

Diggin' in the Dirt: Sweet Corn in Vernonia

By Chip Bubl
Oregon State University
Extension Service-Columbia County

Sweet corn for Vernonia

Here are some ideas that may speed the growth and yield of sweet corn in Vernonia's somewhat trying conditions:

- First, it looks like a good year for sweet corn with early soil warming and the ability to till sooner than the last several years. Make sure you add adequate fertilizer before you plant.
- For a small plot, cover the corn planting area with clear plastic for a week or so. This will warm the soil fast. Corn loves warm soil. Watch the weather forecasts for a projected warming trend and remove the clear plastic and plant your corn. Plant enough corn (every 2 inches in the row) to allow for some seeds not germinating. Spacing between rows should be about 30-36 inches.
- Put down the soaker hose and water. Then put the clear plastic back on until the tips of the corn are just showing. Then remove the plastic completely. If you use row covers, put them on after you remove the plastic until the corn is 3-4 inches tall. This will befuddle the crows and speed the growth of the corn.
- Use shorter season corn. A variety like "Sugar Buns" should do well most

years. A later maturing variety that is well-liked is "Bodacious".

- Thin once the corn has grown to 3-4 inches to one plant very 9-12 inches within the row.

- Water as needed. Fertilize again when the corn is knee-high.

This same technique works for green beans, cucumbers, and squash as well.

Start monitoring the water needs of your tress and shrubs

It has been very dry. I anticipate that gardeners will need to start watering much earlier than last year. In this first full week in May, I have already watered blueberry plantings and will move to raspberries soon. Deep watering for newly planted trees and shrubs will be critical to their survival as the soil profile continues to dry out. Remove moisture grabbing vegetation, especially grass, around new plantings. I am concerned about the fire potential this summer. Stay tuned.

Thin apples for better fruit

With our nice, dry spring, we should end up with more apples than the tree can carry. The "June drop" that is common here usually won't remove enough (and with better pollination, there will be less of it).

You should leave only the largest undamaged fruit in each cluster. The objective is to get each fruit spaced about one hand width apart.

Besides improving fruit quality, thinning will reduce limb breakage from too heavy a load.

While you are thinking about apples, May is the month when most of the apples scab infections get started. If it stays dry, scab will not be much of a problem (for the first time in four years!). But on the unlikely chance that rains starts in earnest again, spray with a dilute mixture of lime-sulfur (one trade name is "Poly-Sul") according to label instructions once bloom is done. The codling moth will emerge toward the middle of May so you need to think about how you might manage those rascals to avoid the worm in the apple. Products with spinosad seem to be the best choice for the home gardener. The apple maggot will be emerging in late June.

Spring foliage disease

The dry weather has helped with plant diseases. After four successive wet springs, our trees should look a lot better this year. As plants leaf out, the fungi and bacteria that attack them can't multiply. Black spot on roses will be less of an epidemic unless the weather

turns. Same story goes for apple scab, dogwood anthracnose, and numerous other problems.

Plant a few extra rows of vegetables for your non-gardening friends and neighbors and for the food bank.

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

Tualatin Valley Scenic Bikeway Approved

At a meeting on May 8, 2013, in Baker City, OR, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department officially approved the Tualatin Valley Scenic Bikeway. The new bikeway, with trailheads in Vernonia and Hillsboro, is now Oregon's 10th designated scenic bikeway.

The Tualatin Valley Scenic Bikeway captures the best of the northern Willamette Valley, from friendly

downtowns to fertile farmlands and lush natural areas. Set in the heart of Washington County, the Bikeway runs point-to-point over 50 miles and includes the Banks-Vernonia State Linear Trail.

Mostly rural roads comprise 30 miles of the route, while the woodsy, off-road Banks-Vernonia State Trail accounts for 20 miles. Bikeway terrain ranges from plains to rolling hills, with the middle portion of the state trail featuring a climb of about 600 feet. The Scenic Bikeway is rated as a moderately challenging ride and can be enjoyed by a wide range of cyclists.

Pleasing views of the Coast Range, farms, vineyards, natural areas near quaint downtowns are afforded riders, while the smell of fresh-cut hay or flutter of waterfowl engages other senses. The primary natural feature is the Tualatin River and the surrounding river basin, which is dotted with wetlands and forest stands. Farm produce



stands, farmers' markets and a winery along the route offer a wonderful seasonal mix of activities, enabling riders to easily partake in the area's agricultural bounty. The valley's mild weather makes the Bikeway a draw through most of the year; however, rain gear may be useful in winter.

With the route's layout, cyclists have many overnight options for multi-day rides, while day trips covering sub-sections of the route are easy, too. L.L. Stub Stewart State Park is adjacent to the State Trail and offers camping, while Hillsboro, Forest Grove, Banks and Vernonia offer lodging, dining and other services. The route's northern and southern hubs are public parks, each with parking, restrooms and drinking water. Several other parks on the route offer picnic shelters and restrooms. Transit connections are available in Hillsboro, Forest Grove and Banks.

Columbia Humane Society Featured Pet

"Pearl"



Meet Pearl. she is a two year old little girl that weighs right around 10 lbs. She is ready and willing to go to her new forever home any day now. She gets along well with other dogs and everyone that she meets. She has a ton of love that she is willing to give. Don't forget - for the month of May - her adoption fee is only \$50. Her adoption fee includes: all vaccines, spay, identification microchip, adoption packet and a leash and collar.

Phone: 503-397-4353
2084 Oregon Street, St. Helens, OR 97051
E-mail: info@columbiahumane.org
Web: www.columbiahumane.org

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