



Concho Valley

July 2023

HORTICULTURE UPDATE

Water Trees

The record-breaking heat wave has stressed many landscape plants, and while we hope for some relief from the extremely hot weather soon, summer is always a tough season even if it does cool down a little. Shade trees, ornamental trees and shrubs are the most permanent, valuable plants in the home landscape and should be irrigated thoroughly to reduce stress and help them stay healthy through these rough conditions.

Many well-adapted and established trees and shrubs can get by with rainfall in 'average' years, supplemented with lawn irrigation, and don't always need their own separate irrigation efforts. Pecan trees are an exception and will always need irrigation every two to three weeks in normal years. In the current conditions, it's recommended to also water the well-established, drought tolerant landscape trees like oaks. Even if drought does not kill a tree, the stress can have significant and long-lasting effects – many insect pests and diseases affect stressed trees much more than healthy ones, and the stress may impact the health of the tree for years to come.

Large trees should not be watered just at the trunk – the large woody roots there do not absorb water, they transport it. The goal should be to irrigate the entire root zone, which extends beyond the canopy. Start by watering 'low and slow' at the dripline of the tree, by letting the water hose run on low or using a hose-end sprinkler or drip tubing. Let it run long enough to thoroughly saturate the ground under the tree canopy and even beyond the width of the canopy. Generally, two to three inches of water per inch of trunk diameter is sufficient, or simulate a one-inch rainfall over the entire rooting zone. Water in the morning or evening to reduce wasting water, which is lost to evaporation in hot temperatures.

Frequency of irrigating trees depends on the type of tree and how well established it is. Young trees with small root systems should be checked every week, while large mature trees should be watered every two to three weeks as long as the heat and drought continue.

July To-Do's

- Start checking cantaloupes and melons for ripeness
- Audit irrigation system to check for problems and conserve water
- Pick okra, squash and peppers often to maintain production
- Watch for summer pests like chinch bugs and spider mites

Pecan Update

The Texas Pecan Grower's annual State Conference is July 30-August 2 in Denton, TX.

It's a great opportunity to learn about pecan production; for info visit

<https://tpga.org/tpga-events/>

Seed Collection and Storage



Saving seeds is a great way to keep annual plants going without having to buy new plants every year and can also be a way to increase favorite perennials throughout the yard. For vegetables that are producing crops, save seeds from the biggest, tastiest, best quality fruit to save for next year. Be aware of some important factors such as hybrid varieties and cross pollination, it's not recommended to save seeds from hybrid vegetables, especially for more than a couple years in a row. Hybrids are not very 'true to type' meaning they are more likely to have different characteristics from generation to generation. Seeds that come from vegetables that are old fashioned or true to type varieties are much more likely to retain the same flavor, color, size, etc. from year to year.

Also be aware of cross-pollination. Vegetables like cucurbits (squashes, melons, cucumbers, etc), peppers, carrots and corn readily cross pollinate so if there are multiple varieties in the same garden or vicinity, there will be some genetic variability. It's best to physically separate from other plants or grow one variety at a time if reliable seed collection is important. Crops like peas, tomatoes (if not planted adjacent to each other), and most beans do not readily cross pollinate.

To save vegetable seeds, allow the fruit to fully ripen and mature before collecting the seeds. Allow to dry thoroughly before storing in a cool, dry location. To collect seeds from perennial and annual flowers, stop deadheading the blooms. Deadheading is recommended through the blooming season to allow for more abundant flowering but doesn't allow seeds to form. Allow the flowers to fade, seeds pods to form, and wait until the seeds are fully mature. Seed pods that are green and moist are not ready – wait until the pods turn brown and dry out. But don't wait too long or the seeds will drop/disperse and be gone. Many species have seeds that don't mature at the same time, but at staggered intervals – so keep an eye out every day.

After collecting the seeds, correct storage techniques are important so they last until the next growing season and longer. The seeds should be kept very dry and stored at cool temperatures. The silica gel packs that often come with newly purchased electronics or purses, etc. can be used to help keep the seeds dry.

Plant Spotlight

Desert Willow

Chilopsis linearis

Many plants are struggling in the heat wave, but desert willows are blooming and happy. This 20ft tall tree has a wild, open growth habit, loves the heat and is very drought tolerant. Choose a sterile cultivar such as Art's Seedless or Sweet Bubba Seedless for long, heavy bloom periods and no seed pods.



Houseplants

With the heat sending us all inside to stay comfortable, now is a good time to try out some house plants and indoor gardening. Buy seeds and start your own fall vegetable transplants inside, buy a houseplant like a philodendron, or try cultivating some herbs with an indoor kitchen garden.

For permanent house plants, choose those that are adapted to low light levels – selection and care are quite different than for landscape plants. Some of the toughest house plants that work well in most homes include Christmas cactus, philodendron, ficus, pothos ivy, sansevieria, ZZ plant, dracaena, and aglaonema.

Two major factors to focus on with house plants are light and water. Plants that are known to be good for inside a building are generally tropical plants native to areas with very dense canopies that can handle lower light levels; but all plants need some light to grow – and even house plants need more light than is usually available in the home to grow well and thrive.

A simple test to measure light levels and to help choose the best spot for houseplants can be done by holding your hand about 12 inches above the surface in question (floor, table, etc) during the brightest time of day. Look for the hand's shadow – if it is a clear and distinct dark shadow, that is a high light level. If it has a fuzzy outline and is a light, faint shadow that is low light. Match plants with the proper amount of light that they need based on the label directions.

Watering houseplants can be tricky; many plants do best when they can be watered thoroughly and the excess water is allowed to drain away well, but houseplants tend to be watered lightly and more frequently; and there is usually a tray underneath to catch the excess water which can create standing water for long periods of time. If possible, place houseplants in a sink or tub, water thoroughly and allow to drain well before returning.

Indoor herb gardens are very popular and can be a nice feature in the kitchen – providing beauty, fresh fragrance and interest. While many herbs are easy to grow outdoors in the west Texas climate, it's important to remember that most herbs are not naturally suited to be houseplants. That's not to say it can't be done - start with finding the right spot where they can get six to eight hours of direct sun, like a south facing window.

Just about any herb can be started indoors, but not all can be permanently grown in small containers; many herbs grow to be large plants, like sage and rosemary. So either stick to smaller plants like basil, thyme and parsley or if growing larger plants just plan to start over every so often to keep plants small and manageable for an indoor garden. Once they outgrow their container, they can be planted outside or given away.

Plant Fall Tomatoes Now

It's time to plant tomatoes! That may seem like the wrong timing, but July is a great time of year to plant fresh new tomato transplants for fall production. Other warm season vegetables such as eggplant, cucumber, okra, peppers and squash can also be planted in July or August for a fall crop before it freezes in November.

Tomatoes prefer cool weather – not freezing, but not in the 90's either. The flowers set fruit better in mild temperatures, especially larger varieties. Small cherry tomatoes can usually produce well all summer long but larger varieties slow down or even stop altogether when it heats up. Many spring-planted plants start to get stressed from pests like spider mites in the summer, so if your plants aren't looking healthy consider replacing them with new transplants. Fall is a wonderful time of year to grow vegetables!

Choose large, healthy plants and encourage them to put on as much growth as possible in their first two months by irrigating steadily and fertilizing with nitrogen – but give them some time to establish before fertilizing. Nitrogen fertilizers can easily scorch or damage brand-new transplants. July started out fairly cool and rainy, but when the heat returns it will be stressful for the new plants – keep a close eye on water needs and provide some shade in the afternoon for the first couple of weeks if needed.

Incorporate compost into the soil before planting, and finish off with a thick layer of wood mulch to help reduce transplant shock, conserve water, and prevent weeds. If growing in containers, use potting mix instead of real soil and make sure the container has good drainage. Standing water will damage roots and cause the plant to decline, and can attract pests such as fungus gnats.



Watering Schedules



The dog days of summer are here, and it's important to stay on top of plant water needs. Turfgrass may be the simplest landscape feature to know how often to water during the summer – research has shown that one inch per week is appropriate for well-established warm season turf in Texas such as bermudagrass, St. Augustine and zoysia. Drought-tolerant, native buffalo grass can survive with much less, but occasional watering can keep it from going brown and dormant during the hot summer. But the more complicated question may be 'how long to water?' to get that one inch. Do a catch can test – place irrigation catch cans, or even empty tuna cans around the yard and water as normal; see how long it takes until they are filled with one inch of water. That is how long it takes for that specific system and it will vary with different types of sprinklers. And of course, this recommendation of weekly irrigation is only when there is no rainfall. Irrigation timers can be helpful to keep the lawn properly watered but the best setting for lawns is 'off.' Just turn it on when needed – otherwise it may run just a couple days after a heavy rainfall, when no additional water is needed yet. One good resource is the website WaterMyYard.org – check it out for weekly recommendations for how long run the irrigation system based on current local weather. Also visit aggieturf.tamu.edu/publications and see the Water Wise Checklist for lawns for more tips.

Next – watering shrub and flower beds. To keep plants as healthy as possible, and conserve as much water as possible, use drip irrigation and apply thick mulch (three to four inches of wood mulch). This will help plants make it through the summer without needing as much water. But irrigation timing will depend on the types of plants – zone shrubs and bedding plants together based on water needs, and try not to mix drought tolerant shrubs with perennials that need more frequent watering or vice versa.

Vegetables are not drought tolerant plants and will perform best with steady, even irrigation. So mulch and drip irrigation are even more critical there, to protect local water sources and not waste water.

Home Grown Watermelons

Watermelons, as well as other cucurbits like muskmelons (aka cantaloupe) are a great choice for a home garden in west Texas because they love the heat – they require hot temperatures to develop sweetness. So if you didn't get a watermelon planted this year, make a note to get one of your own going next spring. A good time frame to plant is April through May, since they need several months to produce.

Depending on the variety, it takes about 90 days to harvest after planting. So now is the time to start checking for ripeness, and here are some tips to help determine when to pull the watermelon and enjoy (these can also help you choose a good one at the market or store). First, look for the small tendril near the fruit; it will dry up and turn brown when the fruit is mature. Next, look at the ground spot – it should be a creamy, buttery yellow color (not bright white). The stripes should be nice and wide, not narrow. The rind should appear dull, not shiny. Finally, you can thump it – give it a gentle tap, and a ripe watermelon will have a deep/dull sound, not high-pitched sharp tone.

A common question is 'how do they make seedless watermelon?' It is done through cross breeding – each seedless watermelon seed comes from a watermelon plant that was cross pollinated in a controlled way. One of the parent plants was treated with colchicine to double the number of chromosomes, then bred with a normal plant; the end result is a seed that will grow into a plant that will produce fruit but no viable seeds. It's quite a process, so the seeds are pricey. If you don't mind the seeds, taste tests have shown that seeded varieties are typically always sweeter and better quality.



UPCOMING EVENTS

July 2023

Thursday, July 13, 6pm-8:30pm

Seminar - Summer Landscaping and Water Conservation

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

Cost: Free to attend

Speakers: Charles Swanson, Allison Watkins

Learn how to water the landscape, and keep the yard beautiful all summer long while being as efficient as possible! Please RSVP at tomgreen.agrilife.org or call 325-659-6522

Thursday, July 20, 1pm-2pm

PPC Seminar - Alternative Energy - Solar Panels, Generators

NEW Location: West Branch Library, 3013 Vista del Arroyo, San Angelo

Cost: \$10

Speaker: Aaron Jenkins, Concho Valley Electric Co-op

Hosted by the People Plant Connection; Interested in learning about solar power for the home? Join us for a discussion and Q&A session about solar panels, as well as generators to keep the home going during power outages. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104.

Friday, July 21, 12pm-1pm

Lunch N Learn Class - Top Tips for Summer Landscaping

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 to keep the yard beautiful all summer long without wasting water. 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, and landscape design. Don't miss it! Mark your calendars and watch out for a registration link coming this summer.

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

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.