

# Diggin' In The Dirt: Voles and Moles

By Chip Bubl  
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## Moles and voles

Voles (also known as meadow mice) and moles often occupy the same habitat. In fact, mole runways give voles greater opportunity to move around the garden without being eaten. Most vegetation damage blamed on moles is actually caused by meadow mice.

Voles can do a lot of damage to woody plants. I have seen roses chewed



from the crowns down to the roots. The first winds knock the roses over since there is little left holding them in the ground. It is not uncommon to have fruit or landscape trees girdled at the soil line by voles. Much of this damage occurs during times when snow is on the ground for several days.

The best defense against voles is to trap moles, thus reducing the runways



the voles also use. If possible, collapse some of the runways with a spading fork or other tool.

Keep grass cut short around your trees. Voles hate to be exposed. Avoid the use of landscape fabric around trees and other woody plants as the voles like the cover it provides.

Voles can be easily trapped using regular mouse traps and peanut butter or apples slices for bait. There are very few poison baits available for homeowner use in garden areas. If you find one with that use on the label, take every precaution to make sure that cats or dogs cannot get to the baits directly. If they do, bait consumption can be fatal.

## Alternatives to the butterfly bush

Butterfly bushes (Buddleas of various species) have been planted in gardens for many years. Their lovely long flower spikes are known for attracting butterflies. Yet a glance along Highway 30 between the St. John's bridge and Yeon will give you perspective on the butterfly bush's dark side. This plant does too well here.

A butterfly bush reproduces easily from seed. There are locations in western Oregon where thickets of the plant have established. There is increasing concern that this plant could become a significant a problem.

Barbara Fick, an Extension agent in Benton County, suggests several alternatives to the Buddleas.

The first is a plant native to the west coast, though not to this area. It is *Ceanothus thrysiflorus*, also known as California lilac. It has early summer

blooming blue flowers and evergreen foliage. It will grow 10-12 feet tall and just as wide if left un-pruned.

Her second choice is *Vitex agnus-castus* or chastetree. The large shrub has long gray-green leaves and lilac to blue flowers from July through September.

The choice is yours, but I would think twice before planting a new Buddlea. If you have one you intend to keep, remove the blooms after they fade to eliminate seed production.

## Planning for new fruit trees

The best selection of new fruit trees and berry bushes is available in February. There are several things you can do to help ensure a successful start for them.

- Read catalogs to understand which varieties seem most suitable for our area.
- Get deer fencing up before you plant.
- Remove existing sod by digging it out, covering the area with a thick compost/cardboard mulch to suppress the grass, or spray it out with something like Roundup before you work the ground.
- Dig a hole 3-4 feet wide and about a foot and one-half deep for each new tree.

## Master Gardener™ class signups being taken

The OSU Extension office in Columbia County will be offering the Master Gardener™ training again this

spring. This year the class will be in St. Helens. The classes will be held on Mondays from 9 am – 4 pm for about 10 weeks starting January 9th, 2012. Cost of the program is \$75.00 which includes a large resource book. Master Gardeners are responsible for providing volunteer gardening education to the community as partial payback for the training. If interested in the program, call the Extension office at 503 397-3462 for an information packet.

*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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# Vernonia Cares Food Bank Receives Donations



Left: VRFPD volunteers, Lt. Jesse Harbour and Amy Smith, present Vernonia Cares Director Sandy Welch with a check for \$1000.

Right: Vernonia Lions Club members George Tice, Ken Pitts and President Grant Williams present Welch with a check for \$2000.



On November 17 Sandy Welch, director of the Vernonia Cares Food Bank, was presented with a check for \$1,000 donated by the Vernonia Volunteer Fire Association. Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District volunteers Amy Smith and Lt. Jesse Harbour delivered the check with the request that the money be designated

Vernonia Cares can provide boxes to at least 200 families in need this year. This check will be a big help in assisting them to meet their goal.

On November 7 Welch received a check for \$2,000 from the Vernonia Lions Club, to be used to purchase turkeys for the Holiday Food Boxes.

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