

Diggin' in the Dirt: Soil Amendments and Nitrogen

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OSU Master Gardener's Spring Garden Fair: Saturday, April 25th

The OSU/Columbia County Master Gardener's™ Spring Garden Fair at St. Helens High School Commons, 2375 Gable Rd St Helens, OR, will be held on April 25 from 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM. The OSU Master Gardeners™ will sell 5,000 tomatoes in more than 30 varieties for only \$1.50 per plant, provide tomato and general gardening information, offer raffle tickets with hourly prize drawings, and have a number of educational displays. There will also be dozens of local vendors offering garden plants and other garden related products. Please carpool when possible.

Watch for Vernonia's own Spring Garden Fair on Saturday, May 9th!

The Vernonia Community Garden Group will be putting on the second annual Spring Garden Fair at the Vernonia High School Commons on Saturday, May 9th from 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM. There will be 800 certified organic tomato plants for sale as well as other garden plants and garden related items from local and regional vendors. There will be an information table staffed with Master Gardeners to answer your garden questions. Note the posters going up around town and watch *Vernonia's Voice* for more information.

Western tent caterpillars show up early this year

Western tent caterpillar eggs

that were laid later last summer on twigs of host trees (apples, pears, alders, and others) have started to hatch. I have seen ¼ inch caterpillars in tiny webs on both apple and alder trees in Warren. This is at least a month earlier than normal. The February and March period of warm weather apparently encouraged the early very tiny and very hungry caterpillars. The alder leaves are barely out, so the little caterpillars will have to work to expand their webs to secure more food. It is possible that the cooler weather the week past may slow them down.

The center of the western tent caterpillar outbreak last year was a ten mile radius around Rainier on both sides of the river. It was a huge infestation with many apple and alder trees completely defoliated. Fortunately, they recover once the caterpillars quit eating and pupate. The adult moths dispersed last August and September to south Columbia County and probably over the hills toward both Vernonia and Clatskanie to lay their eggs. It is not clear how big an infestation we will have this year. There is a virus that tends to damp down the population spikes after a few years. But gardeners should be looking now for the small webs and destroy them on the fruit trees early.

Soil amendments and nitrogen

So many Columbia County soils contain high amounts of clay. Clay is the tiniest soil particle and clay-rich soils have very small pore spaces. The size of the soil pores influence how well the soil will drain. As you probably know, clay soils don't drain all that well. So

what can you do to improve drainage? You can simply make raised beds with the soil and that, by itself, can improve drainage significantly.

You may have heard that gypsum improves drainage in clay soils but that is not true unless the soils are basic, which means that they have a pH above 8. Clay soils in arid environments are in that pH range but we are much more acid and gypsum doesn't do the same thing here. It is a useful fertilizer for acid loving plants that need some calcium since it doesn't raise the pH like lime does. But it generally doesn't improve soil porosity.

When you add organic matter to soils, texture and drainage do improve over time as the material composts. There are all sorts of organic materials you can add to soils. Sawdust, shavings, compost, cover crops, ground material from your landscape, and leaves are common additions. Many professional landscapers recommend adding one to two inches per year to your vegetable garden or landscape beds. This would equal one cubic yard per 150 square feet if you put it on two inches deep.

For a vegetable garden (or new lawn) you would work it in to a depth of 6-8 inches. For a planted landscape, it would be left on the surface.

But there is something you have to assess and that is, how raw (or uncomposted) is the material you are adding? The less composted it is, the more you have to add extra nitrogen to help it break down **if** you are turning it into the garden soil. This doesn't apply if you are putting it on the surface. For each

cubic foot of very raw material, you need to add 3 pounds of actual nitrogen to both feed your crops or lawn and to help the composting organisms along. So how much fertilizer is this per 150 square feet? If you used urea (46% N) as your nitrogen fertilizer, you would apply about 6 pounds (or 6 pints) of it per 150 square feet (46-0-0). If you used an organic nitrogen source with 7% nitrogen (like a 7-4-4) you would need about 25 pounds for the same area.

If the organic material you plan to use is fairly well composted or "aged," you could cut these nitrogen rates in half. Same story if it is for a new landscape bed versus a vegetable garden area. If you are using fresh manures (which generally we don't recommend be applied right before you plant a vegetable garden), you most likely wouldn't need to add any extra nitrogen. And if it is being applied to the surface around landscape plants, you would only fertilize what you usually give your plants.

Plant an extra row for 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. You can also be sent an email when the newsletter is posted.

Contact information for the Extension office

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Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Our next issue will be out May 7th.

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.

FOR TOWING EMERGENCIES IN AND AROUND THE VERNONIA AREA

Make sure you request service from a local provider!

Police and County personnel are required to use a rotation of available providers, **UNLESS YOU SPECIFICALLY ASK** for a service by name.

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