



Concho Valley

August 2023

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

Plant Wildflowers in August

Some plants are at their peak in the hot dry summer weather, but many are struggling. Don't give up hope, autumn will come! It will be a slow, gradual change to cooler weather but fall is the best season for many west Texas plants. Get out early in the morning to work on late-summer landscaping and gardening tasks, but also remember to escape the heat, enjoy the air conditioning and look through seed catalogs to get ready for a busy fall planting time.

Spring wildflowers can be a beautiful addition to a home landscape or planted in a nearby field. Whether planting at home or in a pasture, there are some steps to take to ensure good germination and growth. While it certainly is an option to just toss the seeds out and see what happens, it's worth it to make some extra effort because the weather doesn't always cooperate enough to get a good wildflower show.

First, be sure to get seeds from a reliable source. Seed should be fresh to ensure good germination, so purchase from a trustworthy company. If planting in flower beds, remove any weeds and lightly till the soil. Good soil-to-seed contact is important for good germination, so try to loosen up the soil if possible.

If planting a variety of seeds with different sizes, mix them one-part seed to four-parts sand in order to have even distribution. A simple handheld fertilizer spreader can be used. Once the seeds are spread, tamp them down and water them in lightly. After that, rainfall should be sufficient but if there is drought during the fall, lightly water them occasionally.

Throughout the fall and winter, try to pull broadleaf weeds to prevent them from competing with the wildflowers. Check out an online or printed wildflower catalog, they usually have pictures of what the small seedlings look like so they aren't mistaken for weeds. Some good wildflowers to plant in the Concho Valley include Mexican hat, black-eyed Susan, bluebonnet, Indian blanket and coreopsis.

August To-Do's

- Lightly prune shrub roses and perennials to stimulate a fall flush of blooms; if they are looking stressed, prune more severely
- Provide water for backyard wildlife - songbirds, butterflies etc.
- Continue to deadhead annuals to stimulate new flowers
- Start plant spring blooming wildflower seeds

Pecan Update

Keep watering pecan trees! Pecans require thorough irrigation at least every three weeks when there's no rain to stay healthy. Keep watering through shuck split to help finish a good crop of nuts.

Summer Plant Survival



There have been questions coming in regarding sick and stressed plants. Trees have dropped leaves, shrubs are getting scorched, and many vegetables and perennials are looking rough. It's been a long, hot, very dry summer and one of the toughest things for plants is the high night temperature - which we can't change, and extra watering won't entirely fix.

Some plants thrive in the most extreme summer heat – pride of Barbados and sweet potato vine for example. In landscape planning, remember that diversity is good – include a variety of plants with different strengths and requirements in order to have something showy and happy all year long. For plants that aren't thriving right now, take the time to evaluate irrigation methods and timing. Summer heat certainly causes plants to need more irrigation than cooler seasons; but proper watering (deep and infrequent) throughout the year can help plants develop deeper roots, which can help them withstand summer temperatures.

If you suspect something other than just summer heat, consider all the possibilities – weed killer damage, nutrient deficiency, insect pests, disease, etc. Disease can be difficult to diagnose in plants, try sending a sample to the Texas A&M Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. Visit plantclinic.tamu.edu for info and to print the submission form. The charge is \$35 for routine diagnostic service, and this can be a big help in determining the cause of plant stress.

But what is causing the trouble for many plants right now is simply heat and drought. Add plenty of mulch for planting beds, and even container-grown plants, to conserve moisture in the soil. Cut back perennials now to get a flush of healthy new growth for fall blooms. Give pecan trees extra water – there is a term called 'August Drop' that is used to refer to pecans dropping nuts and leaves in late summer – this is a pretty common occurrence and is a response of the tree to high temperatures.

If plants have yellow, stunted leaves with green veins, this is probably a sign of iron deficiency – try spraying the leaves with a liquid iron fertilizer, and work on increasing organic matter in the soil around the plants. Iron chlorosis is especially common on hollies, pears, and junipers but can affect many others. Iron deficiency is caused by the high soil pH but is also made worse by water imbalance – too much or too little.

Plant Spotlight

Vitex

Vitex agnus-castus

Vitex has had show-stopping blooms this year! This large, hardy Texas Superstar plant grows quickly, and blooms heavily through early summer but only sporadically through summer and fall.

Plant in an open area where the ground around it will be mowed regularly, or keep an eye out for seedlings. It is not considered especially invasive in west Texas, but can spread easily.



Every Drop Counts

At the risk of repeating similar things from last year, this is turning out to be a historic year for heat and drought. We all need to take part in efforts to reduce water use and not waste it. Landscapes and gardens are important and valuable parts of our homes, businesses, parks and athletic fields but we must be good stewards of water and make the most of what we do use.

Consider all the possibilities to make the landscape and garden more drought tolerant, and irrigation methods more water efficient. There are many ways to reduce water use in the home landscape, and the Earth-Kind Landscaping principles are a good place to begin: planning and design, practical turf areas, appropriate plant selection, soil improvement, efficient irrigation, effective use of mulch, appropriate maintenance, and rainwater harvesting.

In addition to designing and maintaining the landscape to be able to make it by with less water, try to find ways to recycle and reuse water, so that potable water can be reserved for other uses. This could include utilizing gray water or air conditioning condensate to water flower beds or shrubs, setting up a rain barrel for when rain returns; or even something as simple as putting a bucket in the shower to catch water while it heats up to use for plants, or emptying the melted ice from the cooler after a cookout into a potted patio plant or flower bed. Remember that every drop counts, and the more we can each make small changes in our daily habits the better off we will be in the future.

The Texas Water Code defines gray water as water discharged from showers, bathtubs, sinks (not used for food preparation or for disposal of hazardous or toxic materials) and clothes washing machines. The City of San Angelo limits the use of gray water to the washing machine only, but those living outside city limits could include the bathtub and/or bathroom sink in a gray water plan. Gray water can be a good source of water for the landscape if set up and managed properly. If there is less than 400 gallons per day of gray water flow from a single family residence, there is generally no permit required to allow gray water to flow into the landscape to water plants. Visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> to see a publication with more info.

Every drop counts, and every effort big or small to make the landscape more drought tolerant makes a big difference for our community. Apply thick mulch to beds and gardens, utilize drip irrigation instead of sprinklers, choose tough plants, reduce turfgrass area and replace with other features that need less water

Summer/Fall Lawn Care

It's been a tough summer, and unfortunately there's no relief in sight. The lawn is an important part of the home landscape that adds value to the property, but in cases of extreme heat and drought some homeowners choose to save money and water and let it go into a summer dormancy. It's ok to not keep the lawn completely green and lush in the summer, warm season grasses can go into a 'survival mode' and turn brown, waiting for fall rains to revive them. Bermuda and buffalo grass are especially good at coming back strong. But just cut back on water enough so that the lawn turns brown, and doesn't die - it would be a lot of work and expense to plant a new one. Keep watering, just less often.

Other lawn care tasks to consider include fertilization and pest control. Nitrogen fertilizer can be tough on plants that are heat and drought stressed, so don't fertilize unless you've been watering adequately to maintain active, green growth, or wait until it rains and cools down a bit more; either way, get it done by early October to not promote too much new growth too close to winter.

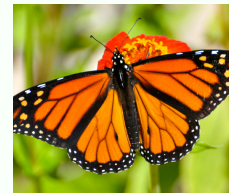
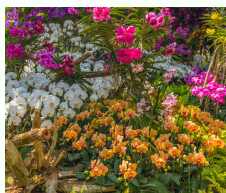
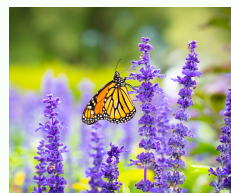
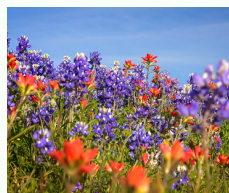
If St. Augustine grass is struggling or there has been a history of take-all root rot disease causing large areas of the lawn to turn yellow and then die back, treat every fall and spring to reduce damage and prevent the fungal disease. If just starting to exhibit mild symptoms or to maintain healthy St. Augustine, top dress with one to two bales of sphagnum peat moss per thousand square feet and apply a micronutrient fertilizer containing manganese. If there are areas damaged by the disease, also treat with a turf fungicide containing azoxystrobin (such as Heritage or Scott's DiseaseX).

Consider applying pre-emergent in healthy, well-established lawns to prevent cool season annual weeds such as rescuegrass and henbit. Wait until soil temperature cools down to about 70 degrees for several days before applying pre-emergent in the fall, that usually happens in the latter half of September or early October.

For a more in-depth guide to applying pre-emergent for the lawn, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on "Pre-Emergence Herbicides." Read the label carefully and follow all directions for product rate and application instructions.



August To Do's



The more our desirable landscape plants and vegetables struggle in the heat, the more the weeds seem to thrive. Here are some late summer to-do list items to keep the yard in good shape until fall. Khakiweed (*Alternanthera pungens*) is a bothersome plant that is prevalent in west Texas. Khakiweed grows flat, spread out on the ground with oval-shaped leaves and produces painful, annoying burs. It is very opportunistic and grows well in bare spots and thinned out turf, so the first and most effective means of control is to ensure something is occupying the soil. Deep mulch, dense groundcovers and healthy thick turf are the most important things that can keep khakiweed from taking over the landscape. That is easier said than done in a year like this one! Post-emergent herbicides that contain a combination of 2,4-D with mecoprop, carfentrazone, dicamba, or metsulfuron (for example, Fertilome brand Weed Free Zone) are effective for controlling young existing plants. Apply early when the plants start to emerge, while they are still small; large mature plants will not be easily controlled with herbicide and should be physically removed.

Mesquite tree seedlings have been popping up all over landscapes and should be removed while small and easy to control. Some options include digging to remove the crown and as much root as possible, or cutting down to ground level and carefully treating the stump with a brush killer product to keep from resprouting.

Lightly trim back perennials and roses to encourage healthy new growth for better fall blooms. Hand water any stressed perennials that are struggling to survive, and replenish wood mulch to a thick four inch deep layer to help plants make it through the end of summer.

August is a great time of year to plant wildflower seeds. This year we had such a glorious show of bluebonnets and other spring wildflowers along roadsides! If you'd like to bring some into the landscape to enjoy next spring get seeds spread before fall rains come.

Monarch butterflies migrate through on their way to Mexico in the fall, so prepare ahead to help them on their way by planting heat-tolerant nectar flowers now such as lantana, salvia and Greg's blue mist.

Herbs and Butterflies

This is most definitely a year that good plant selection matters – it's always important to choose good plants that thrive in local conditions for a low-maintenance, Earth-Kind landscape - but during the extreme heat and drought the native and well-adapted plants really stand out.

Many herbs are Mediterranean plants and do well in the heat, and are wonderful to have in the landscape because they have many advantages. They provide a delicious source of seasoning for meals, many are good for butterflies, they are generally deer-resistant, and are attractive perennials to have in the yard. So consider adding some flavorful herbs to the landscape this fall, as well as some butterfly nectar plants to help the monarchs as they migrate through around October. This will be a tough year for them and every bit of assistance will make a difference in getting them through to Mexico for the winter.

Nectar plants that adult butterflies like to visit include butterfly bush, butterfly weed, blue mistflower, lantana, salvia and flame acanthus. Be conscientious and careful with pesticide use, around both herbs and butterfly plants. People and butterflies will be consuming the plants, so avoid insecticides as much as possible, or only use the properly labeled, edible garden-safe product according to label directions if needed for herbs. In addition to nectar flowers, try to provide a water source for adult butterflies; if there is an existing wet spot, like where air conditioner condensate drains, that will do. If not, a shallow saucer of sand with water added to make it damp can help. Also, use drip irrigation instead of sprinklers as much as possible because spraying nozzles can wash the nectar out of the flowers.

Some of the recommended herbs for the Concho Valley that can be planted in the fall include evergreens like sage, winter savory, rosemary, thyme, oregano, lavender, marjoram and chives; cool-season annuals like parsley, cilantro; and semi-evergreen/perennials like mint, catnip, catmint, lemon balm, Mexican mint marigold, and lemon verbena. Most herbs prefer full sun and well-drained soil; incorporating compost can help loosen up soil and increase drainage. Some do well in poor soil though, like lavender – it will thrive in rocky, lean soil so don't add organic matter. Mints can handle more shade and poor drainage.



UPCOMING EVENTS

August 2023

Friday, August 25, 12pm-1pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Plant Propagation and Saving Seeds

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 how grow new plants from seeds and cuttings. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Save the Date!

Saturday, September 9, 2023

Fall Landscaping Symposium

Location: Texas A&M Center, 7887 N US 87, San Angelo

Cost: \$30 - must pre-register

Hosted by the Concho Valley Master Gardeners

The Master Gardeners have another great line-up of speakers this year, covering a range of topics - native plants, integrated pest management, succulents, hobby greenhouses and landscape design. Visit <https://txmg.org/conchovalley/> for info, or to register online visit <https://cvmg.square.site/s/shop>

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



Allison Watkins Schwarz
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Tom Green County
113 W Beauregard
San Angelo, TX 76903
325-659-6528

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