

Diggin' in the Dirt: Water

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Garden Updates

Western tent caterpillars hatched very early this year. It wasn't clear whether this represented the first wave of a very large population or just an early hatch of an average amount. Cooler weather followed the first sightings which seemed to slow both the growth rates of the already emerged caterpillars and the pace of subsequent hatchings. That pace has now picked up. An area I monitor almost weekly has quite a few more webs though they are still relatively small but expanding rapidly. So there isn't a definitive answer as to the ultimate size of this brood. They are not worth worrying about on alders. Fruit trees in Rainier last year lost much of their fruit to the very large population that munched its way through the landscape. There still is an important take home – these caterpillars will not kill the tree. Once they drop to the soil and pupate, the trees push out new shoots and leaves. Several weeks later, they look fine (except no apples on the heavily damaged trees).

Fruit set on most fruit tree species looks excellent. The early bloom wasn't frosted and the weather has kept some of the worst disease in check. Apple thinning could be done soon. Codling moth females start to mate and lay eggs about one month after full bloom. For us, that is often late May. This year, it should be earlier by mid-May. One good home

garden insecticide is spinosad, which is sold under several trade names. Apples need to be treated periodically (every 2-3 weeks) throughout the summer. There is a virus called Cydex that attacks codling moths but it is harder to locate. Some of the older insecticides labeled for fruit trees work as well.

Most of our vegetable crops are off to a good start. Commercial growers have already harvested one crop of some of the faster growing species like radishes and lettuce. It could be a very good tomato and pepper year. But, this is Oregon and the weather can turn on a dime.

Water, water

One meteorologist described the winter/spring moisture pattern in western Oregon this year as a "wet drought." On this side of the state, snow packs aren't an issue but the volume of rain and its soil storage are. Our rainfall is only slightly less than normal for this water year (October–September) so far. But it came in several drenching periods and then dissipated as runoff. This pattern of rain falling in deluges has been predicted by climate change models for northwest Oregon. Right now, our topsoil and subsoil profiles are quite dry. Watering may need to start earlier.

Drying winds, warm temperatures and transpiration through plant leaves removes soil moisture. Plants (crops and weeds) remove most of the moisture. To grow a garden we have to irrigate vegetables and lawns at 1 to 2 inches of water per week during

the summer. 1 inch of water applied over a 30 by 30 square foot garden or about 1000 square feet = about 630 gallons. Done 4 times a month = about 2500 gallons/month! When you irrigate at 1.5-2 inches as the weather gets hotter, the volume delivered climbs higher. Zoning your irrigation by drip or soaker systems, using mulches, and learning how to assess your soil moisture status can cut your water needs dramatically. So can planting a drought resistant landscape in the place of lawns. But the point is that a vegetable garden (or lawn) can use a lot of water. I do have concern about the wells in Columbia County running low this year. We shall see.

California is coming to grips with the fact there is no more water left to steal (if we guard the Columbia). That very productive state is in trouble. All their water is over committed. Households are being rationed and most farmers have received less than their ration for several years. This year, many will receive less than 30% of their normal allocation.

Permanent crops like nut trees and vineyards may have to struggle on the roughly nine inches of rain that the central Valley receives normally. With choices to make, some plantings won't make it. I had heard that an almond requires a gallon of water to produce. At first I didn't believe it but I did the calculation based on average yield (2200 pounds per acre and 500 almonds in a pound) and the amount of water applied (3.5 acre feet per acre = 43,560 square feet in an acre x 3.5 acre feet = 152,460

cubic feet and multiply that by 7.5 (the number of gallons in a cubic foot) and you get about 1.15 million gallons per acre used to produce about 1.1 million almonds on that acre. The Central Valley in California, where the almonds are grown receives about 10 inches a year in rain.

Do you know how much irrigation it takes to produce a hazelnut (or millions of hazelnuts) in western Oregon? None, once the trees have grown for one year. That is the virtue of Oregon with our 35-45 inches of rain a year in the Willamette valley. Enough moisture is stored in the soil to grow the tree during the spring, summer, and fall. But we can't grow almonds – too cold, for now.

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
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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



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!

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