

Diggin' In The Dirt: Seed Starting

By Chip Bubl
Oregon State University Extension
Service - Columbia County

Seeds are not difficult to start. If you can create an environment that provides plenty of high intensity light, you can grow excellent transplants and have them available at the time you need them. You also have access to a lot more varieties if you grow your own.

If you have a greenhouse or cold frame, you won't have to worry about added light. But if you are starting seeds inside, you will need a waterproof seed-starting table with fluorescent shop lights with reflectors that can be lowered and raised as the plants grow. You don't need expensive grow lights. The lights need to be set as close to the growing seedlings as possible. Two inches is not too close. This will create a strong, stocky plant.

I have successfully started tomatoes indoors in modest light and moved them outside in the trays under eaves that get good light and moved them back inside every evening. They warm back up when they don't need the light and seem to do ok outside during the day if temperatures exceed 50 degrees.

There are two common approaches to starting seeds. Some people grow them in flats with enough space between seeds to allow them to be directly transplanted out into the garden. More commonly, seeds are sown more thickly in starting flats and then transplanted into individual pots or "cell" trays. The seedlings are transplanted after they develop their first set of true leaves. This process takes

a little more time but will generally produce a stronger transplant.

Seeds are often sown too early. Then they are held in pots past the point that they should be. You can plan your seeding dates by counting backwards from when you want to put transplants out. For example, it takes about 2-3 weeks to grow seedlings of lettuce and greens for direct transplant or 3-4 weeks if you move the seedling first into individual pots or cells. For cabbage and broccoli, it is 4-5 weeks by the first method or 5-6 weeks by the second. Lettuce and the cabbage family can be transplanted from now on.

Tomatoes need 5-7 weeks by the first method or 6-8 weeks by the second. Peppers are slightly longer. Squash, pumpkins, cucumbers and melons should only be sown directly in individual pots and they need 10-21 days to transplanting.

Using that information, don't plan on planting your tomatoes outside until mid-May at the earliest. If you protect your tomatoes with either a mini-greenhouse structure or some other device like a "Wall of Water", you can move this up a couple of weeks. Peppers are very sensitive to cold soils so a late May to early June is usually better. Again, if you can protect them after setting them out, they will do better. Warming the soil by covering it with clear plastic for about five days before transplanting also helps quite a bit.

Seedlings need good air circulation and attention to watering – neither too much nor too little.

This is very important! Vegetable

transplants need to be hardened off by exposing them to outside temperatures, sun and wind gradually. Put them outdoors for short periods of time in indirect light and then for a few more days (for short periods) in more direct light.

When transplanting, continue to protect them from low or high temperature extremes. Bait for slugs and consider drenching the transplants with a good water-soluble fertilizer. Most of our transplants in April and May need additional heat. Floating row covers or plastic mini-greenhouses can help to keep the vegetables growing rapidly. If you are using plastic hoop structures, be sure to open them up in the morning to avoid excessive heat buildup. It is easy to cook your tender seedlings if you are not paying attention.

Despite all the rain, I am optimistic that we will have a good gardening year. Last year, the wet weather of May and June really had an impact on gardening, especially the warm season crops like squash, tomatoes and peppers.

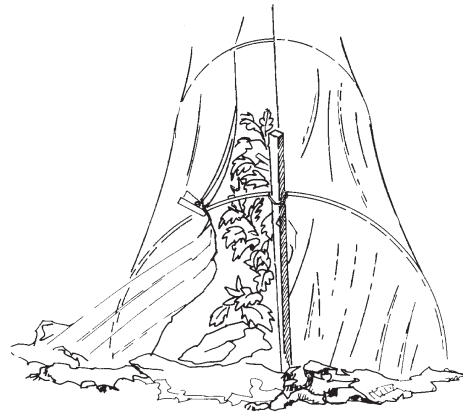


Figure 3
Tunnels Used In Trellised Crops

The odds are against a repeat.

Time to fertilize lawns and other plants

The intense rains have washed a lot of the nitrogen from our soils. It is time to add something back. Lawns benefit from a fertilizer with a mix of quick and slow release nitrogen. If you have moss you want to control, use fertilizer with a moss controlling compound. Shrubs, particularly evergreen ones, will benefit from fertilizer this month as well. So will all the berries.

The Extension Service offers its programs and materials equally to all people.

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

Oregon State University Extension Service – Columbia County
505 N. Columbia River Highway (across from the Legacy clinic)
St. Helens, OR 97051
503 397-3462
Email: chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu

Between The Lines: Funding Public Safety

By Randy Sanders

There is a disturbing and somewhat fashionable trend in conservative politics these days to strip out funding for important societal tools such as police protection and mental health. Fast-forward a few years from now and we will be having a sad and profound discussion on how America has destroyed public safety in its towns, cities and counties.

Recently, many towns in New Jersey have laid off large swaths of police officers. Not surprisingly, crime has risen substantially. For instance, Newark laid off 165 officers, Trenton, 111 and Atlantic City, 40. What happens when police have to patrol without proper backup? In January, Lakewood, New Jersey officer Christopher Matlosz was shot in the face on

a routine stop; here in Oregon, Rainier Chief Ralph Painter was killed responding to a call. Both of those officers should have had additional patrol visibly nearby. Is it a stretch to surmise that funding pressures killed those men?

Decent people-- in lawful and responsible communities-- should agree that law enforcement is one of our most important priorities. We screen and train for the very best; however, we are becoming more and more cavalier about the process of keeping them employed. We cannot expect police to patrol "on the cheap" without proper backup, any more than we can expect our Marines to go out and hunt down terrorists in the mountains of Afghanistan without proper backup. Why, even towns in the old west recognized the value of a sheriff for good law protection!

This country is going through some frightening and, frankly, sickening changes. Add on top of not funding public safety, not funding mental health. It is making us a recusant, lawless society, ripe with squalor. Recently, there were two police officers who were shot in Portland; one remains in serious condition. The first line of defense should have been a mental help line that kept that shooter on the phone as the Portland Police Bureau safely positioned themselves to apprehend him. But, alas, we've gutted mental health and our police

departments, while demanding that police officers absorb those mental health cuts as well as doing their public safety chores.

Consider the last three Oregon officers to have been shot: Steven Dodds, shot in January by suspect David Durham (who is still at large). Those interviewed who know Durham, attest to his recent unstable mental condition. Then there's our local hero, Rainier Chief Ralph Painter, who was shot and killed in January. Currently, his suspected assailant is undergoing a 30-day psychiatric evaluation. Portland suspect, Ralph Clyde-- who also apparently has mental issues-- was plotting to manufacture a "suicide by police" (I personally disagree, why would he not answer the door where the police could have seen him armed, requested that he then drop the weapon and shot him when he did not respond?)

Frankly, there is no excuse not to fund mental health and public safety, if we are serious in maintaining a decent and safe society. We have given passes to incredibly wealthy people (the Bush Tax Cuts) and corporate tax cuts to large oil companies, and now scramble to deal with those choices. However, police shouldn't get the short end of that deal. They still must be properly paid to enforce the law and not to practice psychiatric medicine.

I have all but given up hope for this country and this state to come to grips with these decisions, but still have hope that my home here in Columbia County will do the right thing. Will we insulate our community from this problem by stepping up to properly fund our local police and sheriff's department? Will we recognize that life in our neighborhood for our kids and our families is important? We have lost so much in America on so many levels, my hope is we won't lose it on our immediate home turf.

PIONEER BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

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Saturday, March 26th

10 AM - 2 PM at Vernonia Lake

- Prize for the biggest fish by length
- Prizes by drawing
- Refreshments

• Over 14 needs a license