

Diggin' In The Dirt: Got Wormy Roots?

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Extension presence at Vernonia's First Friday event

For those of you who haven't been, the First Friday Art event (next one is August 5th from 5-8:00 pm) is a great place to be. Lots of talented people are there with interesting things to sell and many wonderful stories. The OSU/Columbia County Extension office has had table there for the past two years. We sell nothing but hopefully provide good information and conversation. Local Master Gardener volunteers are often there along with myself. If you have a plant question, weed sample, or anything else garden or farm related, stop by.

Harvesting potatoes

Early potatoes should be ready in the next couple of weeks. When the vines have died, the potatoes are ready for harvest. Dig carefully to avoid bruising or cutting the skins. Potatoes can be brushed off or washed to remove dirt. They should be dried completely before they are put into storage.

Potatoes should not be exposed to light. If they develop extensive "greening", they should be discarded. It is not the "green" itself, which is chlorophyll, but the alkaloid solanine, which accompanies the greened up cells.

It is difficult to store potatoes for an extended period of time. Our winter temperatures are not cold enough for good storage. I have seen people use small garbage cans with potatoes placed in layers and covered by sand or sawdust. Some store them in a box with a tight fitting lid. The most important advice is to eat the potatoes fairly quickly. They will sprout as the winter progresses. Sprouts from one potato encourage sprouts in neighboring spuds. Check the potatoes at regular intervals to remove sprouts and rotten tubers.

"Wormy" vegetable roots

Maggots bother carrots, parsnips and the cabbage family. Now maggots, of course, are the larval stage of flies. Each of the vegetable families has their own fly. For carrots and parsnips, it is the carrot rust fly. For the cabbage family, it is the cabbage root maggot.

The cabbage root maggot adult

lays its eggs at the base of a developing plant. The maggot hatches and dives into the soil where it starts feeding on roots. Young plants are the most affected and can be killed by extensive feeding.

Radishes and turnips are none too appealing with fat cabbage maggots in them. Cauliflower seems to be especially vulnerable to this pest. Nearly mature plants will suddenly wilt even though the garden has been well watered. When the roots are examined, there won't be much to see. Most fine feeder roots will be gone.

The carrot rust fly has a smaller maggot but the damage is significant. The maggot burrows into the carrot causing holes that often proceed to rot. The maggot also seems to stimulate the formation of "hairy" roots, again an unappetizing appearance on carrots or parsnips. The carrot rust fly seems to get worse the longer you leave the carrots in the garden.

The best control strategies are:

- Plant early (before the fly emerges) or plant late.
- Grow the plant well to outrun the maggots.
- Cover the developing plants with row covers to exclude the female fly.
- Harvest carrots quickly after they mature.
- Some gardeners have had luck putting a barrier of wood ashes around the base of a cabbage family transplant but this has not been consistently effective.
- Insecticides available to the home gardeners for carrot rust fly and cabbage root maggot are marginally effective

at best. New products that contain "spinosad" may be the best option. There are organic and conventional forms of this product derived from a fungal fermentation.

A caterpillar in your cabbage

The most common butterfly around the garden is the white winged species known as the imported cabbage worm. As the name implies, this insect is not native to North America but comes, as cabbage does, from Europe.

The butterfly winters over as a chrysalis and emerges as an adult in May. The females lay yellow eggs on the undersides of the leaves. A female can lay as many as 200 eggs on many cabbage family plants. The caterpillars hatch and start eating. Sometimes they are hard to see within a broccoli head before cooking but disgustingly obvious afterwards.

The best controls are floating row covers and the microbial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis*. Make sure you buy the form for caterpillar control. B.t. has virtually no mammalian toxicity and only kills larvae in the butterfly/moth family. B.t. does not migrate off target. It needs to be applied when the larvae are small to be most effective and should be reapplied periodically, especially after a rain or overhead irrigation.

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.

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