

Diggin in the Dirt: Fall Pests Arrive

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Columbia County

The OSU Food Preservation Hotline will be available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9am until 4pm at 1-800- 354-7319 until October 12, 2012. In addition, you can call our local OSU Extension office at 503 397-3462 with food preservation questions and to get your pressure canner tested.

Vegetable topics

This has been great corn weather. Many gardens have corn in full tassel. All you need to do now is keep the water going, fertilize with something like urea or blood meal along the corn row if the leaf color is too yellow-green and wait for harvest. That waiting isn't easy.

I have had several calls about blossom end rot on tomatoes. This isn't surprising given the heat recently. There is a rumor going around that tomatoes need to be under-watered to produce the best (or earliest) crops. This isn't true!! All you will do is increase the blossom end rot. If the soil is short of moisture, especially in a high temperature stress situation, the plant can't move enough calcium to support both the leaves and developing fruit. The lack of adequate calcium causes the end rot. The biggest fruits are often the most affected. Liming isn't enough. The plant roots need enough water to move it around.

It is easy to have too many zucchinis, cucumbers or green beans. However, it is important to continue to remove the fruit from the plants. Otherwise, new flower and thus fruit production is slowed. Keep the plant

picked and your plants will produce longer.

The fall webworm arrives, as does the alder flea beetle

I'm sure you have noticed the brown webbing in many trees recently. This is the work of the fall webworm. The adult is a moth that is active from late June through July laying eggs in all manner of trees. The eggs are laid on the underside of leaves. Alders, apples, cherries and willows are commonly affected but the potential host range is very large.



Alder leaf beetle larva and damage.

The eggs hatch about ten days after being laid and the larvae spin webs around the foliage. These webs protect the caterpillars from predators. As the caterpillars grow, they can consume a lot of leaves. But does this hurt the trees? I have seen severe infestation of a cousin to the fall webworm (the western tent caterpillar) totally defoliate alder trees in the Alston/Delena area only to have the trees recover completely a month later after the caterpillars stopped munching and pupated. The same thing is true of the fall webworm. The pupae stop eating in mid September and stay of sight until the adult moths emerge next June. The tree damage is cosmetic and short-lived.

No spraying is required.

As many natural populations go, there is an ebb and flow to the fall webworm. Diseases, birds and insect parasites take their toll on the webworm populations. As the webworm outbreaks get bigger over a few years, the parasite populations follow slightly behind. Then the webworm cycle crashes and so does the predator base, starting the boom and bust cycle all over again.

The alder flea beetle was widespread in a lot of Columbia County this year. Alders had a lot of leaves skeletonized by both the larva and adult of this insect. The small, black, worm-like larva rained down on homes, gardens, and landscapes. The hot weather of several weeks ago seemed to knock a lot of the larva off the tree. Since they don't eat much but alders, they seemed a bit disorientated to be on the ground. But perhaps they were just getting ready to pupate in the soil beneath the leaf litter. There they stay until they emerge as small, metallic black with blue tinges adult beetles about 10 days later. The adults then fly back up into the alders and eat some more. Then they over winter and next spring emerge to eat, mate, and lay eggs on the leaf undersides to restart the cycle. As with the tent caterpillar, no control is needed. Alders will recover. Numbers of alder flea beetles are higher this year than they have been for many years. That won't last, either. Flea beetle larva photo courtesy of Robin Rosetta, OSU Extension entomologist.

Share your extra fruit and vegetables with 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

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VHS Cheerleaders will be hosting a cleanup day to get ready for the 2012 Football Season. A grant from True Value Hardware has enabled us to get paint and supplies.

The cheerleaders have already cleaned up and prepped the field and stadium. VHS is looking for community help in finishing up the project.

Please gather in the stands at 6pm if you are able to help.

For more info: Cheer Coach Denise Way cheercoachdee@gmail.com
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