



Concho Valley

November 2022

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

Dead Limb and Tree and Removal

It's been a tough couple of years for trees; the deep freezing temperatures in February of 2021 killed or heavily damaged most Arizona ash trees in the Concho Valley, and caused varying degrees of damage to live oaks and other species. In the summer of 2021 the Texas A&M Forest Service recommended removing trees that were completely bare. They advised that trees with 50% or more of their original canopy had a good prognosis and to wait and see how they fared the next year, but trees with less than 30% did not have a good prognosis. Large, mature trees with just a few leaves coming out of the top of the trunk do not have a good potential for growing back into a structurally sound, attractive landscape tree and removal/replacement is recommended.

In addition to the freeze damage, the hot dry weather we had this year added stress to trees that were already struggling. Now is a good time to evaluate and prune dead limbs or remove trees that are hazardous to people or property. Dead trees reduce property value, decrease enjoyment of the landscape and curb appeal, and over time the risk of large branches falling increases. Routine pruning to remove dead or damaged limbs can be done any time of year, and is best done before leaves fall in order to identify where cuts need to be made. If pruning any type of oak tree, it is recommended to use sterilized tools and to paint the cuts to help prevent the potential spread of oak wilt disease.

Ask neighbors and friends for referrals and recommendations for tree services and arborists. Choose someone that is bonded or insured to protect yourself and your property in case of damage. Certified arborists have been through a special credentialing process through the International Society of Arboriculture, and can be located through the Find an Arborist tool at:
<https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist>

Trees are the most valuable part of the home landscape and it is heartbreaking to see them struggling or dead, but taking action to correct the problem is a start for a new beginning – “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the next best time is now.”

November To-Do's

- Drain fuel from mower and other lawn equipment, or add a fuel stabilizer
- Plant trees and shrubs
- Utilize fallen leaves as mulch or add to compost
- Plant spring bulbs

Pecan Update

We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan show on Friday, December 2nd. Entries will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, November 30th. This is a great way to learn what variety of pecans you may have and to receive information on growing pecans in our area.

For details on how to enter, contact the extension office at 325-659-6528

Winter Curb Appeal



I love fall and winter in Texas, but it is sad to see the pretty warm-season annuals and perennials fade away when it gets cold. There are several ways to keep the landscape looking bright, colorful and attractive through the winter though, and now is a good time to transition over to cool season color and interest.

Cool season annuals provide a big impact and beautiful color punch to the winter landscape. To get the best effect from annuals, start by preparing the soil with compost if planting in the ground or use potting mix if planting in containers. Ensure that the containers have good drainage holes for excess water to flow out. While proper plant spacing is important for permanent plants, annuals are just there for the season and can be squeezed together to make the most of them. Planting in small 'pockets' or groupings, strategically placed in beds or containers will be more impactful than spreading a flat of them throughout the whole bed. Some of the best winter annual flowers include pansy, stock and snapdragon.

Winter vegetables can also be attractive in the landscape, providing a double benefit – food and beauty. Swiss chard and kale are some of the most striking, but all the winter vegetables provide bright, vibrant greenery like spinach, lettuce and broccoli. Keep annual flowers and vegetables watered and fertilized to have the best production and flowering. Keep flowers pinched as they fade to keep pansies, snapdragons etc blooming strong. Include some cool-season or evergreen herbs like parsley, rosemary and thyme to have fresh scents and greenery, and to have fresh herbs handy for cooking.

Shrubs that produce bright red berries in the winter like possumhaw holly, nandina and pyracantha make the yard look festive and appealing in the winter. Other ways to create a beautiful, inviting atmosphere in the yard in the winter include holiday décor like wreaths and lights.

Clean up the fallen leaves once they finish coming down, but don't bag them up and send off to the landfill. Often the leaves can simply be mowed and shredded into the lawn, or rake them up and add to the compost bin or use as mulch in beds. A fresh layer of mulch makes a big difference in curb appeal and is very helpful for keeping plant roots protected from cold weather. Keep weeds under control and continue to mow if needed for attractive yard all season long.

Plant Spotlight

Green Magic Broccoli

Brassica oleracea 'Green Magic'

This Texas Superstar cool season vegetable is great for the winter landscape - it provides vibrant greenery for cold weather curb appeal and also provides delicious food!



Butterflies and Birds

It has been enjoyable to see all the monarch butterflies that migrated through the Concho Valley on their way to Mexico for the winter. It's very inspiring and impressive to see insects that made it all the way down from the northern states and even Canada. Monarchs have been at risk of population decline for years and thanks to efforts to encourage the planting of milkweed, they have seen some recent gains. But it's still important to encourage monarch populations.

Milkweed is crucial for monarch butterflies because it's the only host plant for caterpillars. It's the only plant they will feed on. Planting milkweed in landscapes and pastureland is a simple way to help protect monarchs from declining further. The adult butterflies will feed on nectar from various flowers, so plant perennials that have long blooming periods like lantana, salvia and turk's cap.

There are many different species of milkweed, many of which are native to Texas but one nonnative variety *Asclepias curassavica* is very common in the nursery industry and is not the ideal choice for Texas landscapes. Also called tropical milkweed, this variety makes a satisfactory food source for the butterflies but the issue comes from the fact that it blooms year-round. According to Mike Merchant, retired Texas A&M Entomologist, tropical milkweed encourages monarchs to stay in one spot and form sedentary (non-migratory) populations. This can increase disease rates and mortality in monarch populations. So it's recommended to stick with native milkweed species, but tropical can be used if it's cut back in the fall, and kept cut back through the winter if it re-emerges.

Most gardeners' enjoyment of the outdoors goes beyond plants, many like to support pollinators like bees and butterflies and also like to attract desirable birds like hummingbirds and songbirds. Birds need food, water, shelter and places to nest – provide these and develop a habitat that will attract the enjoyable types. Shelter is provided through plants of various sizes, shapes and textures that birds can escape into away from predators. Diversity is good, a mixed planting of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs. Provide food with fruit and nut producing plants like possumhaw holly, Texas persimmon, redbud, and evergreen sumac. Put out a bird bath, and put up a bird feeder with seed – especially when no other food sources are available in the middle of winter, and see what new birds find their way into your yard.

Cold Protection



It looks like the first freeze of the season isn't predicted to happen in the immediate future, but will likely come before too long - it usually freezes by mid November. Now that it's dipping into the 40's at night, it's time to start getting plants ready for winter. First, bring in tropicals and house plants that have been out for the warm season. Plants like tropical hibiscus and bougainvillea can usually be cut back and overwintered in a garage but a hobby greenhouse or brightly lit room inside the home would be better.

Depending on how cold and early the first freeze is, some gardeners choose to cover their warm season vegetables and perennials to extend production and flowering. This is usually worth it if the first cold spell is short lived, and it warms up for a while afterward. But when cold temperatures set in for the long term, it's usually best to give up on the tomatoes and mums and plant winter vegetables and flowers.

When covering plants, the key is to cover as much ground as possible to utilize heat rising from the soil at night. Don't cinch the covering around the stems, but drape it over like a tent all the way to the ground. Cardboard boxes or large plastic tubs work well.

Some commonly used evergreen plants are only marginally hardy here in the Concho Valley - like rosemary, cast iron plant, pittosporum and palm trees. If there is a particularly hard freeze (usually later in winter), it is helpful to cover them if possible. Better yet, plant them in more protected spots – a microclimate like up against the home or protected from the north wind.

Overall, the two best things to do for plants to protect them from cold temperatures is to water before a hard freeze, and apply thick mulch. Wood mulch helps insulate the roots and can sometimes even mean the difference between coming back the next spring or not for tender perennials like Pride of Barbados and lantana. For heat-loving plants like Pride of Barbados, push the mulch back away from covering the roots in the spring so the sun can warm the soil and help it grow back sooner.

Winter Tree Pruning

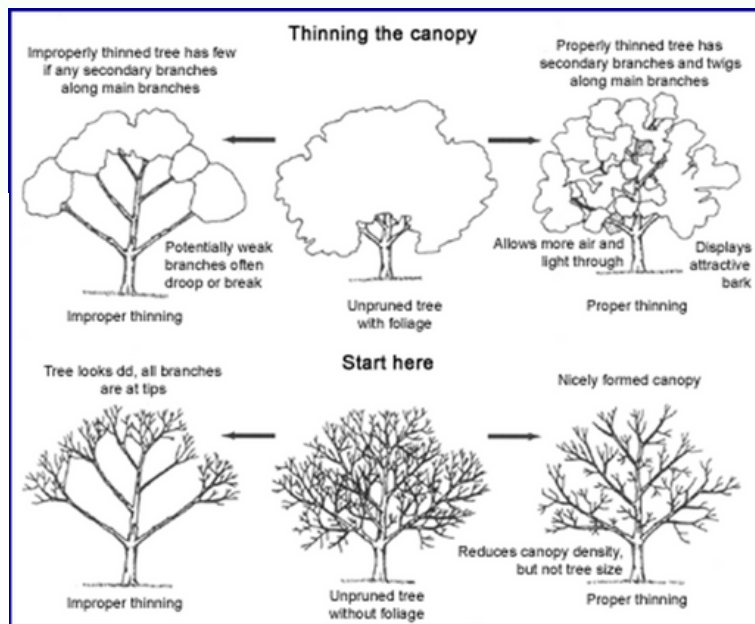
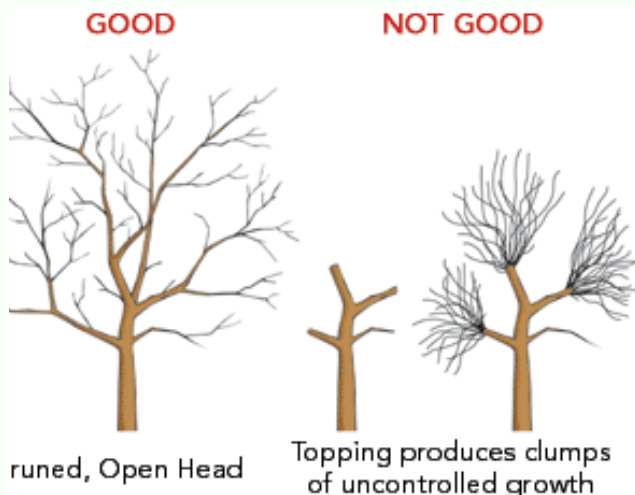


Pruning is one of the major landscaping chores to be done in the wintertime. As mentioned above, most light pruning can be done year-round, but heavy pruning of healthy landscape shade trees is best done in December-January. But get dead limbs removed now, before leaves fall, so it's easier to see which ones are dead. The dormant winter season is especially good for pruning oaks because of the potential spread of the oak wilt disease; oaks should not be pruned or wounded from February through June due to a small beetle that is active in the spring that can spread the fungal disease.

Start with a plan first and carefully choose which limbs need pruning and step back and take a look between each major cut. You can always take more off but can't put it back on! Remove broken, diseased, dead or otherwise problematic branches first. This may be all that is needed. If desired, do training cuts next by cutting back certain lateral branches. Pruning is not a 'quick fix' or one-time solution for structural problems, good pruning is a process and trees should be trained from when they are young and newly planted to have strong attachments and good structure. Even if you hire a professional tree service, it's important to be involved and guide the process. Here are a few basic tips for good pruning techniques.

After removing the dead, damaged or broken limbs evaluate branch angles and the overall structure. Wide angles are stronger, while narrow angles and branches growing close together are weak and have greater chances of failure later. Make carefully planned removal or reduction cuts to promote good tree structure and strength. Branch attachments should have a 2:1 ratio, meaning the smaller branch diameter should be half as wide as the larger branch it's attached to. This kind of training for good branch angles and ratios is much more effective when started on young trees, rather than trying to correct large mature trees. Try to not to cut branches with diameter greater than six inches.

Avoid the unfortunate result of 'lion tails' which can happen when the inside is pruned but the tips of the branches are left intact. Be able to access the entire tree, trunk to tip. Lion tails are stressful to the tree because the tips catch the wind like a sail – the bending and swaying impairs structural integrity. Topping is also not recommended; it is a severe pruning practice that stresses trees and is not needed for landscape shade trees or ornamental trees like crape myrtles.





UPCOMING EVENTS

November 2022

Thursday, November 17, 2pm-4pm

PPC Seminar - Rainwater Harvesting

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

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Kay Thompson, Concho Valley Master Gardener

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn how to capture rainwater, the cleanest and best quality water for plants! To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Friday, November 18, 12pm-1pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Woody Ornamentals

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 about selection, planting and care for shrubs and foundation plants for the landscape. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Wednesdays in November - 2nd, 9th, 16th; 6:30pm-9:00pm

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. Sign up at <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/>

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

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