, mainly because of late summer heat stress compounding freeze damage from the February storm, and high populations of aphids feeding on them. They usually don't drop so many leaves until later in the fall, but there is no major cause for concern for pecans or other landscape trees dropping leaves early. They will be falling soon anyway and don't need any major intervention. Take advantage of the abundant organic matter that comes from deciduous trees, and compost the leaves for improving soil later.

Texas A&M recommends that we "don't bag it" - referring to fallen leaves and grass clippings. Soil needs organic matter for landscape plants, vegetables, herbs etc. to grow well so don't send off valuable plant matter into the landfill. One easy way to keep leaves in the yard is to simply mow over them to shred and let them filter down into the soil in the lawn. This is very effective for pecan leaves, but live oak and other thick leaves should be raked up and utilized elsewhere. Spread them out into beds or in the vegetable garden as a mulch. Mulch benefits plants in many ways - it moderates soil temperature, conserves water, protects plants during freezing temperatures, and prevents weeds. A good depth for mulch is three to four inches.

Another solution is to place the leaves in a compost bin or pile - compost is extremely advantageous in the landscape or vegetable garden. Along with fallen leaves, other organic matter from the yard can be composted, as well as kitchen scraps such as coffee grounds, vegetable peelings and fruit scraps. Just avoid adding meat, dairy products, fat/grease, or noxious weeds to the compost.

The fourth option is direct soil improvement, but this should only be done in areas that will be fallow or bare for the winter season. Raw materials should not be incorporated directly into beds that will be planted right away (otherwise, they can rob plants of nitrogen while they break down). But if leaves are worked into garden soil in the fall, when spring planting time comes around they will be broken down and decayed, providing good soil improvement.

There are often questions about certain species that might not be good for mulch or compost in the yard or garden, and while some leaves break down faster than others almost all types of leaves are a good addition. The main exception is black walnut, which produces an allelopathic substance that inhibits growth of other plants. Don't use black walnut leaves as mulch or compost, because it can reduce plant growth.

## October To-Do's

- Harvest cold-sensitive herbs such as basil if there's an early freeze
- Plant cool season annuals (latter half of the month)
- Adjust irrigation schedule for cooler weather
- Plant trees, shrubs and vines

---

## Pecan Update

Pecan Weevil: Pecan weevil can still be an issue in areas that have drought hardened soils which can result in a drought delayed emergence.

Producers with adult emergence traps should monitor traps until the latest maturing cultivar has reached shuck split.

# Cool Season Vegetables

October is a great month for growing food! There are many delicious, healthy cool season vegetables that are best planted now, including: artichoke, beet, bok choy, broccoli, brussels sprout, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, chard, collard greens, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, bunching onion, radish, shallot, spinach, and turnip.

Many are available locally as transplants, and these crops can also be direct seeded into the garden or flower bed. Cool season vegetables are wonderful to incorporate into flower beds or container gardens to keep the yard looking green and fresh even as things start to turn brown and dormant later in the season.

Radish is perfect for small spaces and containers, since it doesn't need much room. It adds a great fresh crunch to salads and really brightens up dishes. Radish needs loose soil, so work the ground well or plant in fresh potting mix if growing in a container. Harvest the roots when they are young and tender – if left too long, they turn tough, hot and stringy.

Greens like spinach, kale, chard and collards are very nutritious and pretty easy to grow. They prefer full sun but can tolerate part shade. They taste better when grown in cool weather, as heat makes them taste bitter.

Beets are a versatile crop because in addition to the root which can be roasted, pickled, fresh diced finely into salads, etc. the greens are also useful – they can be a substitute in recipes that call for greens like spinach or chard. If the plan is to make pickled beets, they can be planted at the same time in order to be ready to process all at once. But if they are to be used periodically through the winter for meals, it's best to stagger plant – plant a few seeds or transplants every two weeks so they will be ready to eat at different times.

Kohlrabi and bok choy are some unique options to try, they are both very attractive in the landscape and can be utilized in some great recipes. Bok choy makes great stir fry, and kohlrabi is nice roasted or diced up fresh and crisp in a salad.

If starting from seed, prepare a smooth seedbed for optimal germination. Keep seeds damp until they sprout and establish good roots. Some seeds, like carrots and lettuce, must be exposed to light to germinate so don't dig holes to plant in – just scatter on top of the ground, and water lightly to settle into the soil.

---

## Plant Spotlight

### Festival Strawberry

*Fragaria* × *ananassa* Duchesne  
'Festival'

This strawberry variety has been designated a Texas Superstar plant. It produces attractive, flavorful fruit. Plant in October for a late winter/early spring harvest. Foliage is cold hardy, protect during freezes below 20 degrees; when there are flowers or fruit, protect from light frosts.



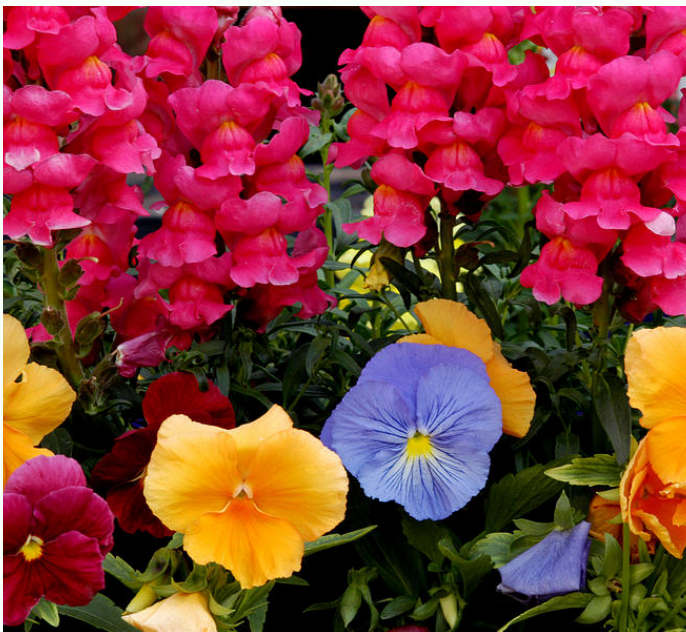


# Watering, Weeds and Color

The first landscape task for fall is to modify watering. Homeowners with automatic irrigation systems should adjust the timers if they have not been changed for cooler temperatures yet. While there have been plenty of hot days recently, landscapes are needing less water than during the extreme summer climate. The website [WaterMyYard.org](http://WaterMyYard.org) is a great tool to help know how long to run the irrigation system each week based on local weather.

There have been questions about weeds in the lawn. Khakiweed is very prevalent right now, and a weedy grass called KR bluestem is an invasive, aggressive perennial grass that pops up in early fall. Both of these common weeds are opportunistic and thrive most in yards that are thin and stressed, and not so much in healthy, vigorously growing yards. So the main recommendation for control is to mow frequently, fertilize properly and irrigate regularly through the growing season to allow the turfgrass to thrive and resist weed invasion. Pre-emergent will not provide good control since KR bluestem and khakiweed are both perennial plants. Keep an eye out and catch it early – dig up clumps with gloved hands before they go to seed.

Now that it's cooling down, it's a great time to add some fresh bright color to the landscape with cool season annual color. Plant pansies, snapdragons, stock, dianthus, and ornamental kale for late fall and winter interest. When planting annual color, the biggest bang for the buck comes when planting in small groupings instead of spreading a few flowers out through a large bed. Plant several flowers close together in a few areas or 'pockets' of a flower bed, or plant several close together in a container for the most color pop and impact.



# Plant Herbs in Autumn



Cool season flowers, vegetables and herbs can be planted right now to keep the curb appeal up and to provide a tasty harvest for the dinner table throughout the winter.

Cool season herbs like cilantro and parsley are happiest when planted in the fall and grown through the cooler winter months; many people try to grow them in the spring and are disappointed when they fade and dwindle in the summer heat. Evergreen herbs like rosemary, sage, thyme, and oregano keep going strong all year long and winter doesn't slow them down. Some herbs are only somewhat evergreen and will keep going unless there's a really hard freeze, such as mint, lavender and chives.

Many of the popular, commonly used herbs are easy to grow and well adapted to the local climate. Most of them do best in full sun and need well drained soil, but mint is an exception and can take some shade and soggy soil. If soil is heavy and compacted, most herbs will perform better if the soil is loosened up and amended with compost to improve drainage.

Many herbs also do well in containers, and can even be grown inside during the winter; basil is an indispensable culinary herb for many, but cannot live through the winter outside. To grow it inside, find a spot with the brightest light – about 6 hours of sun per day and plant in a container with a tray to catch excess water. But don't keep it on a windowsill when it's cold outside, it needs temperatures the 70's and the air next to windows gets colder than the rest of the room.

# Dividing Perennials

Now that we have had some weather that feels a little bit like fall, it's more encouraging to get outside in the yard and work on end-of the season landscaping and gardening tasks. One item to consider adding to the to-do list is to divide spring-blooming clumping perennials. Plant division is best be done in the season opposite of blooming, so wait until spring to divide fall bloomers like oxblood lilies, mums and spider lilies. But now is prime time to dig and divide spring flowering plants like irises, daylilies, purple coneflowers, daisies, and phlox. If circumstances require dividing in the blooming season, it is still worth doing but they will be set back and miss a year of blooming.

Digging and dividing these types of flowers is a good way to spread them around into other parts of the landscape and increase them in the yard, or share with friends and neighbors. 'Pass along plants' are a fun part of gardening and are a great way to meet new friends and get to know people in the neighborhood. Also, division helps keep clumping perennials in better shape for good health and flowering; after several years many perennials become overgrown and crowded, and won't bloom as well. Division refreshes and allows them to flower more abundantly. Division is beneficial every few years for many perennials, but some can go longer – just divide when performance starts to decline.

To divide clumping perennials, use a shovel to dig them up and lift from the ground. Be sure to get stems and roots from healthy, vigorously growing parts of the plant. Some plants can be pulled apart by hand, for others just cut the roots into smaller sections with a sharp knife. If the stems and roots are woody and tough, use only the more tender shoots from the outer part of the clump for replanting. Discard the center of the clump if it looks weak and is woody. For irises, divide into individual rhizomes – retain at least a few inches of the rhizome and one fan of leaves; cut the fan about 2/3 down.

Have the new planting site ready to go if possible; mix compost into the soil ahead of time, plant immediately and apply mulch afterward. If the divided plants can't be put in their new permanent spot right away, they can be 'heeled in' which just means to temporarily plant in a holding bed or a container with potting mix until ready to go in the new location.

---

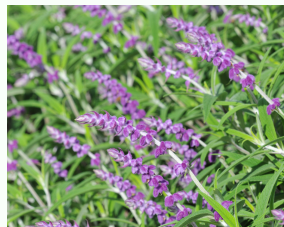
## Showy Fall Plants

Fall is a great time of year to plant most types of plants, including trees, shrubs and perennials; they will have the chance to get established and grow a good root system through the fall, winter and spring before summer hits. It's good landscape design to include a variety of plants that have blooms in all the different seasons. If you don't have a lot of fall color, keep an eye out in the neighborhood to see what looks nice in the fall and plant some. With the exception of desert plants that prefer dry, rocky soil, plants will tend to perform better with some planning ahead – incorporate compost into the planting bed before planting, install drip irrigation around the plants, and finish with a three to four inch deep layer of wood mulch.

Some great fall color perennials and shrubs to consider include flowery senna, fall aster, autumn joy sedum, salvia, Mexican bush sage, roses, turk's cap, Mexican mint marigold, American beautyberry, hardy mums, and spider lilies. Some, like fall aster and mums, really put on their best show just in the fall. Others, like salvia and turk's cap will bloom off and on throughout the summer and into the fall.

The cooler fall temperatures will help reduce the number of some common summer pests like spider mites. If you have struggled with marigolds, for instance, try planting them fresh in the fall and they will be less prone to spider mite damage. Other annuals that are beautiful for autumn include cosmos, dusty miller, and dianthus. When it cools down even more, it will be time to get the pansies, snapdragons, stock and ornamental cabbage and kale planted but wait until there are no more hot days.

With good plant selection (utilizing plants that are well adapted to the local climate and soil), and proper timing of planting, landscapes can thrive and shine all year long. Do a bit of research and work ahead of time to plan and select the best plants – this will ensure the best success.







# UPCOMING EVENTS

## September 2021

Wednesdays, September 15 through October 13, 6:00-9:00pm

### **Earth-Kind Landscape School - Seminar Series**

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

*Cost: \$60 for series*

*Speaker: Allison Watkins*

This series is five Wednesday evenings with a different topic each week. To register and see more details, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/> or call the Extension Office at 325-659-6528.

Friday, October 15, 12:00pm

### **Lunch N Learn Class - Fall is for Planting: Butterflies, Herbs, Bulb and Wildflowers**

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

*Cost: \$5*

*Speaker: Allison Watkins*

Hosted by the PPC; Fall is here! It's the best time of year to plant and work in the yard. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Saturday, September 25, 8:00am to 12pm (or when sold out)

### **Master Gardener Fall Vegetable Plant Sale**

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

*Cost: \$2 per plant*

Join us for the Master Gardeners' first ever fall vegetable plant sale! They have cool season crops such as broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, kale, and more. For details, see <https://txmg.org/conchovalley/> or call the Extension Office at 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.