



Concho Valley

October 2022

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

Autumn Tasks

The Concho Valley is still in drought conditions, and we are in need of some fall rain! But the mornings are nice and cool and the days are getting shorter, and there are a lot of things that are best done in the fall for the landscape and garden.

Pre-emergent can be applied to well-established lawns to prevent winter annual weeds such as rescuegrass and henbit. Don't apply to newly planted lawns or anywhere that seeds or new plants will be placed in the next few months. Lawns that have been regularly irrigated and that are not drought-stressed can be fertilized with nitrogen fertilizer to help the lawn come back strong next spring. Top dress St. Augustine with peat moss (1-2 bales per thousand square feet) to help prevent take-all root rot disease damage, and if it has been a problem in the past also treat with an azoxystrobin fungicide such as Scott's DiseaseX or Heritage.

Replenish mulch in beds to a depth of three to four inches, especially around any tender perennials such as Pride of Barbados or lantana. Mulch helps insulate roots in the winter and can sometimes be the difference between a perennial coming back or not if there are some hard freezes.

Plant wildflower seeds like bluebonnets now – and put in as much or as little work as you like, depending on how much you want to see blooming next spring. A few seeds can be scattered and left to fend for themselves, and if we get some well-timed winter and spring precipitation, they can do just fine with little care. But if it's important to have a good display with lots of blooms, take a bit more care in planting – clear the weeds, prepare the soil to loosen it up and sow the seeds. Water them in well and water every few weeks when there's no rain. Keep weeds cleared out, but don't mistakenly pull the wildflowers – plant some of the seeds in a pot with potting mix to use as a guide to know what the seedlings of the desired plants look like. This is especially helpful if you are planting a seed mix with several different types.

Dig and divide irises and daylilies, especially those that family and friends would like to have a share of, and those that are overgrown and thick. Dividing every few years helps irises bloom more reliably each spring.

Plant fall color such as mums and fall aster, and once it cools down a bit more plant winter color such as snapdragons and pansies. Add some cool season vegetables and herbs such as parsley, cilantro, broccoli, Swiss chard, lettuce and spinach to keep the landscape beautiful and productive even after warm season plants start to fade.

October To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals (latter half of the month)
- Adjust irrigation schedule for cooler weather
- Plant trees, shrubs and vines
- Plant nectar flower plants for migrating butterflies
- Plant spring wildflower seeds
- Purchase spring bulbs, wait to plant (November)
- Replenish mulch in beds

Pecan Update

Pecan Weevil: Pecan weevil can still be an issue in areas that have drought hardened soils which can result in a drought delayed emergence.

Producers with adult emergence traps should monitor traps until the latest maturing cultivar has reached shuck split.

Cool Season Herbs



When cold weather arrives warm season annual herbs like basil will start to fade - basil declines when temperatures get down into the 40's. October is a good time to let go of struggling warm season annuals and replace with winter-hardy plants. Cool season flowers, vegetables and herbs can be planted right now to keep the curb appeal up and to provide a tasty harvest for the dinner table throughout the winter.

Cool season herbs like cilantro and parsley are happiest when planted in the fall and grown through the cooler winter months; many people try to grow them in the spring and are disappointed when they fade and dwindle in the summer heat. Evergreen herbs like rosemary, sage, thyme, and oregano keep going strong all year long and (an average) winter doesn't slow them down. Some herbs are only somewhat evergreen and will keep going unless there's a hard freeze, such as mint, lavender and chives.

Many of the popular, commonly used herbs are easy to grow and well adapted to the local climate. Most of them do best in full sun and need well drained soil, but mint is an exception and can take some shade and soggy soil. If soil is heavy and compacted, most herbs will perform better if the soil is loosened up and amended with compost to improve drainage.

Many herbs also do well in containers, and can even be grown inside during the winter; basil is an indispensable culinary herb for many, but cannot live through the winter outside. To grow it inside, find a spot with the brightest light – about 6 hours of sun per day and plant in a container with a tray to catch excess water. But don't keep it on a windowsill when it's cold outside, it needs temperatures the 70's and the air next to windows gets colder than the rest of the room.

Plant Spotlight

Pink Muhly Grass

Muhlenbergia capillaris

This and other similar ornamental grasses provide beautiful autumn interest in the landscape. Cut back in late winter just before new leaves emerge.



Pecan Tree Care

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.'

In late fall the main focus is on harvesting. But keep irrigating weekly all the way through shuck split when there is no rainfall; 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.



Time to Plant Strawberries



Strawberries are usually available for purchase and most commonly planted in the springtime, but in Texas they are much more productive if planted in the fall. If you'd like to try growing some tasty ripe strawberries, then see if local nurseries have any transplants available or can order them – or try catalogs and websites for delivery. It gets too hot, too soon for spring-planted strawberries to grow well in Texas and many gardeners only get a few berries before the plants give up. But the cooler weather and rain that comes in the fall is the perfect setting to establish new plants, and then in the early spring they will produce early enough to get a better crop.

Plan ahead and have a good system in place that is convenient and effective for freeze protection. Strawberry plants (with no flowers or fruit) are cold hardy and can withstand freezing temperatures, but cold weather will slow down growth. A small hoop house or 'low tunnel' structure is a good choice; clear plastic can be secured snugly around the structure when needed to trap warmer air and protect from cold winds. Be sure to remove the covering promptly when temperatures warm up, otherwise it quickly gets too hot inside when the sun comes out. In the late winter, when the plants start to flower and make fruit, they need to be protected from even just a light frost.

Strawberries prefer high-quality, well-drained soil so amend with compost if planting in the ground and create mounds so the plants can grow on top and have better drainage. Black plastic mulch helps keep the soil temperature up to help encourage growth during the winter. A steady, even fertilizer and irrigation regimen will help encourage healthy plants. For a helpful guide on fall planted strawberries and instructions with photos for creating a low tunnel, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on "Strawberry Growing Guide."

Texas Superstar Plants



Gardening is the number one hobby in the United States; whether it be growing food in a vegetable garden or keeping up beautiful curb appeal, caring for plants is a wonderful way to connect with nature, get outside for fresh air and sunshine, and enjoy a whole host of mental and physical health benefits. Gardening is tough in west Texas though! It was a very discouraging year and many plants are still stressed from the long dry heat. There are lots of tips and tricks to help make keeping plants alive easier (without wasting water) such as preparing the soil well with compost, using drip irrigation, applying thick wood mulch etc., but one of the most important steps is start with good plant selection. Choose plants that are native or well adapted to the soil and environmental conditions of the Concho Valley. This will help plants stay healthier while reducing maintenance.

One resource to help with good plant selection is the list of Texas Superstar plants promoted by Texas A&M University, <https://texassuperstar.com>. These plants have been tested through the state, perform well and are generally available at most nurseries and garden centers.

The newest plant to earn the Texas Superstar designation is the holly fern. Holly fern has thick glossy leaves that appear similar to holly shrubs and makes a nice specimen plant, background or border. It prefers part shade but can handle full shade; morning sun and afternoon shade is an ideal site.

Also announced in 2022 to receive the designation were red yucca and Tangerine Beauty crossvine. Red yucca (hesperaloe) is a staple landscape plant in west Texas, and is very tough and hardy once established. The native variety has flowers that are more of a pink shade, but there are cultivated varieties available in an assortment of shades from dark red ('Brake Lights') to yellow. Tangerine Beauty crossvine is a spring blooming evergreen vine that boasts a profusion of flowers that look like an orange waterfall in the spring.

Other Texas Superstar plants that are favorites for the Concho Valley include annuals like fall zinnias, pentas, gomphrena, whopper begonia; perennials such as new gold lantana, Mystic Spires Blue Salvia; and shrubs – Lynn's Legacy Cenizo, Blue Angel Althea. There are even fruit, vegetable and herb varieties that are Texas Superstars such as Balsamic Blooms basil, Victoria Red grape, Natchez blackberry, Green Magic broccoli, and Arctic Frost Satsuma.

Fall is the best time to plant trees, shrubs, perennials, groundcovers, cool season annuals, wildflower seeds, and spring bulbs. For best results try to find the ones that will thrive in the challenging climate of west Texas! Another good resource is the Earth-Kind Plant Selector, <http://ekps.tamu.edu>.





UPCOMING EVENTS

October 2022

Thursday, October 20, 2pm-4pm

PPC Seminar - Aging With Your Garden

NEW Location: Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Office, 113 W. Beauregard, San Angelo

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Ron Knight, Concho Valley Master Gardener

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to make your landscape and garden easier to maintain, and more accessible! To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Friday, October 21, 12pm-1pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Don't Fall Behind

NEW Location: Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Office, 113 W. Beauregard, San Angelo

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Join us for a discussion on the autumn to-do list for the landscape and garden. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Save the Date:

Wednesdays in November - 11/2, 11/9, 11/16; 6pm-8:30pm

Earth-Kind Landscape School seminar series

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

Cost: \$30

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Find out ways to make your landscape shine in west Texas without wasting water or using lots of fertilizers and pesticides! Join us for a series of three evening classes on topics including landscape design, plant selection, lawn care, tree pruning, soil management and irrigation. More details TBA, contact the Extension Office with questions: 325-659-6522.

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

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