



Concho Valley

March 2022

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

Improving the Lawn

There have been many questions already this year from homeowners wanting to gain control of weeds in the lawn, especially to get rid of khakiweed and other stickers. A lawn isn't very useful or enjoyable when it's full of painful stickers. Khakiweed won't be coming up for a while, but it's a perennial that will resprout from the roots later this year; and the key to killing it with herbicides is to catch it early when it's young and actively growing. Large mature plants will not be easily killed. But even more helpful than correct herbicide usage is prevention with good cultural management. Khakiweed is very opportunistic and grows in bare spots and in thin, stressed turf. Deep mulch, dense groundcovers and healthy thick turf are the most important things that can keep khakiweed from taking over the landscape – something must occupy the space or else the weeds will just keep coming back.

Good cultural management of turfgrass includes proper mowing, irrigation, fertilization and pest control. Visit <https://aggieturf.tamu.edu/publications> for some helpful guides on lawn care. Mowing and irrigation have the biggest impact on the lawn being dense and healthy, it's not just about finding the perfect fertilizer or pesticide. Mow at the correct height (about 0.5 inch for hybrid bermudagrass, 1 inch for common bermudagrass, and 2.5 inches for St. Augustine), often enough so that no more than 1/3 of the height of the grass is removed at once. This will have a big impact on improving turfgrass density and appearance. The average homeowner mows about once a month in the warm season, but weekly mowing during the spring and summer is important for a thick lawn.

Once it warms up, water deeply but infrequently. One inch of water, once per week is sufficient in the hot dry part of summer, and every two or three weeks is enough when it's cooler in the spring and fall. To find out how long to water to get one inch, set out some catch cans (or even some clean empty tuna cans) and water until an inch is measured in the cups. Lawns that are watered too frequently, or more than once per week, have shallow root systems and are not able to make it through the hot, dry summer weather. Deep-rooted grass will be much better at surviving the summer heat, will help conserve water, and better prevent weeds. Utilize the free tool [WaterMyYard.org](https://watermyyard.org) provided by Texas A&M to know how long to run the irrigation system each week based on local ET weather station data.

It's not a quick fix, but establishing a thicker, healthier lawn with deep roots (or using mulch or groundcovers in beds) will be a permanent, sustainable solution for preventing weed infestations.

March To-Do's

- Divide summer and fall flowering perennials and ornamental grasses
- Avoid purchasing bare-root trees and roses this late in the season - instead choose container grown or B&B
- Prepare soil in new beds by tilling in 3 inches of compost
- Don't plant frost-sensitive plants too early. The last frost in the Concho Valley can be as late as mid April, but is usually mid-to late-March

Pecan Update

The Regional Pecan show, was judged February 24th in College Station. The results are available at <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/>

Congratulations to our winners!

Spring Pecan Care



Pecans are beautiful, popular landscape trees in the Concho Valley. I get many questions asking how to get a better crop from a home landscape or small orchard planting – they are wonderful native trees, but pecans usually need a bit of help to produce a large, high quality crop of nuts. The best thing that homeowners can do for their trees to produce well is to water thoroughly and frequently, and apply nitrogen fertilizer regularly throughout the growing season.

Young trees will need at least seven to ten gallons of water per week, and older trees will need as much as 50 inches of precipitation annually. Since we average around 20 inches of rainfall in the Concho Valley, that means a significant amount of irrigation is needed to maintain large trees and grow a nice crop of pecans. Adequate moisture is needed all through the growing season in order for the nuts to grow to full size, then fill well with kernel, and for the shuck to split open at the end of the season. So reliable, steady watering is important.

To provide the needed nitrogen, apply one pound of 21-0-0 fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter per tree, or $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of 33-0-0 fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter per tree. Start the fertilization program in the spring as buds begin to grow, and repeat every six to eight weeks through the season. Apply to the ground under the tree canopy, using a broadcast spreader to cover the whole rooting zone, then water in immediately.

Zinc foliar sprays are also very helpful for pecan production. Zinc is essential for maximum leaf expansion, and larger leaves help produce better pecans. Apply foliar zinc frequently in the early part of the growing season. Because zinc sulfate can seriously damage the leaves of many types of plants, use zinc nitrate on pecan trees in home landscapes to avoid damaging surrounding plants.

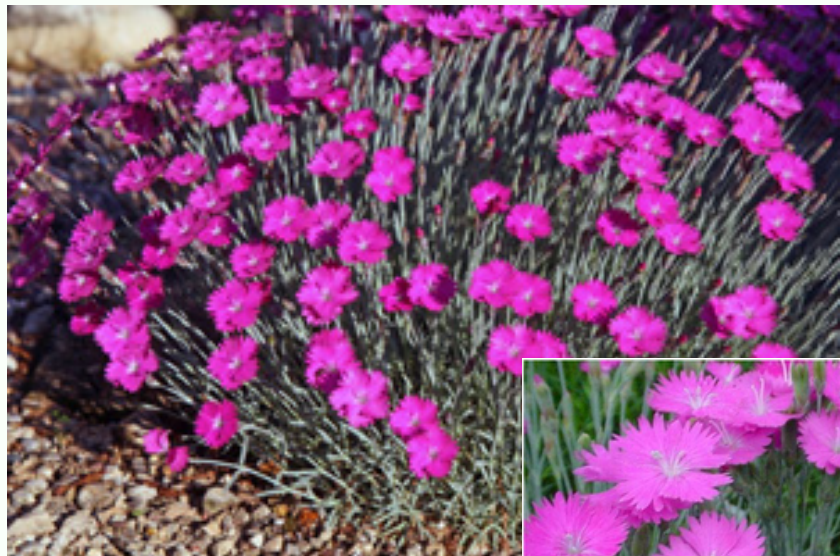
Keep an eye out for pests that damage the nuts - the pecan nut casebearer in the spring, and the pecan weevil later in the summer. If the tree has a heavy crop set in the spring, it's ok to not treat for casebearers because an overloaded tree could benefit from a crop reduction. If treatment is needed though, the timing of the spray is very precise.

Plant Spotlight

Firewitch Dianthus

Dianthus gratianopolitanus
'Firewitch'

This cool-weather loving perennial is great for spring color. Best planted in morning sun with a little afternoon shade, also good in a patio container.



Utilizing Herbs in the Landscape

Herbs are great to have in the yard for many reasons - they are good for pollinators, most are deer resistant, they are delicious and healthy for cooking, and make beautiful landscape plants. There are herbs to try for every level of gardening experience, from beginner to advanced. Beginners could try easy-to-grow plants like mint (there are many delicious types to choose from) and expert gardeners up for a challenge could try some of the harder to grow types (at least in west Texas) like chamomile and tarragon. There are many herbs to try in the landscape, some of the recommended types for the Concho Valley include evergreens like sage, winter savory, rosemary, thyme, oregano, lavender, marjoram and chives; annuals like basil, parsley, dill, cilantro; and semi-evergreen/perennials like mint, catnip, catmint, fennel, lemon balm, Mexican mint marigold, lemon verbena, and lemon grass.

Mexican mint marigold can be used as a substitute for the more challenging to grow tarragon, and calendula or marigold petals can be used as a substitute for the extremely pricy saffron spice. Nasturtium flower buds can be used as an alternative to capers. It's fun and rewarding to be able to cook and serve food with ingredients from your own yard! Just be sure to be mindful of herbs and any other plants that will be eaten, and do not use pesticides that would make them harmful to ingest. Use only vegetable garden-safe pest control techniques, and utilize integrated pest management (IPM) methods like physical, cultural and biological controls to keep plants healthy.

Most herbs prefer full sun and well-drained soil; incorporating compost can help loosen up soil and increase drainage. Some do well in poor soil though, like lavender – it will thrive in rocky, lean soil so don't add organic matter.



Spring Vegetables and Flowers

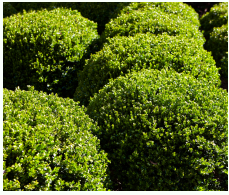
When will it be time to plant tomatoes and spring flowers? Gardeners and homeowners are itching to get some life going in their yards with so much brown left from the cold winter. Warm season vegetables and annual flowers can't handle a frost or freeze, so it's always a big question every year – when to plant. The average last frost in the Concho Valley is around late March/early April, so if you choose to plant early be sure to have a plan ready to go in case there is a late frost. Frost cloth (row cover) is very helpful in protecting plants from short, light frosts. It's a much better option than covering with plastic because 1) leaves will freeze anywhere plastic touches the plant and 2) as soon as the sun comes out the next morning it will quickly get too hot inside a plastic cover.

Tomatoes in particular do best when planted as early in the spring as possible, while still avoiding freezing temperatures. Tomato plants like cool weather – not too hot, not too cold. They don't set fruit well in high temperatures, and it heats up quickly in west Texas spring and summer. Purchase large, healthy transplants and fertilize and water properly to get as much vigorous, healthy growth as possible to harvest plenty of tomatoes before it gets too hot. To keep production going longer, choose heat-tolerant varieties such as Phoenix, Tycoon, Homestead, and any small cherry variety like Husky Cherry Red.

Other vegetables like melons, squash, peppers and okra do just fine in the heat as long as they have adequate water. To have the best success with vegetables, loosen and improve the soil with compost before planting to provide oxygen and nutrients to plant roots. Install drip irrigation, and then apply a thick layer of mulch after planting transplants or after seeds emerge and grow tall enough. Mulch does a lot to help plants – reduces weeds, prevents evaporation, moderates soil temperature, etc.

Some annual color will really brighten up the yard and help with curb appeal while we wait to finish cleaning up freeze damaged shrubs and perennials. Plant flowers like petunias, begonias, periwinkles, pentas, geraniums, and alyssum in pots and in groups in flower beds. Planting annuals in 'pockets' or in small closely planted groups helps them have more color pop and impact.

Shrubs in the Landscape



Shrubs are important foundations to many home and commercial landscapes, and often get overlooked and ignored in existing landscapes. In some ways this is the goal – select and plant the right shrub, then ‘let it be’ with minimal care. If the chosen plant is well-adapted to the local climate, grows to the correct size at maturity, and is planted properly, shrubs should not need regular, extensive effort to keep them healthy and attractive. However, shrubs often get too large (because of poor plant selection) and cover up windows, porches and pathways, or are simply old and overgrown for the site (after many years they need to be replaced or cut back to rejuvenate). This can cause shrubs to be a hindrance to an attractive landscape instead of adding to the home’s beauty. Do some research when planting new shrubs to select dwarf, well-adapted varieties that will thrive and grow to a nice size and shape for the space. Some examples include dwarf yaupon holly, dwarf Indian hawthorn, and dwarf euonymus.

Another way that shrubs can be a burden in a landscape is extensive shaping and pruning. Again, choosing the right plant in the first place can greatly reduce the need for maintenance. Choose shrubs that grow to the desired size at maturity and let them stay in their natural shape and form to reduce or eliminate shearing and pruning. Unless every plant is pruned into the exact same shape and size, it can be very unattractive to sculpt shrubs into spheres or other shapes.

Just because something is frequently done in many landscapes doesn’t mean it’s the right thing for every yard. Aesthetics and what looks good to someone is subjective, so do what works for you and what you enjoy. But don’t feel like you have to ‘keep up with the Joneses’ and keep shrubs molded and sheared just because it’s done everywhere else. Personally, I enjoy the natural form with infrequent, light pruning in most cases. Shaped/hedged/sheared is generally a more formal look and is sometimes needed for a specific appearance or theme.

Planting a New Lawn

A thick carpet of turfgrass makes a great play space for kids and pets, and creates a very pleasant atmosphere for entertaining and even just lounging and enjoying fresh air on a nice day. It is important to ensure that lawns in west Texas are cared for in a water-efficient way, with proper irrigation that doesn’t waste water, because it is easy to unintentionally over-water lawns or lose water through irrigation systems that are not very efficient. But with some effort and knowledge, lawns have a place in a well-designed landscape, and can be healthy and water-efficient even in west-Texas!

Here are some tips for establishing a new lawn –whether for a new construction home, filling in bare spots of an existing lawn, or renovating and redoing an existing lawn. First is timing – sod can be planted technically any time of year, but seed germinates better in warmer temperatures so don’t be too hasty to plant seed. Wait until around May when soil warms up.

A well-prepared site or planting bed is important because it increases the success rate of getting turfgrass established. It also helps create a lawn that is more drought-tolerant, by encouraging deeper roots. First, clear out all debris - weeds, rocks, etc. Then till the ground to loosen and aerate the soil, making it easier for roots to grow through.

Planting can be done in several different ways. While some grasses can be seeded, like common bermudagrass or buffalograss, St. Augustine and hybrid bermuda varieties are only available as sod. For instant impact, purchase squares or rolls of sod and lay it right onto the prepared soil surface, creating an instant lawn. Plugging and sprigging are also options but require more time before the lawn fills in.

Whether planting seeds or sod, irrigate frequently and lightly at first, then slowly reduce the frequency when roots become well established but water deeper each time. Once the lawn is established, the key to good irrigation is ‘deep but infrequent.’

For fertilization, a good first step is to do a soil test through Texas A&M University – see the website soiltesting.tamu.edu. That will give a recommendation on what nutrients are needed, but usually nitrogen is the main concern.



UPCOMING EVENTS

March 2022

Friday, March 4, 12:00pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Spring Vegetable Gardening

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

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Grow some of your own food! Join us to discuss what vegetables to grow in the Concho Valley. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Thursday, March 10, 2pm - 4pm

West Texas Gardening 101 - All About Bees

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

Cost: \$20, \$35 per couple

Speaker: Nikki Felcman, St. Abigail Bees

Hosted by the PPC; See an actual working beehive, learn how to protect native bee populations and care for your own beehives. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104.

Wednesday, March 23, 5:30pm - 9pm

Home Landscaping in the Concho Valley

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

Cost: \$20

Speakers: Dr Chrissie Segars, Allison Watkins

Join us to learn about Earth-Kind practices for beautiful, functional landscapes in the Concho Valley. To sign up, visit tomgreen.agrilife.org or call 325-659-6522

SAVE THE DATE:

Saturday April 2, 8am

Master Gardener Plant Sale - keep an eye out at txmg.org/conchovalley for details

Saturday, April 23, 9am

Container Gardening Workshop - Details TBA

Saturday, May 21

San Angelo Garden Tour - Details TBA

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



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