

Diggin' in the Dirt: How They Survive Winter

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Columbia County

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 p.m. 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.

The November/December cold snaps and other weather topics

As this is being written, night temperatures have been dropping into the low teens with daytime highs reaching the upper 20s. This has been the most persistent cold weather that I can remember since 1989. I then spent months answering question about trees, shrubs, and herbaceous perennials that were damaged or killed. I remember that daphnes were particularly hard hit. Some trees struggled along for several years before dying.

Trees and shrubs progress at a leisurely pace into deep dormancy. That process is physiologically complex and is almost impossible to measure in a given plant. If a tree is not fully hardened off, these low temperatures can do damage. The effect won't show up until next year as plants start to grow again (or not, in some cases). If it stays dry, it wouldn't hurt to whitewash trunks of young trees with exterior white latex paint. That can reduce cold injury in the winter and sunburn in the summer. Where there is snow cover above the graft union, rose bushes may be insulated from the very cold weather. Snow also protects dahlias and other semi-hardy herbaceous plants. Those areas with little snow cover and equally cold temperatures will see a lot more damage on these species.

Trees can actually be damaged by the combination of snow and bitterly cold, clear days. The sun reflects off the snow, warms the tree trunk on the southwest side, and wakes it up a bit. The darkness comes, the temperature plummets quickly, and those warmed cells rupture. Often there will be a sunken area that shows up next spring. This freeze injury can be a point of fungal infection. Whitewash with exterior

white latex paint can reduce this problem by reflecting the sun and keeping the stem cooler.

It's probably too late to figure out how to protect your container plants when the temperatures drop. 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.

How they survive winter

- **Hummingbirds:** The rufous hummingbird is a long-distance traveler that survives the winter quite nicely in S. California, Mexico and Central America. It returns to Oregon in mid to late March and may travel on up into Canada. The Anna's hummingbird is an interesting story. It was not seen in Oregon until 1944 but has expanded its range northwards since then. It is now a year round resident, especially around cities. There are conflicting theories for this change in their range. One theory says that it is a long-term impact of climate change. Another says that it may be due to human activity including cultivating more exotic landscape plants that provide nectar at key times and the fact that many homes put out nectar feeders throughout the winter. They are a constant presence at our house and we bring the feeders indoors on cold nights and put them back out early next morning. It is known the Anna's will eat spiders (which can be found in fair abundance in our trees, even in the winter) and tree sap.
- **Garter snakes:** We have several species of garter snakes in Columbia County. They all take a break for winter, crowding together in communal dens that can contain a tremendous number of snakes. Often they are in mole tunnels or hollowed out sections under rocks or compost bins. They actually don't hibernate (i.e. burn calories to keep up a certain temperature like bears do). Being cold-blooded, they just slow way down, never

completely sleeping. This is called brumation. They have to hang out lower than the frost line (otherwise they can freeze to death) but in western Oregon, that isn't much of a problem. If it gets really cold, they can move lower if there is a lower to go in their tunnel system. In early springs, like last year, you will see some moving about weeks before the group is fully active. To support snakes in your garden, build rock piles or log structures to give them cover, mow carefully when they are about, and try to keep the cats at bay.

Take extra produce you might have to the food bank, senior centers, or community meals programs. Cash donations to buy food are also 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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BCA Donates to Project Linus *continued from front page*

Project Linus only accepts handmade blankets that are quilted, hand tied, crocheted, knitted or fleece. Locally blankets go to dozens of organizations including Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital, Doernbecher Children's Hospital, Ronald McDonald House, Portland and Vancouver Departments of Human Services, Raphael House and many more.

With a goal of creating twenty new blankets for the project BCA students, staff and community members got to work. Parents, staff and older "buddy" students helped younger students. Fabric was donated by the community and local businesses. The excitement



about the project was contagious and grew. One pre-kindergarten student helped on five different blankets. By the end of the project BCA had more than doubled their goal and had a total of fifty-five blankets.

"We are always fundraising here at BCA for ourselves, so it was really nice to be able to do something that would help others in need," said BCA Principal Odessa Falcon. "It was a nice and easy project for our students to participate in," added BCA staff member Lena Wilfert.

At the assembly to donate the blankets, staff members dressed up in Peanut's character costumes and students presented their blankets to Tim and Karen Oakley from the Portland/Vancouver Chapter of Project Linus.

If you would like more information about Project Linus please contact Jodene Cook, the Portland/Vancouver Chapter Coordinator at jcooklinus@q.com.

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