



Concho Valley

February 2023

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

Low Maintenance Shrubs

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.

One practice to definitely never copy is topping of trees. Topping is an unnecessary, poor pruning practice and is especially common in crape myrtles. Not only does it NOT increase flowering of crape myrtles, it can delay flowering and cause stress and structural issues.

February To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals
- Apply pre-emergent herbicide
- Plant and/or prune rose bushes
- Water 24 to 48 hours before predicted hard freezes to protect plants
- Run irrigation system check, repair if needed
- Prune shade trees and shrubs as needed
- Check mowers and other lawn equipment; sharpen mower blades, get tune-up if needed

Pecan Update

Regional Pecan Show
Results

Congratulations to Charles Ewing and the Eldorado Pecan Orchard, they won 1st place Shoshoni and 3rd place Pawnee varieties.

Preventing Weeds in 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. Once 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 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.

Plant Spotlight

Asparagus

Asparagus officinalis

Asparagus is a gem to have in the landscape! It's one of the few perennial vegetables, and once established it returns every year producing delicious food in the spring and fall. Allow 2-3 years after planting to establish, without harvesting. It's worth the wait! Plant crowns now in soil improved with compost. Looks great along a fence or border.



Prepare for Spring

There may be some more cold weather that comes along before spring arrives, but there are a lot of nice sunny, pleasant days that are perfect for working in the yard - and now is a great time to get started on preparing for spring.

Think of areas in the yard that need improvement, or additions that could benefit the family. It helps to draw the property out to scale, using graph paper. A healthy, beautiful landscape in west Texas does require some knowledge and effort, but it's very possible – the lawn doesn't have to be just stickers and weeds. And though desert style landscapes can be very beautiful if done well, cacti, agaves and rock aren't the only option. A well-designed landscape, with good plant selection, efficient irrigation methods, and other proper landscaping practices, has the potential to be attractive even in the challenging and changeable climate of west Texas. A nice turfgrass area for kids and pets, a patio for grilling and hosting guests, and other outdoor living spaces can add a lot of enjoyment to the home.

Check the irrigation system and perform an irrigation audit, to ensure everything is in working order. Consider converting spray irrigation in flower and shrub beds to drip irrigation to conserve water and to improve plant health. Take the lawn mower to have the blade sharpened, and have any other equipment serviced if needed.

Perennials that died to the ground should be cut back fully to allow new spring growth to emerge. Perennials that are semi-evergreen benefit from shearing back about halfway, or down to where there is plenty of green healthy tissue. Even many evergreen perennials that are not harmed by winter freezes can look more attractive and grow more vigorously with a heavy late winter shearing. For example, spreading/mounding plants like artemisia and santolina tend to spread out away from their planting point, leaving a bare unsightly section in the center. Cutting them back significantly this time of year helps the plants stay more compact, dense, and beautiful.

For those that would like to add new flower beds or garden plots, or expand existing ones, now is a good time to work on soil prep. Till up the area to be planted and incorporate compost. Take advantage of the cooler weather to complete the more labor-intensive steps. Apply a thick three- to four-inch deep layer of mulch to help prevent weeds from popping up; the mulch can be moved out of the way where needed for spring planting later.

For well-established existing lawns, pre-emergent can be applied around February 15 - March 1 to prevent spring weeds. Just don't apply pre-emergent anywhere seeds will be planted within the next 3-6 months, depending on the product and how long it lasts.

Planting Roses

Roses are a beautiful addition to the home landscape, and while they have a reputation for being hard to grow many roses are easy to cultivate if given the right environment. Now is a good time to plant container-grown roses.

The first step to growing a beautiful rose bush is cultivar selection. Some roses require extensive pruning and/or are more susceptible to diseases, while other roses do well with little to no pruning and are resistant to common pests. So how do you find the best type of rose? Start with the list of Earth-Kind roses, which are rose cultivars that have been through extensive testing with Texas A&M University and have been proven to grow very well with no fertilizer, no pesticides, and less irrigation than is traditionally given. Visit the website earthkind.tamu.edu to find out more about Earth-Kind roses.

Choose a spot in the yard that has full sun and plenty of room to grow. Roses need lots of air flow and don't do as well when planted too close to buildings or other plants. Incorporate compost into the soil before planting and use good planting technique – dig a hole that is wide but not too deep (only plant the rose as deep as it had been growing in the nursery container). Apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of wood mulch around the plant but pull it away from the stem.

Don't fertilize at planting – Earth-Kind roses won't need fertilizer anyway, and it's a general rule of thumb to wait until plants have had time to establish, start to grow roots and new shoots before applying any fertilizer.

Then water the plant in well, and water as needed when there is no rain. Newly planted plants will always need to be watered more frequently than established plants, so keep a close eye on it and water every few days for the first few weeks. Then, how often to water depends on a lot of factors such as soil type and weather, but train the rose to grow deep roots and be more drought tolerant by watering thoroughly but not too frequently – wait until the soil is dry before watering.



Plant Potatoes



If you want to take advantage of some of the nice-weather days we get periodically in late winter, it's a great time of year to plant potatoes. West-Texas gardeners aren't likely to be able to grow huge baking potatoes like we get at the grocery store from Idaho, but we can grow delicious small potatoes that are a great addition to the dinner table when roasted or mashed. Potatoes are a cool weather crop, but not a winter crop – they are in between. They grow best when the days are warm and nights are cool, and don't like the heat of summer. But the top of the plant can't handle freezing temperatures. February is a good time to plant, as the seed piece starts out protected from cold temperatures in the soil and the plant top emerges after danger of frost has passed.

Potato plants are started from potato pieces, also called seed potatoes. The best bet is to purchase seed potatoes from a nursery or feed store, but the grocery store can be a source as well. Red potatoes, like the variety Red Lasoda, and yellow varieties like Yukon Gold do well in Texas. Cut any large seed potatoes into pieces about the size of an egg, and make sure each piece has at least one eye. Set the potato pieces out to allow the cut side to dry out for about five days, to prevent rotting when planted.

Prepare the soil by tilling and working it well to loosen it up. Remove rocks and sticks, and work the soil up into raised rows that are about a foot high, and 3 feet apart. Raised rows are helpful because they increase drainage. Use a hoe or stick to open up a hole on top of the raised row, and drop the seed piece in. As the plant grows, mound up extra soil around it – the plant only makes new potatoes above the seed piece. Make sure the potatoes that form are kept covered with soil, otherwise they will turn green. Another option is to plant in a container; use a large well-drained planter and plant the seed piece in a shallow amount of potting mix in the bottom. As the plant sprouts, add more potting mix. Keep adding more potting mix as the plant grows until the pot is full, leaving a few inches space at the top of the pot to aid in watering. At the end of the season, just dump out the container onto some newspapers or a tarp and collect the potatoes. For more information on growing potatoes, check out the Extension publication at <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/easy-gardening-series/>.

Winter Vegetable Gardening

While it would be risky to plant warm season plants too early in the year, such as tomatoes and squash that would be damaged or killed by cold temperatures, now is the time to get cool season vegetables planted. Crops like spinach, carrots, lettuce and kale can handle cold temperatures and will taste bitter and/or stop producing when it gets hot. They are also attractive additions to the landscape, whether in planting beds or patio containers. So don't miss out on the chance to grow some tasty leafy greens and root crops, it will start to warm up soon and February is the end of the optimal planting window for these winter vegetables.

It might be fun to try something new and different such as kohlrabi! Many of the winter vegetables are actually in the same plant family – Brassicaceae or mustard family. They are often called cole crops and include arugula, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, bok choy, broccoli, radish and turnips. Some are more challenging to grow like cauliflower, while others are very easy – like kohlrabi. Small, tender kohlrabi bulbs can be used fresh - sliced up in salads or diced and added as a crunchy addition to dip. Larger bulbs can be used in soup or stew. Another less common crop, bok choy, is also easy to grow and makes a tasty addition to stir fry or salad.

Many of these can be found to purchase as transplants or seeds at local nurseries and garden centers, and the others can be found online and in seeds catalogs. The key to getting seeds to germinate well is to plant in well-prepared soil that is smooth and fine-textured, not clumpy and rocky. The addition of compost will improve the soil and can aid in plant growth.

Seeds also require a steady supply of water to germinate, and must be kept constantly damp until the plants emerge and begin to grow roots. This may mean a light sprinkling with water several times a day at first. After the seeds are up and/or the transplants are planted, a three-inch deep layer of mulch will help keep weeds out and conserve water.



UPCOMING EVENTS

February 2023

Tuesdays - February through May, 12pm-3pm

Master Gardener Training Class

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office, San Angelo

Cost: \$225

Registration closes soon, sign up now! Contact the Extension Office at 325-659-6528 for info or email Allison at aewatkins@ag.tamu.edu

Thursday, February 9 2pm-4pm

PPC Seminar - Aging With Your Garden & Square Foot Gardening

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office, 113 W. Beauregard, San Angelo

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Ron Knight

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

Friday, February 24, 12pm-1pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Home Fruit Trees in West Texas

Location: Tom Green County Extension Office, 113 W. Beauregard, San Angelo

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the PPC; Join us for a discussion on growing fruit in your home landscape. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

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



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