



# Concho Valley

March 2023

# HORTICULTURE UPDATE

## Spring Vegetable Gardening

We are approaching the time of year when gardeners are eager to plant, and we all keep a close eye on the long-range weather forecast. Warm season vegetable plants can't take freezing temperatures, so either wait until all danger of frost has passed or have a good plan in place to move plants inside or cover to protect from a possible cold snap. According to the National Weather Service here in San Angelo, the average last frost is March 24; but it has been known to freeze into late April. The latest on record was April 30th, in 1908! And in 2004 it didn't freeze after February 26. So there are no guarantees when it comes to weather, and every gardener decides for themselves when they want to plant.

There is something special about growing your own food, it just tastes better and brings deep satisfaction. Whether planting a few vegetables in flower beds, growing in containers, or creating a large garden plot – any effort to grow vegetables is a worthy goal. Here are some tips to have a productive crop. First, consider the soil. If planting in containers, don't use real soil – potting mix provides better structure for plant roots in pots. If planting in the ground, incorporate some good quality finished compost before planting to improve soil structure, provide nutrients and help plants grow more vigorously.

After preparing the soil, install drip irrigation. Drip irrigation is a great option for watering vegetables since it applies the water to the soil, where it's needed, and doesn't stress plants by spraying on the leaves. After planting the vegetables, apply a three to four-inch-deep layer of wood mulch. Mulch will greatly reduce the most common frustration of vegetable gardening – weeds. But it needs to be deep enough to have an impact on weed populations. If starting vegetables from seed, wait until after the seeds emerge to apply mulch.

For more info on specific crops, visit Aggie Horticulture at <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>; also visit the Tom Green County Extension site at <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> to see a planting chart of what can be planted when.

## March To-Do's

- Divide summer and fall flowering perennials and ornamental grasses
- Avoid purchasing bare-root trees and roses this late in the season - instead choose container grown or B&B
- Prepare soil in new beds by tilling in 3 inches of compost
- Don't plant frost-sensitive plants too early. The last frost in the Concho Valley is usually mid-to late March but can surprise us in April

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## Pecan Update

Save the Date! Tuesday May 9th there will be a Listening Session with staff from Texas A&M on PRESERVING TEXAS' PECAN LEGACY

*What do you need help with?  
How can we can work together  
to sustain pecan growing in  
Texas? Help set the priorities.  
We want to listen!*

More info TBA

# Spring Lawn Care



Warm season turf will start greening up soon and though we will still have up-and-down temperatures, for the most part it's time to enjoy some spring weather and get to work in the landscape. For lawns that are green with weeds like henbit and rescuegrass, keep the weeds mowed to help the turfgrass emerge strong. And consider applying a pre-emergent next fall to prevent the cool season annual weeds from coming up in the first place. Also work on getting the lawn denser and healthier to choke out most of the weeds. The practices that have the biggest impact on a dense, weed-free lawn are mowing and watering. Proper mowing and irrigation will help encourage thick, healthy grass that can outcompete weeds. Many homeowners think (or wish) there is a silver bullet, that there is just the right product to spray on the grass to make everything perfect. While there are some helpful and effective herbicides available that if used correctly can help control weeds, it's not that easy. It takes consistent, correct mowing, watering, fertilizing etc; but once the lawn is thick and healthy again, it is much better at keeping the weeds out.

Don't fertilize too early, wait until the turfgrass (not just cool season weeds that might be up) has needed to be mowed twice. Fertilizing before the grass is actively growing isn't helpful, and won't be taken up by the plants.

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 is important for a thick lawn.

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 and surviving the summer heat and also help conserve water. Utilize the free tool [WaterMyYard.org](http://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.

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## Plant Spotlight

### Baby Tears Sedum

*Sedum album chloroticum* 'Baby Tears'

This beautiful sedum is lovely in a container and trails down nicely as a good 'spiller' plant, and spreads out as a small groundcover in beds.

White blooms, grows 4"-6" tall





# Introducing the Milkweed Beetle!

*By contributing author Linda Rowe, Master Gardener*

Those of us who are interested in butterfly gardening know how important milkweed is as an agent in attracting butterflies, particularly the Monarch. According to the Native Plant Society of Texas, there are approximately 30 varieties of milkweed native to Texas, butterfly weed being the most popular with Texas butterfly gardeners. Milkweed is the host plant of the Monarch, as it provides the food source for the Monarch caterpillar. That being said, it is also the host plant of the Milkweed Beetle.

The Milkweed Beetle has what is known as piercing, sucking mouth parts which they use to pierce and suck the fluids from milkweed seeds. They also lay their eggs at the base of the plant to give the hatched larvae access to the stems and roots of the plant, which is their food source. The adult beetle also consumes the leaves which results in less-than-ideal growing conditions for the plant.

Trying to control and eradicate a milkweed beetle infestation can prove to be a trying and stressful endeavor, as any kind of pesticide application would harm the Monarchs that feed and lay eggs on the milkweed as well.

I came across an interesting article written by Mark Czernieo, who had a Milkweed Beetle infestation in his butterfly garden. He recommends removing the seed pods from the plant as soon as they appear to limit the food source for the beetle's larvae. If you would like to read his entire article, you can find it at [MarkCz.com](http://MarkCz.com), Milkweed Bug Infestation of Butterfly Weed.



## Spring Landscaping

Gardening is a wonderful activity that provides fresh air, sunshine, vitamin D, exercise and fun! Here are some tips to help you get the most out of your efforts:

First, add some color and interest to the front porch or the patio with a beautiful combination pot. Use the 'thriller, filler and spiller' technique to really create a showy container planting. The thriller plant would be something really eye-catching, like a tall spikey purple fountain grass. Then fill in around it with some mounding colorful annuals like petunias or begonias. Finally, add trailing plants as the 'spillers' like wooly stemodia or Cuban oregano. Potted plants will need to be watered more often than plants in the ground, so consider utilizing drip irrigation and mulch (yes it can work in potted plants too!).

Spruce up the curb appeal in the flower beds as well with some fresh annual color and beautiful perennials. Choose heat-tolerant plants and be sure to provide the right amount of light. Just remember that 'full sun' on the label doesn't *always* mean direct, all-day west Texas sun – a little afternoon shade is beneficial to many traditional bedding plants. But there are certainly plenty of options that *can* take the heat of all-day sun, like pride of Barbados, yellow bells, and lantana.

Keep an eye out for fire ants, as they will start coming out soon. Wait until you know they are out foraging before treating; there are many options ranging from organic products like spinosad to traditional pesticides. The 'Texas Two-Step' method recommended by Texas A&M includes both mound treatments and baits, visit <https://fireant.tamu.edu/controlmethods/twostep/> for more info.

Don't miss the annual Concho Valley Master Gardener's Plant Sale! They have been busy growing lots of different plants and will have hanging baskets, perennials, annuals, vegetables, herbs and more available on Saturday, April 1st at 8am. The sale is held at the Tom Green 4H Center, 3168 N US 67 in San Angelo (next door to the Animal Shelter). The sale will go until sold out, which is usually around 11am. Be sure to get there early!

# Growing Herbs



Herbs are wonderful to have in the landscape for many reasons – they are beautiful ornamental plants, attract butterflies and bees, and they can be used for seasoning to make food taste delicious. Another bonus is that many herbs are deer-resistant!

There are herbs to try for every level of experience, from beginner gardener to advanced. Beginners could try easy to grow plants like mint (there are many delicious types to choose from) and expert gardeners up for a challenge could try some of the harder to grow types (at least in west Texas) like chamomile and tarragon.

Most herbs 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 with potting mix - if the pot has good drainage. Some of the recommended herbs for the area include evergreens like sage, rosemary, thyme, oregano, mint, marjoram and chives; annuals like basil, parsley, dill, cilantro; and perennials like catnip, catmint, fennel, lemon balm, Mexican mint marigold, lemon verbena, and lemon grass.

Anywhere they are planted, herbs are worth having around – whether a few potted plants on the porch, or mixed into the flower beds, or an extensive dedicated herb garden. It's a true delight to be able to harvest and cook with fresh herbs in your own yard!

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## Watering Plants

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. 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.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## March 2023

Thursday, March 9, 2pm-4pm

### **PPC Seminar - Spring Vegetable Gardening**

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

*Cost: \$20*

*Speaker: Allison Watkins*

Hosted by the People Plant Connection; Learn how to grow your own fresh food! To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104.

Friday, March 17, 12pm-1pm

### **Lunch N Learn Class - Spring Forward**

*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 some of the items on a spring to-do list for the home landscape and garden. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Saturday April 1st, 8am until sold out (usually by 11am)

### **Master Gardener Plant Sale**

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

The Master Gardeners have grown a lot of beautiful plants for their annual plant sale! Come check out the selection of locally propagated plants that are all well-suited for the local climate. Contact the Extension Office at 325-659-6528 for info or email Allison at [allison.schwarz@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:allison.schwarz@ag.tamu.edu). More details and plant list coming soon at [txmg.org/conchovalley](http://txmg.org/conchovalley)

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



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