

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Gardening Without Water

By Chip Bubl  
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## Gardening without water

It is now illegal to water outside your house from a faucet connected to the city water system, except for food producing plants. With most gardens already in, how do you triage (and plan) for water shortages?

The following are some suggestions from a UC Extension Service Master Gardener™ from San Jose where they have had water restrictions for some time. Her comments, adapted and edited from an article in the San Jose Mercury, are excellent:

Here are some tips:

- Don't spare the compost. Add 3 to 4 inches of compost to your garden beds and work it lightly into the soil. Healthy soil produces healthy plants, which need less water. Compost, as it stabilizes, can hold water in the summer but also improve water drainage in the winter and spring. What a wonderful material!
- Mulch. Add 3 to 5 inches of mulch on top of beds to help reduce water evaporation. Mulch can be almost anything including dried leaves, aged horse manure, extra compost, wood chips, straw, or other materials. Mulch also will slow weed germination.
- Wash dishes by hand and use the soapy water for your plants. Bath water can best be collected and used around woody plants but not around vegetables where the edible portion might come in contact with the water. Cooking water can be cooled and used if it doesn't have salt in it. Laundry wash water can be collected and used but you have to watch out for bleach compounds and possibly boron.

Use the purest simple soap laundry detergents.

- Grow plants that you are successful with and your family will make good use of. In your current garden, water the most important ones first. Water new trees. They aren't cheap to replace and are vulnerable the first year.
- Plant seedlings close together on an offset pattern, rather than in a row. This configuration uses less water and as the plants grow, they will shade the soil and reduce evaporation.
- Grow high-yield vegetables, such as greens, beans, squash, and tomatoes. You'll get more for your water buck with these plants. Garlic is grown over winter and needs no water. Neither does rhubarb.
- Weed your vegetables. They compete for sunlight and water. Weed early and often.
- When given a choice, plant determinate varieties. Determinate plants grow to a certain size and produce for a specific amount of time. Indeterminate varieties will continue to grow and produce until frost. The determinate types, with their shorter growing season, will use less water. Probably too late for this season but something to consider for future gardens.
- Use transplants wherever you can. Grow your own. You will use less water in the process.
- Try dry farming. Some plants, including tomatoes, can be dry farmed. It works best if they are able to be planted out fairly early and given early heat protection with row covers or cloches to get their top and root growth off to a good start. For successful dry farming, you want to create a spongy growing medium that will hold water. Prepare the bed

with lots of compost. Plant your tomatoes and water them as usual for the first few days to get them established, then water only once a week. Once the tomatoes flower and set fruit, cut off all water. The plants may not look great, but they will produce and some say the fruit will taste better.

The key to a productive, healthy vegetable garden is location, soil and planting the right plant at the right time. If plants require a lot of sun, be sure to plant them where they'll get the most. Amend your soil to make sure it has plenty of nutrients to feed the plants, and don't try to grow crops that aren't in season. Getting a soil test will help you to know what might be lacking in your soil.

In Vernonia, we can generally grow cool season crops, such as leafy greens, beets, turnips and peas most of the spring, summer and fall. Make the most of them early (and late summer into fall when there is good soil moisture.

## 2015 OSU Extension Canning Classes

Come learn how to safely can foods from your garden this season! Participants will practice making and canning recipes in the kitchen, and will process a jar to take home. Space is limited, so call soon to reserve your spot! Pre-registration is required.

### Where:

Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District Office  
35285 Millard Road,  
St. Helens, OR 97051

### When:

Tuesday, August 25th ~ Canning Tomatoes and Salsa  
Tuesday, September 8th ~ Preserving Fall Fruits  
Tuesday, September 22nd ~ Pressure Canning Soups

**Time:** 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm

**Cost:** \$25 per class. Some scholarships are available. Call the Extension office

to inquire.

### Registration:

Call the OSU Extension Service:  
503-397-3462

Or register online at: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia>

## Food Preservation Questions? OSU Extension Service Has Answers

Are you planning to preserve food from your garden or purchased from a farm this summer? If so, call or visit the OSU Extension Service office before you start canning, freezing, or drying. Costly and potentially harmful mistakes can be made by using outdated canning recipes and instructions. You can find free publications AND pressure gauge testing at the Columbia County Extension office located at 505 N. Columbia River Highway in St. Helens (across from the Legacy Clinic). If you have questions, phone the office at 503-397-3462. You can download for free all our food preservation publications at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>. An additional great resource is the National Center for Home Food Preservation at <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/>. In July, the OSU Extension Statewide Food Preservation Hotline (1-800-3547319) will open Monday through Friday from 9am – 2pm starting on July 13th and ending on October 16th.

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## VERNONIA'S WOMEN OF FAITH MINI-CONFERENCE

*Join us for a Heart to Heart Message from God's Word.*

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You Will Hear:

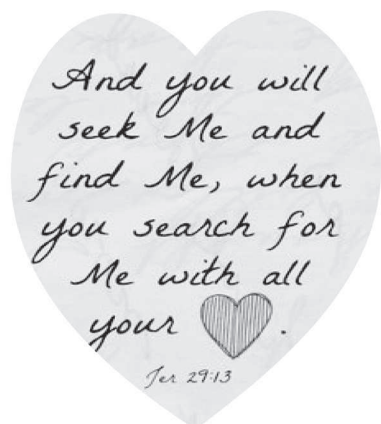
- \*Compelling Messages from God's Word
- \*Laugh Out Loud Humor
- \*Heart Tugging Testimonies
- \*Beautiful Worship Music

WHEN: August 29, 2015 ( Saturday )

TIME: 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

WHERE: Anderson Park / Covered Area

For More Information Contact  
Victoria: 503-429-0746  
LeeAnn: 503-504-5270



## WOEC Annual Meeting August 22nd

The West Oregon Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, August 22nd, at the Cabin in Vernonia (Scout Cabin), 901 Park Drive. Registration starts at 10:00 am; meeting begins at 11:00 am. BBQ lunch will follow the meeting. Districts 1 (Elsie, Jewell, Necanicum area), District 4 (Vernonia area), and District 6 (Scappoose, Chapman area) are up for re-election.

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10-6 Tue-Sat  
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