



# Concho Valley

October 2023

# HORTICULTURE UPDATE

## Earth-Kind Soil Management – Fall

What a hard summer it was - hopefully autumn weather really kicks in and sticks! As days get longer and cooler leaves will start falling in the next few months. Remember the phrase “don’t bag it” and save those fallen leaves – they are valuable organic matter for the landscape and garden. With the exception of plants that prefer ‘lean’ soil with little to no organic matter (like cactus, agave, desert plants), organic matter helps plants grow better.

Another phrase to remember is “compost once, mulch forever.” When starting a new project – a new flower bed or vegetable garden for example – till up the soil to aerate and loosen; then incorporate compost to help improve soil structure, provide nutrients, and make it easier for plant roots to grow. After completing the project, and for all existing beds, apply and maintain a three- to four-inch deep layer of wood mulch to prevent weeds, conserve water, insulate plant roots and to slowly provide additional organic matter as it breaks down. Replenish the mulch to the right depth annually to keep the benefits going.

Fallen leaves are a great source of organic matter that can be used as mulch or composted with other materials and shouldn’t be wasted by taking up space in the landfill. Mimic mother nature as much as possible by recycling plant material to increase gardening success and to help protect the environment - improving soil with compost and mulch can reduce the need for fertilizers. With good plant selection, many landscapes can thrive with no additional fertilizer except for turfgrass and vegetables.

Some options for utilizing leaves include: mowing, use as mulch, add to a compost pile, or direct soil improvement. Sometimes leaves can simply be mowed – for example pecan leaves shred easily with a mower to a much smaller volume and can often be left on the lawn to decompose and add organic matter to the soil underneath the grass. Thick live oak leaves are harder to deal with though, they can be used in planting beds as a mulch or added to a compost bin with materials like coffee grounds and fruit and vegetable scraps to help break them down into compost. Don’t incorporate fallen leaves directly into soil where plants will be grown in the immediate season, but if a garden plot will be fallow (empty) for the winter the leaves can be tilled in and will break down over the winter, ready for spring planting. Otherwise they will rob plants of nitrogen during the decay process.

Join us for an Earth-Kind Landscape School seminar series to learn more about beautifying the landscape without wasting water or using excessive fertilizers and pesticides. There will be four classes – October 26 - Nov 16 from 6pm to 8pm at the Extension Office downtown. For details and to sign up, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/>.

## October To-Do's

- Plant cool season annuals (latter half of the month)
- Adjust irrigation schedule for cooler weather
- Plant trees, shrubs and vines
- Plant nectar flower plants for migrating butterflies
- Plant spring wildflower seeds
- Purchase spring bulbs, wait to plant (November)
- Replenish mulch in beds

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## Pecan Update

Pecan Weevil: Pecan weevil can still be an issue in areas that have drought hardened soils which can result in a drought delayed emergence.

Producers with adult emergence traps should monitor traps until the latest maturing cultivar has reached shuck split.





## Growing Strawberries in Texas

Crops that like hot temperatures do well in the Texas summer— such as cantaloupe, okra and peppers. But the heat makes it tough to produce some popular crops like large tomatoes and strawberries. Strawberry plants are usually planted in the spring, but research done in Lubbock shows that it gets too hot, too quickly for them to produce a good crop. Fall is the time to plant strawberries in Texas, and though it's hard to find plants available it's worth the effort if you love fresh, ripe strawberries.

Strawberry varieties can be grouped into either June-bearing types (produce fruit in short-day conditions and generally produce a larger harvest) or everbearing (produce fruit in long-day conditions, will make a fall crop if they survive the summer). Ask local nurseries if they can order strawberry plants for planting in late September through October, or try ordering online from seed companies like Burpee, Stark Bro's or Gurney's. Everbearing varieties are best used as an annual in Texas, since they are most productive their first year and the summer heat stresses them.

Strawberry plants are a bit picky and need just the right conditions to make a lot of fruit, but the plants (foliage) are cold hardy down to around 20 degrees. Have a plan ready to cover them up and protect if it's predicted to be colder than that through the winter. Once they start flowering and making fruit, they will need to be protected any time the temperature gets close to 32 degrees. A small hoop house or 'low tunnel' structure is a good choice; clear plastic can be secured snugly around the structure when needed to trap warmer air and protect from cold winds. Be sure to remove the covering promptly when temperatures warm up, otherwise it quickly gets too hot inside when the sun comes out.

Use compost to improve soil and create a rich growing environment, and plant in a spot protected from prevailing winds. Strawberries do best with steady, even fertilizer and irrigation. Black plastic mulch can be very useful for strawberry production, just use drip irrigation underneath and punch holes every 12 inches for plants. The black plastic helps increase the temperature during the winter, keeps weeds out and prevents water from evaporating.

Fall-planted strawberry plants can start producing as early as November or December, but peak production will be March through May the following spring. For a helpful guide on fall planted strawberries and instructions with photos for creating a low tunnel, visit <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> and click on "Home Strawberry Production."

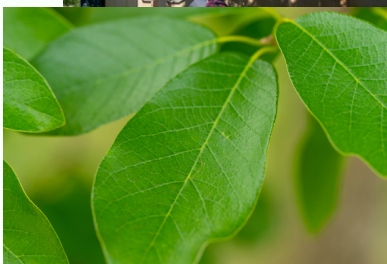
## Plant Spotlight

### Mexican white oak

*Quercus polymorpha*

Fall is the best time of year to plant trees in Texas, and this newly designated Texas Superstar plant is a good one to consider!

Typically reaching a height of 35-45 feet, this semi-evergreen tree provides a well-proportioned canopy to provide a perfect blend of shade and aesthetic appeal.



# Low Maintenance Design

Whether you're an enthusiastic gardener and love working on the landscape or not, a beautiful yard can be a huge benefit – it extends and increases living area, improves property value and curb appeal, and provides a lot of enjoyment. Horticulture can be tough in west Texas though! And even hobby gardeners like to keep maintenance and labor down to a minimum. Believe it or not, a beautiful yard is possible in the Concho Valley without excessive water and fertilizers and labor, but it requires some knowledge and lots of planning ahead.

Texas A&M University promotes Earth-Kind landscaping and gardening practices, which are pretty simple and easy to understand as general concepts but they need to be adapted to local geographic regions and applied to the local climate and growing conditions. Visit the website <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> for helpful publications on topics ranging from composting and soil improvement, to drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting, landscape design and more.

The first step to a low-maintenance landscape is soil improvement with compost; incorporating organic matter into the soil before planting can make a significant difference in the success of growing plants and will reduce the need for irrigation and fertilizer. Another critical step is good plant selection. It's not as simple as choosing something with the right zone number. The zones listed on plant labels are only an indication of cold hardiness – so yes it should match our zone (8a) but that is not the only factor to consider. The high pH of our soil limits selection and is the reason we can't grow blueberries and azaleas. Also, a plant may be within the cold hardiness zone, but not be able to handle the extreme heat of summer.

Drip irrigation should be used in all planting beds – it is more water efficient than sprinklers, is better for plant health, and makes watering the beds easier. Sprinklers spraying on shrubs, perennials and groundcovers can increase fungal disease and cause hard water buildup from minerals in the municipal or well water. Drip systems are also much easier to install and maintain than in-ground sprinkler systems, it just takes a bit of practice to get the hang of how to put them together. In most cases sprinklers are still better for turfgrass, but use water-efficient nozzles that don't allow as much evaporation.

Apply thick mulch to all garden and flower beds – wood mulch applied properly can be a superhero for your landscape - reducing weeds, conserving water, breaking down into organic matter to improve soil, etc. Apply over drip irrigation and keep replenished to a depth of three to four inches to get the best benefit.

# Divide Irises, etc.

The best time to work on digging and dividing plants in the fall is a few days after a good rainfall, when the ground is still soft but not muddy. Divide spring-blooming perennials such as irises, daylilies and crinums now to help keep them blooming and thriving where they are growing, and to be able to share with others. Plant division is best be done in the season opposite of blooming, so wait until spring to divide fall bloomers like oxblood lilies, mums and spider lilies. If circumstances require dividing in the blooming season, it is still worth doing but they will be set back and miss a year of blooming.

'Pass along plants' are a fun part of gardening and are a great way to get to know people in the neighborhood and share a love of plants. Also, division helps keep clumping perennials in better shape for good health and flowering; after several years many perennials become overgrown and crowded, and won't bloom as well. Division refreshes and allows them to flower more abundantly. Division is beneficial every few years for many perennials, but some can go longer – just divide when performance starts to decline.

To divide clumping perennials, use a shovel to dig them up and lift from the ground. Be sure to get stems and roots from healthy, vigorously growing parts of the plant. Some plants can be pulled apart by hand, for others just cut the roots into smaller sections with a sharp knife. If the stems and roots are woody and tough, use only the more tender shoots from the outer part of the clump for replanting. Discard the center of the clump if it looks weak and is woody. For irises, divide into individual rhizomes – retain at least a few inches of the rhizome and one fan of leaves; cut the fan about halfway down.

Have the new planting site ready to go if possible; mix compost into the soil ahead of time, plant immediately and apply mulch afterward. If the divided plants can't be put in their new permanent spot right away, they can be 'heeled in' which just means to temporarily plant in a holding bed or a container with potting mix until ready to go in the new location. The cool fall weather and softer ground after rainfall also makes it easier to work on all sorts of fall landscaping tasks. Now is a good time to finish cleaning up freeze-damage trees and shrubs, plant cool-season vegetables and flowers, and transplant any volunteer trees that need to be moved to a better location.



# Cool Season Herbs



Herbs are wonderful to have in the landscape because besides just looking nice for curb appeal they also can be used to make food more delicious. Herbs can help with goals for healthier eating, because they add flavor and can jazz up recipes without using as much fat and salt. And it's fun to make food with something you grew yourself!

Cool season herbs like cilantro and parsley are happiest when planted in the fall and grown through the cooler winter months; many people try to grow them in the spring and are disappointed when they fade and dwindle in the summer heat. Evergreen herbs like rosemary, sage, thyme, oregano stay going all year long and winter doesn't slow them down. Some herbs are only somewhat evergreen and will keep going unless there's a really hard freeze, such as mint, lavender and chives.

Many of the popular, commonly used herbs are easy to grow and well adapted to the local climate. Most of them 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, and can even be grown inside during the winter; basil is an indispensable culinary herb for many, but cannot live through the winter outside. To grow it inside, find a spot with the brightest light – about 6 hours of sun per day and plant in a container with a tray to catch excess water. But don't keep it on a windowsill when it's cold outside, it needs temperatures in the 70's and the air next to windows gets colder than the rest of the room.

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## Pecan Trees

October is Texas Pecan Month! Pecans are native to about 150 counties in Texas, and can grow and produce in all counties. Pecans are beautiful landscape trees that also provide a delicious, healthy crop. They are rich in vitamins, antioxidants and can help improve cholesterol levels. Compared to other nuts, pecans are among the lowest in carbs and highest in fiber. A handful of Texas pecans – about 19 halves – is a good source of fiber, thiamin, and zinc, and an excellent source of copper and manganese. San Angelo can be considered one large pecan orchard because there are so many planted in neighborhoods. Visit the website [americanpecan.com](http://americanpecan.com) for some great recipes and ideas for utilizing pecans!

November is a busy month for pecan crop production because it's harvest time. Other tasks for fall and winter pecan tree care include watering and pruning if needed. Adequate rainfall or irrigation is required right up until shuck split – dry spells late in the season can cause shucks to stay closed and interfere with harvest. As it cools down, pecan trees use less water than during the growing season, but they will still need a thorough rainfall or irrigation about once per month during dormancy. If it's a dry winter, trees may need a deep watering several times before spring rains come.

For those that would like to add a nice landscape shade tree to the yard, fall is a great time of year to plant trees; some of the recommended varieties include Pawnee, Hopi, Sioux and Wichita – these will do well in the Concho Valley. Pecans perform best in deep, well-drained soil that is weed-free around the tree. Remove all vegetation and apply mulch to help keep weeds out for newly planted trees to establish quickly. Pecan trees in the home landscape should be spaced far enough away from hardscapes such as patios, driveways and home foundations - at least 15 feet away.

We will be conducting the annual Concho Valley Pecan Show on Friday, December 1st at the Tom Green County Extension Office – the deadline to enter is Wednesday November 29th. The pecan show is a chance to have pecans judged for quality and compete with other entries for ribbons. Anyone who grows pecans is welcome to enter the show and there is no entry fee; for more details on how to enter please contact Allison at the Extension Office - 325-659-6522.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## October 2023

Friday, October 13, 12pm-1pm

### **Lunch N Learn Class - Winter Vegetable Gardening**

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

*Cost: \$5*

*Speaker: Allison Schwarz*

Hosted by the PPC; Join us for a discussion vegetables to plant now for cool season production, such as broccoli, lettuce and beets. To reserve a spot [Click Here](#) or call Susan Stanfield at 325-656-3104

Thursdays 6pm-8pm: Oct 26, Nov 2, Nov 9, Nov 16

### **Earth-Kind Landscape School Seminar Series**

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

*Cost: \$30*

*Speaker: Allison Schwarz*

Join us for a series of four seminars on a variety of landscaping topics such as lawn care, plant selection, tree pruning and soil improvement. [Click here to sign up.](#)

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



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