

## Diggin' In The Dirt: Dreaming of Spring

By Chip Bubl,  
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### Pruning workshop set for February 26th

The Columbia County Master Gardeners are putting on a pruning workshop on Saturday, February 26<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. at the Columbia County Fairgrounds. Topics will include pruning fruit trees, small fruits (grapes, blueberries, trailing berries, etc.), roses, and other woody plants. There will be a brief discussion of fruit tree diseases and insects. Also included is a demonstration of pruning tool sharpening and maintenance. The event is free and open to the public. Dress for the weather and bring pruning tools if so inclined.

### Oregonian Garden Columnist to speak in St. Helens

Vern Nelson has written the "Edible Landscaping" column for the Oregonian for going on twenty years. Vern is an expert in producing an immense variety of fruits and vegetables in an urban setting. He will speak at a meeting of the OSU Master Gardeners on Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 P.M. at the Extension office in St. Helens. His talks are always engaging and filled with new ideas for things to grow and ways of growing them. The general public is welcome.

### Columbia County Small Woodlands Association Tree Sale March 12<sup>th</sup>

The thirteenth annual tree sale sponsored by the Columbia County Small Woodlands Association will be held at the Lawrence Oil parking lot on Highway 30 on the north edge of St. Helens on Saturday, March 12<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. The group started out selling mainly trees for reforestation and native plantings including bundles of Douglas fir, Western Red Cedar, Oregon Ash and other native species. They still do that, but have branched out (pun intended) to include a number of ornamental varieties as well. This is a very popular sale. Get there early for the best selection. For more information, call (503) 556-8800 or (503) 556-2014.

### Rose Pruning

Roses, along with much of the rest of the woody landscape, need attention this month. The first cut on a rose is to remove dead wood. If a rose has been limping along for years, prune at the roots and plant something better. Rose rejuvenation usually involves tough love. A small cane cannot produce a bigger one. In most cases, it is wise to remove all canes smaller than your little finger. Generally, four well-spaced canes are left, but you may only have two that are suitable to build the rejuvenated rose on. Dip your pruning shears in a disinfectant solution between each rose.

Fertilize in the spring and control black spot to give the plant the leaves to build a new life.

### Soaked Soils

We average about 60-70-inches

of rain in the Vernonia area. Most of that comes from late October to mid-May. This year has been wet... very wet. Many of our clay-based soil types are quite wet. And there are still several months of rainy weather to come.

Soil scientists know that when soil pore spaces fill with water for extended periods of time, the air is driven out. Some plants are quite tolerant of prolonged flooding where others are very stressed.

It is not uncommon to see an increase in soil-borne diseases like *Phytophthora* root rot after a damp winter. In most cases, infected plants won't recover.

The best long-term solutions involve drainage improvements. It might be an extensive tile drain system installed when a new house is being constructed. In some cases, shallow ditches can be installed to divert water away from the planted landscape. Berms can be created and planted, which gets the bulk of plant root systems out of the surface water. Soils can be amended routinely with organic matter, which opens up drainage pores. Finally, and perhaps the best option, landscape plant species can be chosen that will stand moist conditions. For vegetable gardening, raised beds are the preferred solution on very wet sites.

### Mason Bees

If you somehow missed all the hubbub about mason bees the last couple of years, don't be left behind again. Get

an untreated 4x4 or 4x6 piece of wood and drill 5/16 inch holes (spaced about an inch apart) into the block. Drill as deep as you can, but don't go through the block. Place it in a protected place that gets some morning sun. Those clever mason bees will find it and pack the holes with brood, pollen, and mud. Then next year, you will have more mason bees that can't wait to pollinate your fruit trees, even if the weather is cloudy and cold. What a deal!!

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### Free Newsletter

The Oregon State University Extension office in Columbia County publishes a monthly newsletter on gardening and farming topics (called *County Living*) written/edited by yours truly. All you need to do is ask for it and it will be mailed to you. Call (503) 397-3462 to be put on the list. Alternatively, you can find it on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/> and click on newsletters.

### Contact information for the Extension office:

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## Geography Matters: Public Utilities and GIS - The Value of Details

By Sean Pickner

For the last couple of months, Vernonia GIS has been focused on modeling the city's public utility system. We are modeling the utilities in a GIS to help improve the general management and accessibility of information related to these utilities.

One major responsibility is to insure that all utilities are accounted for, so that our model is accurately depicting the system and how it functions. Producing the most accurate and complete records of the utilities is essential in assisting those who work on the utilities, because they need to be able to evaluate how things are connected, and identify barriers that could impact how the systems works.

The development of the public utility system was a four-step process. We initially began this process by using GPS units to take accurate locational measurements of all the utilities. We brought all the GPS points into a GIS, and evaluated the accuracy.

The next step was to compare all the GIS points to the city's historical engineering plans so we could evaluate what utilities were accounted for and what features were missing. From these points, we connected the networks of pipes and drainages that made up the utilities, which gave us a more detailed understanding of the utility system as a whole.

The next step involved evaluating the system for errors in representation, and improving the accuracy of our model. It is essential that every utility is accounted for, because we are aiming to improve the management of the utilities, and missing utilities skews results and disrupts tools used for analysis.

The final step is an ongoing process and it involves identifying details that describe these utilities. We want to be able to use these utilities for analysis purposes, and so, by recording information that describes these utilities, we can perform analysis on them.

There are many details involved in this process, but the basic idea is that we have tried to be very

thorough in our development so that any user of this information can benefit from the accuracy and completeness of these records.

It's surprising how complex the utility system in a town like Vernonia can be, and to make things more difficult, we are trying to model nearly every detail that makes up the utility system. If there are inaccuracies in its representation, all evaluation and analysis done on these data sets adopt those errors. It takes time and energy on the front end to make sure that these data sets are correct, but by doing this, it improves all projects that utilize this information afterwards.

The advantage of the GIS doesn't only come from the tools that help you evaluate the system, but it also comes from the management of the data. We are trying to replicate the actual utility system within the GIS, and so it is imperative that we account for everything that makes up the utility system.


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