

Diggin in the Dirt: Vegetable Topics

By Chip Bubl
Oregon State University
Extension Service

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.

Outstanding garden weather has continued since my last column. Even Vernonia is having a bumper crop of corn, winter squash, and tomatoes. Apple quality is generally excellent. Grapes are maturing nicely. Most of the calls I have gotten concern trees and shrubs that are either dead or looking very weak. At this point, there is almost no moisture in the soil profile. Deep-rooted trees can still grab some. But more recently planted trees and shrubs will struggle with their smaller root systems. It makes sense to give some of your newer woody plants a good soaking once a week until normal fall weather returns. There are several disorders of apples that are due, in part, to water-short conditions. These include water-core (that glassy and very sweet center we get in some apples) and bitter pit (which despite its name creates brown dimples just under the skin and a little into the flesh). Apples with either of these disorders will not store well, so eat them first.

Good potato crops raise the question as to how best to store them for later use. The first rule is that they should be kept totally dark. Light stimulates

greening and sprouting, both of which are concerns. The biggest challenge is to get the right balance of moisture (to keep them from shriveling) and cold. Many gardeners store them in slightly moist sawdust in a solid color bin to keep them dark. The bin should have holes drilled to allow air exchange. Others put them into bins without the sawdust. There are variations on all of these themes. But when I talk to gardeners, most say that their spuds generally don't keep past December in really good condition. My advice is to eat a lot of potatoes in the fall and focus on other starches as the winter progresses. It is worth noting that commercial (non-organic) potatoes are treated with a sprout inhibitor prior to storage. It is also worth noting that some potatoes (some of the fingerling types and others) have better storage qualities.

If you like garlic, get out there and plant some late this month or in October. Find a sunny, well-drained space, lime it with about 10#s per 100 square feet, add some compost and/or fertilizer and you are ready to plant. Go to a Farmer's Market soon (they are about to end) and buy several varieties of garlic. Get the names and label them in bags. Separate out the cloves from the bulbs and plant the biggest cloves from each variety. Mark your rows so you know what did well. Eat the cloves you didn't plant. Space the rows about 12" apart and the garlic about 3" apart within the row and the cloves about 2" below the soil surface.



Cover with one inch or so of compost or some other organic matter to keep rain from crusting the soil. Sit back and wait. You may not see tops until January but rest assured that the plants are doing just fine. Weed often. Harvest in July. That's it.

Winter gardens should be covered, either with mulch or a cover crop. Both add organic matter and improve soil tilth. Cover crop roots can break up soil "plow pans". The roots and leaves trap and hold nutrients and legumes in the mix fix nitrogen. Cover crops can grow very lush over the winter and often are 3-4' tall by the mid-spring. You may have to wait for a dry spell before you can till the cover in and start gardening.

Mulches can also add organic matter, though they can't trap nutrients and fix nitrogen. Worms are stimulated by a mulch blanket and do great work in aerating the soil profile under the mulch.

The biggest advantage to mulches is that they can be pulled back in the spring and transplants put in with a minimum of fuss. The disadvantage is that you don't get the nutrient release with working a legume cover crop and mulches may stimulate more moles and voles.

If you work your garden area at all in the fall, add some lime. A good application rate is 100-150#s per 1000 square feet of vegetable garden. Lime takes about six months to fully react with the soil so the benefits will be ready when you start spring gardening. Gardens only need to be limed once every

three years.

It is not too late to plant a lawn, but get right on it. Most grass seed mixtures are sown at the rate of 5#s per 1000 square feet. Add one pound of seed for each week past September 15th to ensure a solid stand. Don't plant after October 15th. This would also be an excellent time to fertilize your lawn. Use lawn products with a mix of slow and quick release nitrogen.

Share 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.

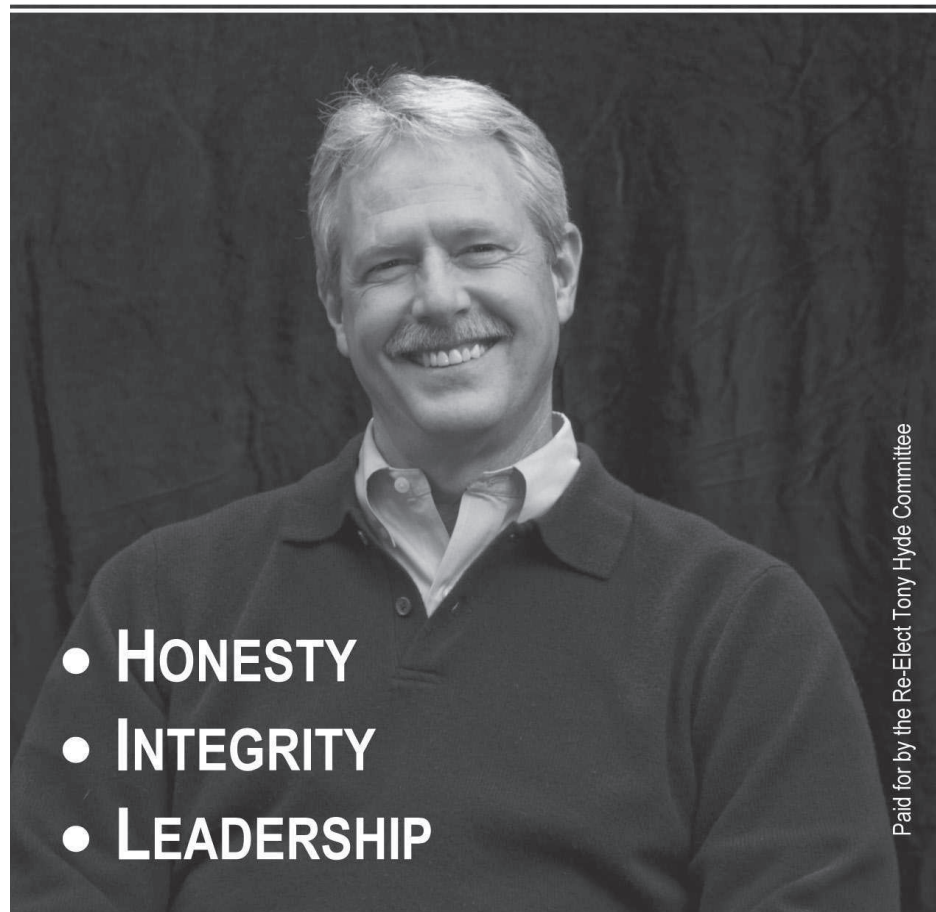
Free newsletter

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
Email: chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu

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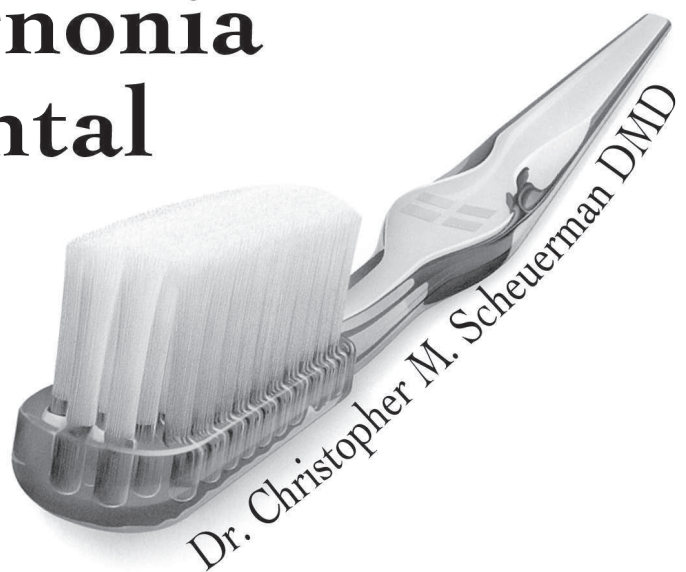


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