

Diggin' in the Dirt: Those Pesky Box Elder Bugs

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2014 OSU/Columbia Master Gardener™ Class Will Be Held in Vernonia (again)

After twenty-one years of having the Master Gardener classes in St. Helens, Vernonia hosted the class in 2010. It was a wonderful class. After discussion with a number of people, we have decided to come back to Vernonia for the 2014 class. The classes will be held at the Vernonia Learning Center each Thursday from about 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM starting March 6th. 2014; there will be about 10 class days on successive weeks. Classes will start in March to avoid the worst weather and will go through early May. Cost of the class series will still be \$75. Gardeners from all parts of the county are welcome. The classes will cover vegetable and fruit gardening, soils and fertilizers, insect and disease identification and management, weed identification and management, and lots of other topics of interest to gardeners.

Payback projects (an obligation for all Master Gardeners™) will be focused in the Vernonia area and nearby communities. If you are interested in the Vernonia OSU Master Gardener program, please call Chip Bubl at the OSU Extension office 503 397-3462 to get more information and to get on the mailing/email list.

Food preservation and food safety

Want to learn how to safely preserve produce from your garden this summer? The OSU Extension Service in Columbia County offers food preservation information and resources. Here is a list of services that we provide:

- Free Printed Publications and Safe Canning Recipes
 - Online Publications and Recipes: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>
 - Free Pressure Canner Gauge Testing (call ahead before bringing in your gauge)
- In addition, you can call our local OSU Extension office in St. Helens at 503 397-3462 with food preservation questions

Jenny Rudolph, MPA
OSU/Columbia County Extension
Educator

Regional events of note

AllAboutFruitShow.Clackamas
County Fairgrounds, Canby 10/19-20
<http://www.homeorchardsociety.org/aafs/>

Fall Mushroom Show.
Western Forestry Center, Portland
10/20 12:00 -5:00 PM <https://wildmushrooms.org/sites/default/files/articles/2013FallShowBW.jpg>

Oh, those pesky box elder bugs

Our houses are very inviting for a number of insects. They seek shelter from the winter cold and what better place to look than our homes. The number one irritation on sunny fall days is the box elder bug. This insect is basically black and oval and about one-half inch long. There are fine red lines criss-crossing its back and a red color on the underside that is revealed when it flies. Box elder bugs congregate in huge numbers on the side of your house and do a little sunbathing. Then they wiggle their way through minute gaps around window frames, door moldings and anywhere else they can sense warmth and shelter. Here is the good news: they don't do any structural damage to your house. They don't eat anything, they don't breed inside, they just try to stay warm. However, they do



seem to sleep walk as the temperatures warm up sporadically in the winter and then they land on your head in bed or in your cereal bowl at breakfast. This can be vexing.

The best defense is to exclude them. That means caulk and lots of it around the doors and windows. With higher energy prices in store, that isn't a bad idea anyway. Pest control operators will sometimes use a persistent exterior insecticide to manage the migration. Once the box elder bugs get inside, there is little you can do.

You might ask, what did they do before we built houses for them? Well, they spend their summers in big-leaf maple trees using their piercing, sucking mouthparts to extract nature's goodness from the leaves, flowers and fruits (maples and box elder trees are the same genus and we don't have box elders on this side of the Cascades). In falls past, the box elders bugs could be found in the thick furrows of old-growth Douglas fir bark, hunkered down for the winter.

Bill Holm wrote the following poem (and in fact, an entire book of poetry dedicated to the box elder bug) which you might enjoy:

The Box Elder Bug Prays

I want so little
for so little time,
A south window,
A wall to climb.
The smell of coffee,
A radio knob,
Nothing to eat,
Nothing to rob,
Not love, not power,
Not even a penny.
Forgive me for only
being so many.

Winterizing the garden

- Cover rose bushes with a sawdust mulch above the graft union and up several inches to protect the plant in the event of very cold weather.
- Dig your dahlias if you still can and put them in the coolest space you have that will stay above freezing. Dust the cut stems with sulfur and put in sawdust or peat moss. Alternatively, mulch them well and count on another mild winter.

- Figure out how to protect your container plants when the weather turns cold. Roots are not as hardy as tops. Plants that are hardy to 0° F in the ground can die at 15-20°F in containers. Best strategy is to put them out of the direct wind and when the weather turns really frigid, wrap some insulation around the pot, keep the soil moist, and consider throwing a tarp or blanket over the top.

• It is not too late to plant bulbs! Our mild winters allow bulbs to push out roots and establish themselves far later than other parts of the country. If you find that you haven't planted garlic, tulips, daffodils, or snowdrops, don't despair. Get to it. You might even find some bulbs at

discount.

Voles are a winter problem

Meadow mice, more properly known as voles, cause a lot of damage in the winter. As food gets scarce and especially when there is snow on the ground, they will turn to young trees and shrubs for dinner. Their nibbling can girdle your trees at the soil line or remove the roots below ground. Next spring, the trees leaf out but can't move water and they die.

Reducing damage starts with making the voles uncomfortable. Cut the grass around trees very short so that they fear owls, cats, and hawks as they go in search of food. Collapse mole tunnels for they provide access. Finally, be careful in the use of fabric and black plastic mulches- they provide cover.

Take extra produce you might have to the food bank, senior centers, or community meals programs. It is greatly appreciated.

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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