

Concho Valley

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

November 2021

Pecan Trees

Many of the questions that come into the Extension Office are about pecan tree care. Pecans are beautiful landscape trees that provide a healthy, delicious food but they are not low maintenance. They require plenty of water, fertilizer and pest control to stay healthy and to make a good crop. For a good guide on caring for pecan trees, visit the website <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on 'West Texas Pecan Management.'

This time of year the main focus is on harvesting. Keep irrigating weekly when there is no rainfall, all the way through shuck split; adequate moisture is needed to finish the nuts and for the shucks to open up and allow the nuts to fall. The pecans are ready to harvest anytime after the shuck begins to open up, but nuts harvested early in the season will need to be dried before being placed in storage. Allow to dry on screens in a well-ventilated space for about two weeks, until the kernel snaps when bent. For best quality, store pecans in the freezer and keep sealed so they don't absorb odors from other foods.

Fall is an excellent time of year to plant trees; some of the recommended varieties include Pawnee, Hopi, Sioux and Wichita – these will do well in the Concho Valley. Pecans perform best in deep, well-drained soil that is weed-free around the tree. Remove all vegetation and apply mulch to help keep weeds out for newly planted trees to establish quickly.

In order to maintain a healthy shade tree in the landscape, water is the main need – provide thorough irrigation every week or two when there is no rain. Three weeks without water will stress the trees. Nitrogen fertilization is also beneficial. For homeowners that would like to try and improve crop production, zinc foliar spray is helpful and pest prevention is needed. Pecan nut casebearers can destroy developing nutlets in the spring, and pecan weevil can destroy pecans in the late summer.



November To-Do's

- Drain fuel from mower and other lawn equipment, or add a fuel stabilizer
- Plant trees and shrubs
- Utilize fallen leaves as mulch or add to compost bin
- Plant spring bulbs

Pecan Update

We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan show on Friday, December 3rd. Entries will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, December 2nd. This is a great way to learn what variety of pecans you may have and to receive information on growing pecans in our area.

For details on how to enter, contact the extension office at 325-659-6528 or visit tomgreen.agrilife.org

Preparing for Winter



After record-breaking high temperatures, it finally feels like fall. Take advantage of the beautiful weather to spend time in the yard sprucing it up and preparing for the coming winter. The average first freeze is mid-November, but it's hard to predict when it will truly turn cold. Now that temperatures are dipping into the 40's at night, it's time to start transitioning tropicals and houseplants that have been spending the summer outside back inside. Basil starts to decline in cooler night temperatures, so harvest and dry or freeze it to have some to use through the winter.

As warm season flowers start to fade and decline, add some bright color to containers and flower beds by planting cool season annuals like pansy, snapdragon, stock, kale and cabbage. Plant winter vegetables like broccoli, swiss chard, carrots and brussels's sprouts. Parsley and cilantro are cool season herbs that are best planted right now.

Avoid using high-nitrogen fertilizers on trees, shrubs and turf this late in the season, as nitrogen stimulates tender new growth that can be easily damaged at the first fall freeze. Cool season annuals and vegetables will benefit from steady applications on nitrogen. Wait until late winter to prune trees, except dead branches should be removed now while they are easily visible.

Turn the irrigation timer off, and only water occasionally as needed with the manual setting. Disconnect and bring in battery timers for drip irrigation before it freezes so they aren't damaged from ice forming inside.

After the first freeze, trim back all dead perennial tops and apply mulch over the roots. This is especially helpful for tender perennials like Pride of Barbados and lantana.

As leaves fall, don't bag them up and send them off to the landfill. Leaves are valuable organic matter for the landscape and garden. Light layers of leave can simply be mowed over on the lawn to shred them up. Other options include adding them into a compost pile or using as mulch in beds.

Plant Spotlight

Bok Choy

Brassica rapa subsp. *chinensis*

Bok choy is a beautiful cool season vegetable that adds bright, fresh greenery to the landscape and is also a healthy, tasty option for stir fry, salad, soups and more.

For tips on cooking with bok choy, visit

<https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/why-and-how-to-eat-bok-choy/>





Tree Selection

Trees are very valuable additions to the home landscape. It takes time to realize the full benefits of trees, and we should all plan ahead for future enjoyment by planting trees now. Since trees are such important, permanent parts of the landscape, good selection is essential. Choose trees that thrive in the local climate. One good resource to help choose the right tree for your yard is the website <https://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu>. Enter your zip code and choose from certain criteria to see a list of recommended species.

Some of the recommended large shade trees for the Concho Valley include cedar elm, bur oak, and chinkapin oak. These are all tolerant to drought and alkaline soil, are long-lived and are excellent choices for home landscapes. Medium-sized shade tree recommendations include Chinese pistache, lacey oak, and Texas ash.

Small ornamental trees also provide benefits and are part of good landscape design. Texas mountain laurel, flameleaf sumac, desert willow, Texas redbud and Mexican buckeye are great small trees to choose from.

Late fall is a wonderful time of year to plant trees. Follow good planting techniques to have the most success and end up with a healthy, vigorously growing new tree. Visit <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/arborday/plantingsteps/> to see tips on how to properly plant a tree. Be careful to dig the correct depth and don't plant the tree too deep. Planting trees too deep is a common cause of early tree death - or if the tree survives, it can cause significant health and aesthetic issues later on. Do apply a thick layer of mulch around the newly planted tree, research shows that thick mulch helps trees grow better than without. Try to avoid staking newly planted trees – it's usually not necessary, but if staking is needed don't leave on for more than one year. Don't fertilize newly planted trees, wait a year and see if any fertilization is needed at that point. Most recommended tree species will be well-adapted and should not require much fertilization.

Tree placement is an important landscape design component. Consider placing large shade trees at 45-degree angles off the corners of the home in the front yard; this will frame the home to highlight it and help the home appear larger. When trees are planted in the middle of the front yard, visually cutting the front of the home in half, it can make the home appear smaller.

Pruning Landscape Trees

Pruning of landscape shade trees can technically be done any time of year, though the winter season is the best time for major pruning. It is good to do it when the trees are dormant because they need their leaves during the growing season to make food for the whole plant, and major pruning reduces the food factories. And timing is particularly important for oak trees; they should not be pruned from February 1 to July 1 because this is the window of time that oak wilt is most easily spread through an insect vector – the nitidulid beetle. Oak wilt is a fungal disease that can affect any kind of oak, but is particularly damaging to red oaks and live oaks. Other methods for prevention include sterilizing tools before pruning and painting all pruning cuts with spray paint. Be sure to never bring in any unseasoned red oak firewood to your property; wood that has been left to dry for a year or more does not pose a threat.

Don't think of pruning as a quick fix for tree structure problems, it will usually not be able to immediately correct all issues – especially if the tree is mature and has not been pruned before. Pruning is a gradual process that should be carefully planned and carried out over the life of a tree to promote good structure. Whether you do the pruning yourself, or hire a tree service to do the work, it's important to be involved and guide the process. Here are a few basic tips for good pruning techniques.

First, remove dead, damaged or broken limbs. Then step back and take a look at the overall canopy, and pay special attention to branch angles. Wide angles are stronger, while narrow angles and branches growing close together are weak and have greater chances of failure. Make carefully planned removal or reduction cuts to promote good tree structure and strength. Branch attachments should have a 2:1 ratio, meaning the smaller branch diameter should be half as wide as the larger branch it's attached to. This kind of training for good branch angles and ratios is much more effective when started on young trees, rather than trying to correct large mature trees. Try to not to cut branches with diameter greater than six inches.

Avoid 'lion tailing' trees, which is easy to do to large, tall shade trees. The inner, lower branches are easier to reach but thinning the inside of the canopy can leave tufts of leaves and smaller branches at the tips. This can damage the health and structure of the tree because the tips catch the wind like a sail – the bending and swaying impairs structural integrity.

Composting

A compost pile or bin is something that should be in every home landscape. It's not an attractive addition that makes a good focal point, but it's important to have an out-of-the-way spot in the yard to put fallen leaves, plant trimmings and vegetable scraps in to decompose. Organic matter is a critical part of soil that plants need to grow well, and yard waste like leaves and grass clipping shouldn't be wasted by going into the landfill with the trash to take up space. It all becomes 'black gold' when broken down, decomposed and turned into compost that can be used in the landscape.

To get good quality compost, keep a good balance of oxygen and water, as well as the right balance of nitrogen and carbon. A compost bin needs to have open sides to allow air flow to provide oxygen, and if it gets dry it needs to be dampened. To provide the good balance of carbon and nitrogen just add the right plant-based waste materials.

High carbon materials are nicknamed 'browns' and are things like fallen leaves and twigs - materials that are tougher and slower to decompose. 'Greens' have a higher nitrogen ratio, and are softer-tissue things like grass clippings and fruit and vegetable scraps. Don't add meat, dairy or fats. Turn the pile weekly to speed up decomposition and create great compost to use in the landscape.

Remember the phrase 'compost once, mulch forever' – when starting a new bed or planting project, till up the soil and apply a three-inch deep layer of compost, then mix in as deep as possible. This provides immediate improvement to the soil structure and helps plants grow better. After planting apply a three-inch deep layer of wood-based mulch and keep it replenished to three inches from then on. As the mulch gradually decomposes, it also adds good organic matter to the soil. Except for when planting desert plants and those that prefer 'lean' soil, compost helps gardeners be more successful.

Thanksgiving is a great time of year to start a compost bin if you don't have one. There are fallen leaves to rake up to get it started, and plenty of fruit and vegetable scraps like potato peels, apple cores, and coffee grounds. To learn more, visit the website earth-kind.tamu.edu and view the publication on composting.

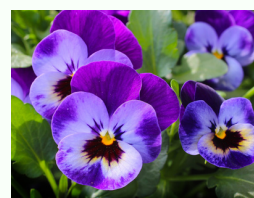
Winter Color and Interest

Winter will be here soon, and now is a good time to plant cool season color once warm season annuals start fading and declining. For winter annual color, you can't go wrong with flowers like pansies, snapdragons, stock, and cyclamen. Even winter vegetables like ornamental kale and cabbage and swiss chard provide great winter color and interest.

Stock's beautiful flowers have a lovely spicy-sweet fragrance. Stock does well here in the Concho Valley and will bloom late into spring. Size ranges from 1 to 2 feet tall and colors come in white, and varying shades of pink and purple. Pansies are a favorite winter flower for good reason - they are tough and well adapted, easy to maintain, and provide a great color display through the winter, even during light snow. Pansies have many color options that can integrate well into any landscape design or color scheme. Ornamental cabbage, kale and swiss chard don't bloom with colorful flowers but their leaves and stems provide a bright pop of color.

Masses and group plantings of annuals provide a larger impact than individual or sparse placement, so plant these flowers close together in small 'pockets,' strategically placed to catch the eye. Plant around the mailbox, on either side of the front door, or any place that is easily viewed or receives a lot of foot traffic.

Other plants that look great in the winter include evergreen shrubs, herbs like rosemary, parsley and cilantro, cool season perennials like dianthus, and bulbs like paperwhites. These are more permanent additions to the landscape that grow in the cool season. Even ornamental grasses can be showy in the winter, though they go dormant and turn brown – just don't prune them to the ground. Leave them in place, and the dried foliage stands out providing a nice structural accent. Finally, don't forget about berries – shrubs that make colorful berries brighten up the winter landscape as well. This includes various types of hollies, pyracantha, nandina, and beautyberry.





UPCOMING EVENTS

November 2021

Saturday, November 6, 10am-12pm

PPC Pumpkin Fest

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

Cost: Free to attend

Hosted by the PPC; Did you grow a pumpkin this year? Bring it to the weigh-in and try for a ribbon! For more info [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Tuesday, November 9, 6:30pm

Flower and Bird Photography

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

Cost: Free to attend

Speaker: Jim Bean

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners; Join the Master Gardeners to learn tips on capturing the beauty of nature on camera. For more info, contact the Extension Office at 325-659-6522.

Thursday, November 11, 2pm-4pm

West Texas Gardening 101 - Rosemary Wreath Workshop

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

Cost: \$25

Speaker: Susan Stanfield

Hosted by the PPC; Join this hands-on workshop to make and take home a fresh, fragrant holiday wreath. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104.

Friday, November 19, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class -Winter in West Texas: Winterizing and Cool Season Color

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Join us for a discussion on getting the landscape and garden ready for winter, and sprucing up the curb appeal with bright cool season color. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

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



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