



# Concho Valley

April 2022

# HORTICULTURE UPDATE

## Assessing Tree Damage from 2021

There are still many questions coming into the Extension Office regarding shade trees affected by the winter storm just over one year ago. Arizona ash were the most commonly affected, but some live oaks were damaged also - as well as various other species like lacebark elm and crape myrtle.

Last year, early in the season the recommendation was to wait and see how much the damaged trees recovered before making a decision to cut down or not. But by late summer of last year, the time for a decision came. And now, over a full year after the event, homeowners can be confident that what branches remain dead after spring green-up won't recover, and the trees need to be pruned or removed.

Arizona ash is not a recommended species for the Concho Valley, as they are short-lived trees, have weak structure and are prone to pest problems. This is a good opportunity to replace with a better species such as bur oak or cedar elm.

Whatever the species of tree, the decision whether to completely remove, or prune, or cut to the ground to regrow from the roots is entirely up to the homeowner and should be made based on the specific circumstances of the landscape and health of the tree. But in general, if 50% or more of the canopy survived the winter storm last year it is likely worth the effort to carefully prune and allow time to continue to recover. If less than 50% of the canopy survived, it may be a better option to totally remove the tree.

Live oaks were very mixed in how much damage they received in the big freeze, many fared well and others were significantly damaged. Oaks are very variable genetically and no two are exactly alike. There are two species of live oak common to west central Texas - *Quercus fusiformis* (escarpment live oak) and *Quercus virginiana* (Southern live oak). Many live oaks are a hybrid between the two species, and those with more escarpment oak genes survived the freeze better than those with more southern live oak genetics. Also, trees that were already stressed by another factor before the freeze were more likely to be damaged.

Large trees can be very slow to show stress and it can take years before we see the full impact of certain damaging factors. Some oaks experienced frost cracks or 'radial shakes' in their trunks that may not have caused significant effects on the canopy immediately, but after heat and drought stress of the last year they may exhibit more canopy die back. Trees can often recover from frost cracks, but if there is significant shedding of bark and exposed wood they should be monitored closely and removed if they are a risk to people or property.

## April To-Do's

- Deadhead flowering annuals and perennials to extend blooming period
- Replenish mulch as needed in all beds
- Apply bait for fire ants
- Fertilize lawn based on a soil test; if needed apply 5 pounds of 21-0-0 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet
- Plant warm season vegetables

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## Pecan Update

Check out the website  
[pecankernel.tamu.edu/](http://pecankernel.tamu.edu/)

for helpful information and  
updates on pecan pests and  
best treatments

# Spring Landscape Irrigation



It's been dreadfully dry so far this year, and no matter how well we irrigate we just can't replace a rainfall. But some perennials are starting to emerge with new growth, and the ground has been very hard and dry so they need some irrigation until we get more spring rains. Since water is such a precious resource, be efficient and careful with how it's used. Good watering practices not only save water and money, but also promote deeper-rooted plants that are more drought tolerant and can survive summer heat.

Plants that have deep roots have access to more water than shallow rooted plants, and will perform better and look more attractive when it gets hot and dry than plants that get watered too frequently. A good general rule of thumb for watering plants is 'deep but infrequent.' This means to water thoroughly when needed so that water is pushed deep into the soil, but don't water too often – wait until the plants really need more. For lawns, about one inch of water applied one day per week is adequate in the summer. In the cooler spring and fall, apply the one inch of water less often (every two or three weeks).

Some other practices to implement to promote a healthy and drought tolerant landscape include: generous use of mulch, drip irrigation instead of spray irrigation, utilizing more efficient spray irrigation for turf, rainwater harvesting, good plant selection, landscape planning with zoning/grouping of plants with similar water needs, and good soil management with the incorporation of compost before planting.

Mulch provides incredible benefits when it is applied correctly, compared to no mulch. Besides conserving water by preventing it from evaporating from the soil, organic mulch also moderates soil temperature, provides rich organic matter to the soil as it breaks down, controls weeds, improves water holding capacity of soil, and reduces erosion.

A colleague once said "sprinklers don't waste water, people do." Whatever the method used, whether hand watering with a hose or utilizing drip tubing or spray heads, water can be wasted if the system is poorly designed and maintained. Don't let automatic sprinklers run during or after rainfall, and don't let drip irrigation fall into disrepair with leaks and other problems. Well-functioning irrigation helps plants stay healthy, protects our water resources, and saves money on the water bill.

## Plant Spotlight

### Purple Oxalis

*Oxalis triangularis*

Beautiful in beds or pots, this low-growing perennial does well in dappled sun or part shade. The leaves are even lovelier than the light pink flowers. Improve soil with compost before planting to improve drainage, or be sure to have adequate drainage holes if in a container.





# Pumpkins

April through June is a good window of time to plant pumpkins, and other winter squashes like butternut and acorn. Pumpkins are a great crop to grow, especially for families – kids particularly enjoy them. The seeds are large and easy to plant, they grow quickly once they sprout, and the large leaves and flowers are fun to track and measure. Gardening is a healthy, educational and fun activity and growing pumpkins with kids or grandkids is a great way to connect with them.

There are many different types to try; 'Festival' squash is a nice small variety that can be grown in containers on a patio, and is colorful. There are white ones like 'Blanco' or 'Shiver.' 'Grizzly Bear' is a fun warty variety. If you'd like to carve jack-o-lanterns for fall, some good varieties include 'Charisma,' 'Mellow Yellow' and 'Igor.' If pumpkin pie and other desserts is the goal, plant pie pumpkin varieties like 'Small Sugar,' 'Orange Smoothie' and 'Dickinson' (which is actually more a type of butternut squash than pumpkin).

Of course it's fun to try and grow as large a pumpkin as you can, and if a giant pumpkin is the goal choose a variety like 'Dill's Atlantic Giant' or 'Big Max.' The People/Plant Connection, a local nonprofit organization that promotes horticulture therapy, is offering free giant pumpkin seeds for anyone in the Concho Valley that would like to try their hand at growing a large pumpkin. There will also be a weigh-in at the end of the season with ribbons for the heaviest entries. To request seeds, visit <https://www.peopleplantconnection.org/> or call 325-656-3104.

Plant in soil that has been well prepared with compost, and be sure to allow plenty of room for the plant to spread out - a plot about 10'x10' in size. Keep the soil consistently damp for the seeds to germinate (about a week). After the plant has a good root system, water deeply as needed and apply mulch around the plant. Don't let the plants dry out – the large leaves lose a lot of water to transpiration, and the fruit needs plenty of water to grow to full size.

Leaf cover is good and will help prevent sunscald as the pumpkins grow. Pumpkins are ripe when the skin is hard and the stem has turned brown and dried up. There are a few pests to watch out for, so monitor for insects such as squash bug and squash vine borer, as well as diseases like downy mildew.



# Beneficial Insects

Gardening is focused on the plants, but there are so many other living things involved – microbes in the soil providing nutrients to plants, beneficial insects pollinating flowers and keeping pest populations down, earthworms aerating soil, and more. It is a very fine balance, and it is important to remember to let nature help as much as possible! While some insects feed on plants and cause damage, many more are harmless or even beneficial. Predators, parasitoids, and pollinators are all necessary for a successful landscape or garden.

Predators are insects that hunt and kill other insects. Some are broad feeders and eat many different insects, and some are more specialized such as ladybugs and green lacewings that prefer to feed on aphids. Since aphids are plant pests, ladybugs and lacewings are very desirable in the yard. Parasitoids are insects that live in or on another insect and eventually kill them. One example is the braconid wasp that lays eggs on tomato hornworms. When they hatch, the larvae kill the hornworm. Tomato hornworms feed on and damage tomato plants, so anything helps keep them under control is a friend to vegetable gardeners.

And many fruit and vegetable crops need pollinators to produce fruit – squash, melons, apples, cucumbers, etc require insect pollination, most of which is done by bees. Butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, and more also contribute. To keep predators, parasitoids and pollinators hard at work in your yard be mindful of them, try to encourage their populations, and be careful to not kill them. Pesticides can be useful when used correctly, but always follow the label and limit the use of broad-spectrum insecticides. Beneficial insects tend to be more sensitive to them. Overusing pesticides often makes pest problems worse, increasing the quantity and variety of detrimental insects in the yard. This happens when beneficial insect populations are reduced. For info on controlling pests in the yard or garden without damaging beneficials, visit the website <https://landscapeipm.tamu.edu>.

To help pollinators, plant bee- and butterfly-friendly flowers to provide food and nectar. Some pollinators utilize a wide variety of plants while others require specific host plants. For example, planting milkweed in the yard is a big help for monarchs as they migrate north this spring. Swallowtail caterpillars like plants in the carrot family, like dill, fennel and parsley.

# Spring Lawn Care



A healthy, dense lawn is the best defense against weeds and is the key to a sticker-free yard that can be enjoyed without worrying about being impaled by the various types of stickers that are common. It can seem like weeds come in and take over the lawn and ruin the nice turf, but what really happens is the lawn gets stressed, becomes thin and weak, allowing weeds to come up that wouldn't have proliferated had the lawn been healthy.

Fertilization is one of the common maintenance steps for turf. For bermudagrass, fertilize based on how vigorous the grass grows. Typical Bermuda lawns will need about two to three applications over the growing season. Don't fertilize during hot, dry spells when the grass is not growing as fast. Apply one pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet.

St. Augustine generally does not need as much nitrogen fertilizer as Bermuda lawns, so be careful to not overdo it – just apply lightly (a half rate) once this spring and once in the fall. But there are some other tasks to do specifically for St. Augustine that will help it be healthy and prevent disease problems. Take-all root rot is a common fungal disease that can affect other turf species as well, but is mostly seen in St. Augustine. It causes widespread damage - large dead areas and can eventually kill the whole lawn if not treated. Top dress with sphagnum peat moss, at a rate of one to two bales per thousand square feet every spring (April to early May) and fall (September to early October). The acidity of the peat moss helps prevent take-all because the pathogen thrives in alkaline conditions. This is most helpful on lawns that are currently healthy, or just starting to yellow from the disease. If the disease has been problematic in the past or symptoms are currently showing up, also apply azoxystrobin fungicide (trade name Scott's DiseaseEx or Heritage) and fertilize with an iron plus micronutrient fertilizer that includes manganese.

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## Food Production at Home

There are many ways to incorporate edible plants into the landscape, so even if you don't have a ton of space for a huge garden, it's not only possible but very beneficial and highly recommended to plant some vegetables, herbs and fruit in the yard. First, consider vegetables and herbs that can be planted now and will provide a pretty quick harvest. Also, take this opportunity to realize the advantage it is to have permanent edible plants in the yard to share with friends and neighbors and to serve at the dinner table.

Now is a great time to plant warm season vegetables; Texas A&M promotes the Earth-Kind method of gardening, to reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides and water. Earth-Kind helps promote personal health and safety as well as the conservation of natural resources. In my opinion, some of the spring and summer vegetables that can best be grown in an Earth-Kind manner include okra, peppers, sweet potato, magda variety squash, and heat tolerant tomatoes. These can all take the heat of west Texas and will grow well without excessive inputs. Magda squash is a specific variety with a nice nutty flavor that is less prone to squash bug infestation (but not immune).

Five more Earth-Kind suited vegetable that are for the cool season and should be planted later in the fall or winter, include carrots, swiss chard, onions, spinach and asparagus. The herbs I recommend as the best Earth-Kind options and the most usable for cooking include sage, rosemary (dwarf varieties are recommended for smaller spaces), basil, chives, oregano, thyme, and mint. Parsley, garlic, and cilantro are great choices for fall/cool season planting.

Fruit trees also make a good addition to a home landscape. While these options won't produce food immediately and are more of an investment for the future, some of the easiest to grow fruits for Texas include Asian persimmon, fig, blackberry, pear, grape (juice or jelly varieties, like champlel) and pomegranate.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## *April 2022*

Saturday, April 2, 8am to 12pm or sold out

### **Master Gardener Plant Sale**

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

Come browse the selection of plants grown locally by Master Gardener volunteers! Perennials, vegetables, herbs and more. FMI call 325-659-6522 or visit [txmg.org/conchovalley](http://txmg.org/conchovalley).

Thursday April 7, 6pm-8:30pm

### **Pecan Tree and Raised Bed Gardening**

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

*Cost: \$10*

*Speakers: Dr Larry Stein, Gail Eltgroth*

This two-part seminar will provide info on pecan tree management and basics of raised bed gardening. To sign up, call 325-659-6522

Thursday, April 14, 2pm - 4pm

### **West Texas Gardening 101 - Gardening for Pollinators**

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

*Cost: \$20, \$35 per couple*

*Speakers: Carol Sturm, Susan Stanfield*

Hosted by the PPC; Learn how to best provide for the needs of hummingbirds and butterflies in your landscape. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104.

Friday, April 22, 12pm-1pm

### **Lunch N Learn Class - West Texas Lawns**

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

*Cost: \$5*

*Speaker: Allison Watkins*

Hosted by the PPC; Learn about selection, establishment and care of turfgrass in the Concho Valley. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Save the date:

Saturday, April 30, 10am

Container Gardening Workshop - Details TBA

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



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