



# Concho Valley

February 2022

# HORTICULTURE UPDATE

## Spring Pre-Emergent

The weather just seems to get more and more unpredictable – from the extreme winter storm a year ago to the warm December we just had, unusual weather can make gardening even more challenging than it already is in west Texas. But one of the common late-winter lawn care tasks, application of pre-emergent herbicide, is based on a measurable factor – soil temperature. If you would like to prevent spring weeds in the lawn, purchase pre-emergent and get it ready to go for when conditions are right – usually around mid-February to early March.

Pre-emergent is recommended for lawns twice a year; in the late winter apply when soil temperatures are about 55 degrees for several days in a row. In the fall, wait until soil temperature decreases to about 70 degrees. Soil temperature can be measured with a soil thermometer or even a simple kitchen meat thermometer. There are also soil temperature maps available online that show the current temperature as well as a 5-day average.

Visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on “Pre-Emergence Herbicides for the Home Lawn” to see a publication with more details and a list of products. Some are better for grassy weeds but there are options for broadleaf as well. Benefin (‘Balan’), dithiopyr (‘crabgrass control’), isoxaben (‘Gallery’) and pendimethalin (‘Halts’ or ‘Pre-M’) are some that are generally widely available in local horticulture supply stores and garden centers, and there are many other brand names and products to choose from as well.

Pre-emergent herbicide kills seedlings as they emerge so timing is very important – it must be applied before the weeds come up. And it's only effective against annual weeds, it will not kill perennial weeds that have an established root system. When used appropriately, pre-emergent can be very effective against otherwise difficult to control weeds such as crabgrass, annual bluegrass and rescuegrass. But remember that the first step and most important factor to having a weed-free lawn is that the turfgrass must be dense and healthy. Thin, stressed or dead lawns open up opportunities for the weeds to grow. So first focus on proper mowing, irrigation and fertilization and then utilize herbicides as needed without relying on them too heavily.

Don't apply pre-emergent anywhere that new seeds will be planted in the near future; different products vary in how long they are effective but they generally last several months. If you plan to sow grass seed this year skip the pre-emergent.

## February To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals
- Apply pre-emergent herbicide
- Plant and/or prune rose bushes
- Water 24 to 48 hours before predicted hard freezes to protect plants
- Run irrigation system check, repair if needed
- Prune shade trees and shrubs as needed
- Check mowers and other lawn equipment; sharpen mower blades, get tune-up if needed

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## Pecan Update

The Regional Pecan show, originally planned to be judged in January, has been postponed.

The new date has not been set but details will be announced as they become available.

# Starting Seeds Indoors



Whenever spring comes around (and stays), it will be an exciting time for gardeners to start planting and sprucing up the landscape. One way to get a head start on that now would be to start seeds indoors. While there will certainly be a good selection of transplants available at local nurseries, and transplants are preferable to seeds in some cases, seeds can be a more inexpensive way to start a flower or vegetable garden. There are many more varieties to choose from when selecting seed from catalogs, and growing those seeds indoors ahead of time instead of direct-sowing outside in the planting bed in the spring time can improve success.

Start with high quality, fine-texture potting mix. When dealing with tiny seedlings it's important to keep everything as clean and sterile as possible, as they are more sensitive and susceptible to diseases and pests. A brand-new bag of potting mix is a good way to go, or to use old potting soil it should be pasteurized. Just place in a shallow pan, cover with foil and bake in the oven until the mix reaches 180 degrees F for 30 minutes. This can create a long-lasting earthy odor in the oven so it's usually better to just buy new for seed starting.

Almost anything that can hold potting mix can be used to start seeds, but again it needs to be clean. Sterilize pots with 10% bleach solution before starting. Seeds starting trays can be purchased at local nurseries and garden centers, or improvise with egg cartons, cups, milk cartons etc. Punch holes in the bottom so that water can drain and place some kind of tray underneath to catch the excess water.

Seeds packets should indicate the optimal germination conditions, but in general seeds need soil that is damp and warm but not too hot. An air temperature of about 75 degrees in the day and 65 at night is good. Provide ample light for the seedlings to grow well, and begin transplanting into individual pots after the first true leaves are formed. Allow a strong, deep root system to grow, then harden off outdoors before planting in the landscape or garden.

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## Plant Spotlight

### Livin' Easy Rose

*Rosa 'Livin' Easy'*

This rose grows about 4ft tall and 3ft wide and produces striking apricot orange flowers from healthy, shiny green foliage. Very reliable, repeat bloomer with good disease resistance.





# Winter Trimming

February is a good time of year to cut back freeze-damaged perennials as well as give a 'haircut' to other landscape plants to keep them growing vigorous and to stay dense and attractive. For example, spreading/mounding plants like rosemary, artemisia and santolina tend to grow out away from their original planting point, leaving a bare unsightly section in the center. Cutting them back significantly this time of year helps the plants stay more compact and beautiful. Semi-evergreen plants like *Salvia greggii* and roses benefit from a trim in late winter to help with strong spring growth and to keep them tidy and healthy-looking. Cut them back about 25% to 50%, depending on how healthy their existing stems are. The more stressed and unsightly they are, the more they should be cut back.

Old shrubs that are overgrown and not as attractive as they used to look can be rejuvenated with 'gradual renewing' pruning. Remove a third of the oldest, tallest branches – cut them back almost to the ground, right now before new growth starts. This will stimulate fresh new growth, and the process can be repeated each year until the shrub is back into the desired condition.

Evergreen groundcovers can also benefit from a winter trimming, it will help them stay thick as well as neat and tidy. Asian Jasmine is a popular and common groundcover, for good reason – it's a nice size and texture, is fairly easy to grow, can handle shade, and doesn't need tons of water. A severe trim (as low as six inches) can help it grow back denser and thicker in the spring, but will cause it to look ugly for a while. A hedge trimmer is best, and a string trimmer can work but is more uneven and can accidentally dig up runners.

Mondo grass can be mowed once a year with a mower at the highest setting (no lower than four inches) to keep it looking dense and healthy. It also will look rough until spring growth fills it back in. Neither mondo grass or Asian Jasmine need any trimming to keep a more informal, natural look, but if they are damaged and need to be rejuvenated, or if a formal look is preferred, trimming now can help achieve that.



# Earth-Kind Soil Management

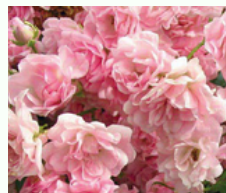
Soil quality has a huge impact on landscaping and gardening success, because it dictates water holding capacity and drainage, nutrient availability, etc. Soil is a complex, crucial part of gardening that requires some consideration but is often overlooked. Texas A&M has developed "Earth-Kind" landscaping techniques to help gardeners enjoy gardening, while also protecting the environment and natural resources; there are many components to Earth-Kind landscaping, and a good foundation to start with is Earth-Kind soil management.

Well managed soil can reduce or even eliminate the need for fertilizers in many landscape scenarios. Overuse of fertilizers is harmful to the environment, and the first step to fertilize correctly is to simply do a soil test through Texas A&M. Many homeowners apply fertilizer on a set schedule, but if there are already enough nutrients in the soil, additional nutrients are unnecessary. Visit <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/> and use the "Urban Soil Submittal Form" to send in a soil sample. The report may indicate that no fertilizer is needed, or if some is needed the report will show specifically what nutrients to apply and how much.

Another important but simple aspect of good soil management is the incorporation of compost any time new plants are added. Till or dig up the beds and add three inches of organic matter, then mix it in as deep as possible. Organic matter will improve drainage, aeration, nutrient absorption, and soil structure. There are many good options for plant-based organic matter, ranging from composted cotton bur hulls, composted farm manure, bagged compost from a nursery or garden center, or homemade compost made in the backyard from yard scraps like fallen leaves and grass clippings. Be sure to only incorporate fully decomposed organic matter, or finished compost; otherwise it can tie up nutrients instead of providing nutrition. Overtilling can be damaging to soil structure, so don't re-till the soil every season. But when starting a new bed or garden, the addition of compost will improve soil quality.

After planting, keep a three- to four-inch-deep layer of organic mulch maintained in the beds. Organic mulch, like shredded hardwood or cedar mulch will provide many benefits to the plants such as conserving water, moderating soil temperature, and preventing weeds. As time goes by, it will slowly break down and decompose into additional organic matter that will continue to improve soil. Just remember the phrase "compost once, mulch forever" and replenish mulch every year as it shrinks.

# Rose Planting and Care



Roses are one of the most popular flowers for landscapes and are a favorite for giving in cut bouquets, but have a reputation for being difficult to grow. Many see rose bushes as being finicky, prone to fungal disease and in need of extensive pruning and maintenance. While that may be true for some rose cultivars, there are many, many options to choose from and some roses are very easy to care for!

Two broad categories of easy-to-grow roses are antique and Earth-Kind types. Earth-Kind roses are cultivars that have been through rigorous scientific testing to find those that are tough – needing little water or pruning, and no pesticides or fertilizer. Antique or old roses have been around a long time because they are very hardy and a bonus is that they are very fragrant.

February is a great time to focus on roses not only because of Valentine's Day, but mid-February is a good time of year to plant new plants and to prune existing ones if needed. No matter what kind of rose you choose, plant in full sun and with good air circulation. This will go a long way to reducing fungal diseases on the leaves and will encourage good blooming. Don't plant too close to other plants or structures. Incorporate compost into the soil before planting and use good planting technique – dig a hole that is wide but not too deep (only plant the rose as deep as it had been growing in the nursery). Apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of wood mulch around the plant but pull it away from the stem.

Don't fertilize at planting – Earth-Kind roses won't need fertilizer anyway, and it's a general rule of thumb to wait until plants have had time to establish before applying any fertilizer. Water the plant in well, and water as needed when there is no rain. Newly planted plants will always need to be watered more frequently than established plants, so keep a close eye on it and water every few days for the first few weeks. Then, how often to water depends on a lot of factors such as soil type and weather, but train the rose to grow deep roots and be more drought tolerant by watering thoroughly but not too frequently – wait until the soil is dry before watering.

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## Efficient Landscape Irrigation

Water conservation is always a critical factor in landscaping, especially in west Texas. Take the time now to evaluate and improve irrigation systems before the warm season comes. Some fundamental components of efficient landscape irrigation include drip irrigation, a rain/freeze sensor, efficient spray nozzles, a knowledge of how to adjust an automatic time clock, and mulch. Drip irrigation is the best way to water plants because it applies the water slowly, directly to the soil so that it does not evaporate like spray irrigation. Not only does it save water when compared to spray irrigation, plants like it and most will perform better with drip. Plants absorb water best through the roots, so spraying leaves is unnecessary; and consistently spraying leaves can potentially increase fungal disease pressure. Drip irrigation can be a do-it-yourself project and with a little practice any homeowner can have the power to save water and keep plants irrigated without wasting water. Professional irrigators can also be hired to install drip systems.

Subsurface drip irrigation can be utilized for turfgrass as well, and can be a great choice but is a little more complicated than above-ground drip lines; it's worth looking into, especially for anyone starting from scratch with a new system. For those that have existing sprinkler systems or just want to stick with spray heads for the lawn, check out the various types of efficient sprinkler nozzles. One good example is multi-stream technology. Multi-stream sprinkler heads spray small jets of water, instead of droplets into the air. Multi-stream nozzles have a lower precipitation rate so they take a longer amount of time to water, but they use less water overall due to better uniformity and less evaporation (the smaller the droplet, the faster it evaporates).

It's distressing see sprinkler systems running during or right after a nice long, heavy rainfall. A rain/freeze sensor can help prevent this from happening, and is fairly inexpensive and simple to add to an existing system. If you have an automatic system with a timer, practice changing it and learn all the details of how it works. Control the irrigation timer, don't let the irrigation timer control you! Finally, three to four inches of wood mulch in all planting beds and even in potted plants can help with water conservation; it also looks attractive and adds a finishing touch to the yard.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## February 2022

Thursday, February 10, 2pm-4pm

### **West Texas Gardening 101 - Greenhouse Management**

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

*Cost: \$20*

*Speaker: Kay Thompson, owner Concho Natives*

Hosted by the PPC; Whether you have a greenhouse or are thinking about getting one, this seminar will tell you what you need to do to choose the right one for your site and how to care for it. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104.

Friday, February 18, 12:00pm

### **Lunch N Learn Class - Edible Landscaping: Fruit, Vegetables and Herbs**

*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 how to incorporate edible crops into a beautiful, functional landscape. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

### **SAVE THE DATE:**

Wednesday March 23, 6pm

Spring Earth-Kind Landscaping Seminar - Details TBA

Saturday April 2, 8am

Master Gardener Plant Sale - keep an eye out at [txmg.org/conchovalley](http://txmg.org/conchovalley) for details

Saturday, April 23, 9am

Container Gardening Workshop - Details TBA

Saturday, May 21

San Angelo Garden Tour - Details TBA

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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

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