

Diggin' In The Dirt: A Cool Spring

By Chip Bubl
Oregon State University Extension
Service-- Columbia County

16th Annual Spring Garden Fair Saturday, April 30th in St. Helens!

It's that time of year again. The OSU/Columbia County Master Gardeners™ are putting on their Spring Garden Fair Saturday, April 30th, from 9:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. at the St. Helens High School Commons. Highlighting the Fair are the tomato plants. Over 6,000 plants, consisting of over 40 varieties, both heirlooms and standards, will be sold for \$1.25 each. There will be many other vendors selling a variety of annual, herbaceous perennial and woody plants. Garden art, garden books and other garden accoutrements will also be available. Master Gardeners will be available to answer tomato and gardening questions. There will be displays and raffles. As always, admission to the fair is free. See you there!

Transplanting root-bound trees

This is the month when volumes of plants are moved from nurseries to yards. Most woody plants (trees and shrubs) are sold in containers. The plant you buy may have been in the pot anywhere from two to four years. It is not uncommon to find plants that are quite root-bound. Those plants have circling large roots or perhaps roots with big kinks.

Unfortunately, root-bound plants may take a long time to move

into the surrounding soil that they are supposed to live in. As their tops develop but the roots do not, they can be killed during periods of warm weather. A surprising number of trees that fail to thrive are found to have never grown into the soil at all.

Can you re-invigorate a root system before you plant the tree or shrub? You can, if you follow the advice from an Extension specialist from WSU. Ms. Chalker-Scott suggests taking the plant out of the container and then washing all the soil or planting media off the roots. This can be done in a wheelbarrow. Straighten as many roots as you can. Then take a look at all the roots. Look for roots that are circling or kinked and try to cut back to places where you can straighten the growth out. Keep the roots moist as you do this and try to be in the shade. She reports cutting as much as 70% of a root system and having the tree perform nicely.

Before you start the root pruning, dig a nice hole for the tree that is wide but not deep. Once the tree is ready to go in, create a mound in the center of the hole onto which you can place the plant and distribute the roots around the mound. Back-fill the hole with topsoil from the site. Firm the back-filled soil with your hands or by gentle watering to

remove air pockets. Mulch the tree with 4-6 inches of good compost and any of the potting mix you removed from the roots earlier.

You can add a little nitrogen to the surface. Remember to control any invading weeds and especially to keep the planting watered throughout the summer and into fall.

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Will we have fruit?

The cool weather may have an impact on fruit set. Two factors are in play. First, if at your locations, your trees may be slower to bloom. In general, delayed bloom tends to favor better pollination because the weather (less rain and cold) usually improves. That said, there is a forecast for some very cold weather that may hit around April 24th. Fully opened blossoms facing sub-freezing temperatures may be damaged. With apples, we can lose a lot of blooms and still have a crop if the late or early blooms set fruit. With cherries, we want

The only annual grass that competes well is annual bluegrass that grows in the winter and is going to seed now (if you aren't mowing it much).

The weedy grasses in most lawns are quack grass, velvet grass,



Elytrigia repens (quack grass)

bentgrass, and the above-mentioned annual bluegrass. There are some products that control bluegrass. These are applied in the fall/winter. Sadly, we have no options to control bentgrass, quack grass or velvet grass without damaging our desired turf varieties.

Many homeowners will treat the "bad" grass patches with Roundup™ and then overseed with lawn seed when the treated grasses die. Or fertilize them so they all get deeper green, and live with them for a number of years.

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

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Digitaria (crab grass)

all the fruit we can get, so each blossom lost is significant. The bees have been sluggish in the cold. Mason bees emerged late and honey bees are spotty. Now we need good pollination weather. Mild temperatures and only moderate amounts of rain would be perfect.

Crab grass isn't quack grass

We are often asked how to control crabgrass in lawns. The problem is that crabgrass is seldom found in our lawns. It is in the garden beds and along the roadside. In fact, it is fairly common wherever the ground is bare or disturbed in the spring. That is because crabgrass is an annual grass. It germinates in the spring and summer, sets seed and dies. It cannot compete with our turf grasses that grow all year long.

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