

Diggin in the Dirt: Don't Feed the Animals

By Chip Bubl
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Service – Columbia County

2012 Summer Food Preservation Classes

Back by popular demand are our OSU Extension summer food preservation classes taught by Jenny Rudolph. This series of classes is great for both the beginner and the experienced canner. Classes will be held in St. Helens at the First Lutheran Church on 360 Wyeth Street (the corner of North 4th and Wyeth). Class size is limited to allow for hands-on involvement in the kitchen: There are still two classes available: August 8th, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. - Pressure Canning Vegetables and Meats; and August 22nd, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. - Canning Pickles, Tomatoes and Salsas.

Cost to attend is \$20 per class. A small number of scholarships are available. Payment must be made in advance to hold your spot. Contact the OSU Extension Service – Columbia County office at 503-397-3462 to register.

Harvesting garlic

July is garlic month. Generally, garlic is ready to harvest in the second week of July. But the cool weather in April/May seems to have pushed the garlic back a little bit. Garlic doesn't have to be brown before harvest. Often, the garlic will have green tops at the best "skin" stage for harvest. That is not a problem.

How can you tell if the garlic is ripe? Look at a well-formed bulb

and pull it apart. Count the number of "skins" to the outermost set of cloves. If there are three or less skins, harvest right away. The skins help to keep the garlic dormant during winter storage and also make the bulb look more attractive. Be sure to eat the garlic you have examined (of course!).

If you continue to water garlic or we get a lot of rain, you can quickly lose all the skins. You can also increase storage disease. So harvest in advance of any significant rain at this stage.

When you harvest the bulbs, tie the tops into bundles and hang the bulbs from rafters in your garage or barn or place them on a screen so that they have good air circulation while they are curing. They shouldn't be exposed to the direct sun.

You can eat the garlic at any time and it is ready for winter storage after thirty days.

Blossom end rot of tomatoes

It is finally warm enough to push tomatoes (even in Vernonia), so it is time for the annual review of blossom end rot. This is a poorly named problem in one respect – it is not a disease but rather a nutritional disorder. The symptoms are dark, leathery sunken spots on the bottom of your rapidly ripening tomatoes or peppers or zucchini. What misery!

Blossom end rot results from a shortage of calcium in growing fruits. Practically speaking, however, the cause is usually inadequate irrigation. Soil moisture is essential for roots to absorb and move calcium through the plant.

To avoid blossom end rot:

- Keep your tomato bed well limed to keep the soil calcium level up.
- Keep plants evenly watered so calcium will be available.
- Use an organic mulch to help keep soil evenly moist. Great fluctuations in soil moisture seem to aggravate the problem.
- Avoid heavy nitrogen fertilization.
- Trap moles, whose tunnels may make even watering impossible.

Pinch out some of the excess shoots, since shoots and fruit compete for calcium within the plant. The shoots capture much of the calcium, leaving the fruits short leading to that brown patch on the bottom (calcium poor cells that break open). Avoid pinching during very hot weather since you can expose fruits to more sunlight that can lead to sunburned fruits.

Don't feed raccoons or other wild animals

Feeding raccoons or other wild animals can lead to lots of problems. Feeding can be intentional, accomplished by leaving dog or cat food free-choice outside, or having poor garbage can, compost bin, or bird feeder management. All are big mistakes. I have known a number of individuals who let their animal compassion get in the way of good sense with awful results. Here are some reasons why close proximity can be a problem:

- The animals (raccoons, rats, squirrels, opossums, et al) may decide your house is a good place to live in. Cat and doggie doors are soooo fun!!
- Many species can carry serious

diseases harmful to your pets or you.

- Some animals are very aggressive, especially when the food doesn't show up on schedule. Children specially need to be warned about possible danger.
- Rats, mice and squirrels like to chew through electric wiring. They don't belong inside houses.

Take your extra fruit and vegetables to the Food Bank. What you can offer is really important.

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
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Flamingos Flock Back to Vernonia
Boy Scout Troop 201 announces the annual return of the flamingo Flocks to Vernonia. The flocks have started their rounds and will conclude their visits in the later part of August 2012. The flocks will be delivered at night and the senders anonymity protected. This is a fundraiser for Boy Scout Camp and donations are welcome. For questions or to order a flock to be sent to a person or family of your choice please contact Tera Roberts at 503-429-6006.

Vernonia Ridgeriders Schedule of Events

AUG 4th SATURDAY Jamboree Parade Staging at Anderson Park Arena 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM	SEPT 15th SATURDAY Vernonia Ridgerider Playday 10:00 AM-3:00 PM Signup at 10:00 AM Events start at 11:00AM
AUG 5th SUNDAY Vernonia Ridgeriders Jamboree Playday 9:00 AM-4:00 PM Signup at 9:00 AM Gaming starts at 11:00 AM	For more information contact Deloris Bellingham @ 503-895-0553 or go to the vernoniaridgeriders.com website

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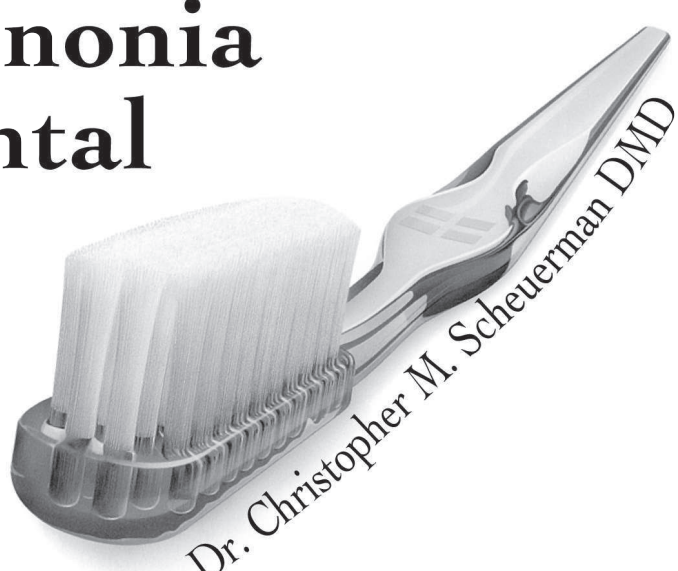
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