# Concho Valley HORTCULTURE UPDATE

# Fall Vegetable Gardening

Believe it or not, mid-summer is the time to start on the fall vegetable garden. July is a great time of year to plant fresh new tomato transplants for fall production. Other warm season vegetables such as eggplant, cucumber, peppers and squash can also be planted in July or August for a fall crop before it freezes in November.

Tomatoes prefer cool weather – not freezing, but not in the 90's either. The flowers set fruit better in mild temperatures, especially larger varieties. Small cherry tomatoes can usually produce well all summer long but larger varieties slow down or even stop altogether when it heats up. Many spring-planted plants start to get stressed from pests like spider mites in the summer, so if your plants aren't looking healthy consider replacing them with new transplants. Fall is a wonderful time of year to grow vegetables!

Choose large, healthy plants and encourage them to put on as much growth as possible in their first two months by irrigating steadily and fertilizing with nitrogen – but give them some time to establish before fertilizing. Nitrogen fertilizers can easily scorch or damage brand-new transplants. July started out fairly cool and rainy, but when the heat returns it will be stressful for the new plants – keep a close eye on water needs and provide some shade in the afternoon for the first couple of weeks if needed.

Incorporate compost into the soil before planting, and finish off with a thick layer of wood mulch to help reduce transplant shock, conserve water, and prevent weeds. If growing in containers, use potting mix instead of real soil and make sure the container has good drainage. Standing water will damage roots and cause the plant to decline, and can attract pests such as fungus gnats. Drip irrigation is the best way to irrigate vegetables, since it applies the water directly to the soil for the roots to absorb instead of being splashed on the leaves. It can be a pretty simple do-it-yourself project with a little practice. For tips, visit tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture and click on "Low Volume Irrigation."

Wait to plant cool season crops like leafy greens, broccoli, carrots and radishes – they should go in the ground starting around October when it cools down.

Save the date for the Master Gardener's Fall Vegetable Gardening Workshop and Plant Sale - Saturday, September 24th - more info will be available at <u>https://txmg.org/conchovalley/</u> in September.

# July To-Do's

- Start checking cantaloupes and melons for ripeness
- Audit irrigation system to check for problems and conserve water
- Pick okra, squash and peppers often to maintain production
- Watch for summer pests like chinch bugs and spider mites

#### Pecan Update

The Texas Pecan Grower's annual State Conference is July 10-13 in San Marcos, TX. It's a great opportunity to learn about pecan production; for info visit <u>https://tpga.org/tpga-events/</u>

#### **Growing Watermelons**



It's watermelon season, and it's a good year for them! As tough as the heat is on many landscape and garden plants (and gardeners), melons do well in the summer. Whether growing your own, or purchasing from a farmer's market or the grocery store – watermelons are a summer staple for many. Thanks to modern shipping we have access to watermelons year-round in the store, but getting fruit in-season makes a big difference in taste and quality. So take advantage of a great crop year and enjoy some this summer!

Watermelons, as well as other cucurbits like muskmelons (aka cantaloupe) are a great choice for a home garden in west Texas because they love the heat – they require high temperatures to develop sugars; the hotter it is, the sweeter they are! . So if you didn't get a watermelon planted this year, make a note to get one of your own going next spring. A good time frame to plant is April through May, since they need several months to produce.

Depending on the variety, it takes about 90 days to harvest after planting. So now is the time to start checking for ripeness, and here are some tips to help determine when to pull the watermelon and enjoy (these can also help you choose a good one at the market or store). First, look for the small tendril near the fruit; it will dry up and turn brown when the fruit is mature. Next, look at the ground spot – it should be a creamy, buttery yellow color (not bright white). The stripes should be nice and wide, not narrow. The rind should appear dull, not shiny. Finally, you can thump it – give it a gentle tap, and a ripe watermelon will have a deep/dull sound, not high-pitched sharp tone.

A common question is 'how do they make seedless watermelon?' It is done through cross breeding – each seedless watermelon seed comes from a watermelon plant that was cross pollinated in a controlled way. One of the parent plants was treated with colchicine to double the number of chomosomes, then bred with a normal plant; the end result is a seed that will grow into a plant that will produce fruit but no viable seeds. It's quite a process, so the seeds are pricey. If you don't mind the seeds, taste tests have shown that seeded varieties are typically always sweeter and better quality.

# Plant Spotlight

Calylophus Calylophus berlandieri

Also called sundrops or square-bud primrose, this bright sunny plant loves heat and thrives in rock gardens. Blooms from spring through fall, grows about 30 inches tall with a rounded bushy form.



#### Rainwater Harvesting

Summer has been intense and there's still a lot more heat and drought to go; it's good motivation to consider adding a rain barrel or rainwater harvesting system to the landscape.

Utilizing a rain barrel or tank has many benefits for the home landscape, as well as the environment and municipal water sources. Plants love rainwater and will grow better when watered with it, especially during the summer when we have long spells with no rain and must rely solely on irrigation. Harvesting rainfall can help improve stormwater runoff and decrease fertilizer, debris and other pollution going into local rivers as well as reduce flooding during heavy rain.

Catching rainfall can be simple or extensive – some homeowners are incorporating large systems with tanks that hold thousands of gallons, and others are starting with a small rain barrel. Whether large or small, rainwater harvesting systems can really help conserve water and keep plants alive during drought. For lots of helpful info, including a calculator to determine the best tank size, gutter size etc., visit

rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu. There are also rainwater harvesting demonstrations created by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners that are open to the public located at the Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N. US Highway 67. Stop by to see the tanks and how they are set up and get ideas for a home system.

Rainwater harvesting simply means collecting rainfall off an impervious surface (usually a roof but could be a parking lot or other surface) and diverting to a storage tank to use later. Many think it's not worth having a rain tank because it doesn't rain often enough – but infrequent rainfall is precisely the reason to do it. One inch of rainfall provides 0.6 gallons of water per square foot of catchment area - a 2,000 square foot roof could potentially collect 1,200 gallons of water for every inch of rain – that's about 24,000 gallons of water in an average rainfall year!



# Summer Plant Pests



Gardening is tough in the summer! Heat and insect pests can make it grueling for both people and plants. But there are still tasks to do now, such as planting of fall warm season vegetables like tomatoes and squash. So try getting out early in the morning when it's cool (or at least not AS hot) and keep an eye out for summer insect pests.

Grasshoppers are hard to control because they just keep coming in from surrounding areas. Most severe outbreaks occur around landscapes in rural areas near farmland, so they may not be as bad of an issue in urban areas. Damage can be minimized by using barriers, insecticides, and resistant plants. According to Dr. Mike Merchant, retired Extension Entomology Specialist, homeowners can protect valuable plants, to some extent, through the use of residual insecticides. Geotextile fabrics can be used as barriers to protect valuable vegetables and specimen ornamental plants. If grasshoppers are a repeated, annual issue in the landscape try plants that they tend to avoid. According to Dr. Merchant, some options include: artemisia, American beautyberry, crape myrtle, lantana, moss rose, purselane, turk's cap, and rock rose.

Other common landscape pests to watch out for include aphids, mealy bugs, scale, spider mites, and caterpillars. Not all caterpillars are pests, some are beneficial butterflies. But moth caterpillars can be destructive in the garden and landscape. Sophora worm on Texas mountain laurel, walnut caterpillar on pecan trees, and tomato horn worm on vegetables are just a few to scout for. Bt is a non-toxic pesticide that can be used to control pest caterpillars, and does not harm bees or other beneficial insects except butterflies; be sure to avoid getting it on butterfly food or nectar plants.

### Landscaping in the Shade



The summer heat is scorching and those with large shade trees in the landscape are surely enjoying the cover that the canopies provide, reducing electricity bills and helping to keep the home and yard cooler. But landscaping in the shade can be challenging - turfgrass does not grow well in shade and there are many popular landscape plants that need full sun to thrive and bloom.

Some of the particularly difficult spots include the north side of the home, the center of large live oak trees, or narrow sides of the yard between a tall fence and the home. In these cases, it's best to choose plants that are particularly well adapted to shady conditions and avoid turfgrass. Live oaks have thick canopies and often the lawn thins out or goes bare around the trunk of large live oaks – even shade tolerant St. Augustine grass. Consider whether it could be feasible to create a bed around the trunk with a groundcover like Asian jasmine or mondo grass.

It's important to use drought-tolerant, well-adapted plants in the landscape to reduce the need for water, fertilizer and pesticides and to have healthy, thriving plants with less effort. But as wonderful as shade is, most native, well-adapted plants to west Texas do best in full sun. Many of the plants that love shade will need acidic soil and lots of moisture to grow well. So finding tough plants that don't need a lot of water can be especially hard for shady yards in west Texas.

Small ornamental trees and large shrubs that can handle part shade include redbud, Mexican buckeye, rough leaf dogwood, American beautyberry, althea, oakleaf hydrangea, glossy abelia, nandina, possumhaw holly, and yaupon holly. Mexican buckeye blooms attractive pink flowers in the spring, while yaupon and possumhaw holly have bright berries in the fall. Rough leaf dogwood and oakleaf hydrangea prefer the eastern half of the state but can be grown here in well-prepared, deep soil.

Flowering perennials that will grow and bloom in the shade include Texas gold columbine, lyre leaf sage, autumn sage, mealy cup sage, and turk's cap. And a couple of interesting foliage plants to try would be leopard plant and inland sea oats.

To have the best success with landscaping in the challenging west Texas climate, prepare soil with compost before planting, utilize drip irrigation and finish off with a three- to four-inch deep layer of wood mulch. Water anything newly planted frequently at first, but gradually train plants to go longer between thorough waterings to help train deeper roots that can survive heat and drought.







Tuesday, July 5, 6pm-7pm Landsacping with Native Plants Webinar

Location: Online - Zoom Cost: Free Speakers: Kelly Tarla - CEA AG/NR and Allison Watkins - CEA Horticulture Join us for a discussion on the benefits of landscaping with native plants! To sign up visit https://bit.ly/native-landscape

Friday, July 15, 12pm-1pm <u>Lunch N Learn Class - Fall Vegetable Gardening</u>

**NEW** Location: Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Office, 113 W. Beauregard, San Angelo Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Believe it or not, fall gardening starts in July. Plant warm season vegetables in the summer for a fall harvest - join us for a discussion on what to plant when. To reserve a spot <u>Click Here</u> or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

*Save the Date!* Saturday, September 10, 8:30am-4pm <u>Fall Landscaping Symposium</u> Location: Texas A&M Center, 7887 N US 87, San Angelo

Location: Texas A&M Center, 7887 N US 87, San Angelo Cost: \$30

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners - don't miss this wonderful annual event! A full day of presentations with plenty of breaks, and snacks and lunch provided Visit <u>https://txmg.org/conchovalley</u>/ for details and to register.

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



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