

Diggin' in the Dirt: Hot Topics

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Hot topics for a cold season

Start with a **garden review**. It is easy to forget some of the things that you know you want to change for next year. Take some time to make notes about moving (or removing) plants if they aren't in the right place, improving paths and walkways, ordering seeds you want to try, etc. With soil so soggy right now, it isn't a good idea to be working much in the garden.

It is too early to start tomato and pepper seeds! Normally, tomatoes should be started about late March to mid-April for Vernonia and peppers several weeks later. That said, you might consider starting some cabbage family plants (cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, arugula, etc.) a little bit later this month for transplant out in late February. Those early transplants will need some protection using hot caps, row covers or plastic cloches until the temperatures start to warm up a bit. If you don't have a green house, consider building a small cold frame to get your plants started. Here is a brief piece on how to make them: <http://hort.uwex.edu/articles/extending-garden-season>.

An alternate suggestion would be to mark your calendar for Saturday, May 9th. That is when the Vernonia Community Garden Association is having their annual plant sale at the Vernonia School complex. There were a number of vendors with all sorts of plants and garden related items for sale there last year. And the show stopper is always

tomato plant sale, with over 20 varieties of organically grown heirloom and other slicers, paste, cherry, and other specialty types. There will be more information in the coming months in the Voice and on flyers that will start appearing in town closer to the event.

Wood ash accumulates this time of year for gardeners who use wood stoves. Wood ash can be applied to vegetable gardens, lawns, and used around roses and other woody plants except acid-loving species like rhododendrons, azaleas, and blueberries. But use them with a light hand. One to three pounds per 100 square feet is plenty. That works out to be about two five-gallon buckets per 1000 square feet of garden. Spread as evenly as possible. Wood ash provides calcium, potassium (lots), and other trace minerals. But too much can affect roots' capacity to take up other minerals like phosphorus and magnesium.

This is the time to review the **seeds you have left over** and make your seed orders for next year. Vegetable and flower seeds have a limited life span. The actual span is determined by both how the seed was stored and the type of seed. For example, onion seed is notoriously short-lived (1-2 years), even in the best of storage conditions. Other seeds stored cold (the colder, the better) and dry survive longer 3-6 years or more. But survival (measured as germination percentage) isn't the only measure of seed quality. It turns out the seed vigor, i.e. how well it grows after it germinates decreases faster than the germination rate. So you might have some six-year old seed that will germinate (at least some of them) but they

may not grow as well as new seed. So, sort through your seed box and don't be afraid to toss some.

Almost every gardener with room for fruit trees dreams of **fresh peaches**. And almost every gardener here has had their heart broken by peach trees that grow for 2-4 years and then die. They die from either or both peach leaf curl (a fungus) or bacterial canker. There are varieties that are resistant to peach leaf curl (*Frost* is one that does well here) but so far none that I know of that are resistant to bacterial canker and curl. Still, a curl-resistant variety may be better able to "outgrow" the bacteria so I do recommend only planting those varieties. It is also helpful to spray these trees (and other fruit trees as well) with either lime sulfur or copper on as many dry days as you can between now and late February. Also, it is best to prune peach trees (and other stone fruit trees like cherries) in the summer after fruiting to slow the spread of the bacteria.

The cold weather in early November followed by another cold snap about three weeks later has convinced **garlic**, which usually doesn't break ground until mid-January, to emerge and grow. This could be a problem if it gets below 20 degrees or less with no snow cover. It won't kill the garlic but those temperatures can freeze the tops off if the plants aren't protected by row covers. New tops will come back but the ultimate bulb size will be lower. I have also noticed that slugs seem to be interested in the garlic so I have started baiting them. Fertilize the garlic in February and again in April.

Finally, pay attention to the

shrubs and plants you have growing under the house eaves. They can get quite dry. In a cold snap, plants with dry roots are more susceptible to cold injury.

Happy New Year and a Good Garden For All!

Donate extra produce to the food bank, senior center, 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. You can also be sent an email when the newsletter is posted.

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Natural Path to Health: A New Beginning

By Dr. Carol McIntyre

Happy New Year!

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season filled with love from family and friends. We certainly enjoyed ours and it was refreshing to spend so much time at home. Spending the day in my new PJs and snuggling with the children was by far one of the best parts.

Every New Year it seems we all feel the need for some sort of cleansing. Whether it be that we begin or complete home projects or vow to focus on our health, there is a feeling that something needs to change. New Year means new beginning. A fresh start. A clean slate. If you do decide to do a cleanse of any

type, keep a few things in mind.

If you are taking any prescription medications, doing a cleanse may alter how those medications act in your system. Depending on the drug and its potential side effects, other problems could present while doing a cleanse. Don't let this deter you from jumping into a healthier new year, but do be sure that you consult with your doctor or other qualified health care provider.

Start simple. Increase your water intake and decrease alcohol and caffeine intake. Eat more fresh vegetables and fruits and decrease processed foods. Cook your own meals. Use the crock pot! There are many ways to make healthier foods even on a tight schedule.

Exercise. This could be as simple as a walk around the block after dinner. Sitting in a chair and using arm weights and leg weights to increase muscle tone and strength. Increasing muscle mass will increase metabolism and decrease adipose (fat) tissue. Vigorous exercise is not always the best way to begin.

Breathe. Deep breathing has been proven to increase circulation and reduce stress. We all have stress in our lives. Finding simple and effective ways to reduce stress has a major impact on our well-being. When we have a better overall state of well-being, we create room for other more positive activities.

There are many herbals that help with cleansing. I will introduce one to

you. This herb is so versatile and is the only herb that one of my eldest herbal teachers would take daily. It is Dandelion. Dandelion root, leaf and stem are very nourishing. The plant is loaded with vitamins and minerals and acts on the kidney and liver, two of our most important organs in the process of detoxifying.

At the office, I am now offering one hour acupuncture appointments to established patients for a reduced price of \$40. This will be helpful for those people who have a more acute treatment protocol in place as well as those who would like to come in more frequently. I hope people will take advantage of this new opportunity.

Check in at the office for updated pricing and other new developments. I look forward to bringing in a Reiki master and a massage therapist to better serve our community. Qigong is still happening at the Grange, 375 North St. every Friday at 9:30 am. All our welcome. Hope to see you there.

Happy New Year once again! Thank you for joining me~ Be Well.



Red-tailed hawk photo by Charlotte Ganskopp.

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