

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Parsnips Can Surprise You

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## Grafting Workshop

We will have our annual grafting workshop Saturday, February 11th from 9 am – 12 at the Extension office in St. Helens. Space is limited. Call for reservations (503 397-3462). Cost will be \$15 and will include five dwarf apple rootstocks. If you have a favorite apple tree that you want copies of, take some 12" cuttings from last season's growth (about pencil thickness), using the middle third of the shoots. Bundle and label the cuttings and place them in plastic bag and store them in the refrigerator until the workshop. Free cuttings will be available of a number of other good apple varieties.

## Row covers will be available again

The interest in row covers continues to increase. For those of you that missed the buzz, row covers are made from a gauzy fabric. They come in twelve-foot widths and, when we cut the roll, in lengths of 50 or 100 feet. Row covers are used in vegetable production on farms and home gardens.

They serve several purposes:

- Covers increase temperatures around transplants and growing plants by 4-6 degrees during the day and 3-4 degrees at night. This is valuable heat in the spring and fall.
- Seeds planted under row covers aren't seen by crows.
- Soils warm with the covers but don't crust, so seed emergence is faster and more even.

- Covers can be left with enough slack so that broccoli-sized plants can grow tall underneath them.

- Covers can keep insects out like carrot rust flies and cabbage root maggots. However, slugs prosper under covers so slug controls are needed. Weeds also like it under cover, so persistent weeding pays.

Last year we sold, in 50 or 100 foot pieces, about a mile (!) of cover. This year we are selling one ounce covers versus the half ounce ones of last year. This will raise the cost to \$35 for a 12 x 100' piece or \$18 for a 50' one. The benefit of the heavier piece is that there is a little better heat retention and the fabric is stronger and less likely to rip. You cut them down further to fit your gardening needs. Call our office (503 397-3462) if you want some. It went fast last year.

## Chilling requirement satisfied, some buds are swelling

You have probably noticed how many woody plants show signs of active bud swelling. We have had enough cold weather to satisfy their chilling requirement (an amount of time exposed to temperatures below 42°). Given a little bit of warmer weather and they could get really enthused about growing. Then if we get a serious cold snap (15° or less) there could be a lot of plants in trouble.

Parsnips can surprise you. As you know, parsnips have a reputation for being something of a challenge to grow. They are slow to germinate, need well-dug soil to produce nice roots, and usually need to be harvested before the carrot rust fly larva or field mice finish them. Yet early harvest doesn't allow them the cold exposure that can greatly enhance the flavor and sweetness of parsnips.

But recently, I just got an email from a local gardener who had started some parsnips in 4-inch pots. Then he sort of forgot about them though he watered enough that they were still alive but horribly root bound. He finally

couple plants and found exceptionally nice roots. When cooked, he described the resulting dinner dish as "absolutely melt-in-your-mouth delicious and creamy". That parsnip flavor improved after cold exposure wasn't a surprise. What is a surprise to both of us is the amount of growing they did in November and December. But this is why we garden.

*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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planted them in mid August and then pulled a couple several months later and found they were small and twisted. He mentally filed them in the mistake category. But we have had an interesting fall. Our parsnip gardener noticed the plants had continued to grow. He dug a

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