

Diggin' in the Dirt: Soil Texture

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Did you know...

• Slugs can lay up to 800 eggs. They also have 10,000 tiny rasping teeth. Neither fact is comforting. This is the prime season for slug control. You can chop them, bait them, beer them, or salt them. But rarely can you forget them. Slugs are devious, hiding in the cracks of the soil or under anything that will protect them from drying out. They are somewhat open to what they can eat but do have favorite plants. Neither of the slugs that cause most of the plant damage is native to North America. They even threaten our beloved banana slug.

• Cilantro can be planted for both seed and leaves now. If you use row covers, cilantro will sprout fairly quickly. Thin the plants to 8 inches apart within the row. Cilantro will be harvestable in 5 weeks or so after germination, especially if the weather warms a bit. Make successive plantings until June. In the warmer months, cilantro bolts to seed fairly quickly. If that happens to your plants, don't despair. The flowers are used by lots of pollinators and other beneficial insects. Harvest the seed for use in savory dishes and baking.

• Spinach can also be planted now. It does better seeded under row covers or transplanted from cold frame or greenhouse starts. Like cilantro, you can seed every ten days or so for a more

continuous harvest. Also like cilantro, it doesn't do well as the weather really starts to warm up.

Soil texture and soil testing

Soils are a mixture of sand, silt, and clay. Sand is the largest particle, and clay, the smallest. The relative proportions of these particles determine a soil's texture. It will affect a soil's water drainage characteristics (i.e. sandy soils drain quickly while heavy clays drain very slowly). The mix of these three soil particles also affects nutrient holding capacity. Clay soils can hold and release more mineral elements like phosphorus, magnesium, nitrogen, calcium, and potassium. Organic matter in soils improves nutrient storage capacity, soil drainage, and aeration. In addition, organic matter can improve moisture holding in the summer.

So what is your soil made of? You can test the texture relatively easily. Fill a quart jar about two-thirds full of water. Add one-half teaspoon of liquid dish soap. Then add enough soil (taken from the top 6-12 inches) to bring the mix almost to the top of the jar. Cover and shake vigorously for five minutes. Then put it down for a couple of days for all the sand, silt, and clay to settle out. Sand will settle first, silt will be next, and last clay and organic matter will sink. You should be able to measure the relative proportions when the mix is clear.

If you want to test your soil for its actual nutrients, you will need to take a representative sample from at least 8 locations to a seven inch depth in your vegetable garden. Don't sample an area that had a burn pile or is otherwise not the same as the rest of the garden. You will put each sample in one common bucket and mix them together. Then you will pull one "composite" sample from that mix and send it to a soil-testing lab for analysis. A list of soil testing laboratories can be found at <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/files/project/pdf/em8677.pdf>. Cost of the test will be about \$40. This is not something you need to do every year. But is interesting to see the results and it can guide your yearly fertilizing.

Soil temperature and seed germination

This has been a great year to a garden started early. Soils have warmed as they have drained off some

of January's rain. But it isn't easy to maintain these temperatures. If our normal rain returns, soil temperatures will drop once again. So when are soils too cool for planting? It depends a bit on the crop. Peas and some in the cabbage family can stand lower soil temperatures (35-45 degrees). But that does not mean they like those temps. All will germinate faster, rot less, and grow better in warmer conditions. So what does that mean for the gardener? Raised beds, by themselves, increase soil temperatures by draining water faster and allowing the soil to heat up quicker. Covering worked soil with clear plastic for several days can heat soils. Following that up with row covers or plastic cloches can maintain that heat.

Row covers still available

We still have about ten 6x100 foot pieces (\$20/piece) and six 6x50 foot pieces for sale. Call our office (503 397-3462) if you are interested in them. They warm the environment around plants so they grow faster and can keep insects off your chard, broccoli, and other crops. They are reusable.

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.

Contact information for the Extension office

Oregon State University Extension Service - Columbia County
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WANTED

Volunteers for Jamboree

The Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and Logging Show is an annual event which welcomes visitors, residents and old friends to celebrate and showcase our community with food, music, activities and events.



The Jamboree Committee - your friends and neighbors who make this event happen each year.

WE NEED YOU!

Join the Committee!
We meet the 2nd Wednesday of each month.

WE NEED YOUR SKILLS



IDEAS



INTELLIGENCE



ENERGY

We could use your help with:

- Set up/Tear down
- Traffic Control
- Logistics
- Planning
- Info Booth
- Music Coordination
- Electrical Specialist
- Vendor Coordination
- Parade Assistant
- Parade Registration

VOLUNTEER AND GET ONE OF THE YELLOW T-SHIRTS!



For more information to volunteer and help make Jamboree happen contact:

Megan at (971)254-6826 or

Volunteer@VernoniaFriendshipJamboree.com.



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