

Diggin' in the Dirt: Field Mice and Root Crops

By Chip Bubl
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Garden topics

Outstanding garden weather has continued since my last column. Even Vernonia is having a bumper crop of corn, winter squash, and tomatoes. Apple quality is generally excellent. Grapes are maturing nicely. Most of the calls I have gotten concern trees and shrubs that are either dead or looking very weak. Even with the recent rains, there is almost no moisture in the soil profile. Deep-rooted trees can still grab some. But more recently planted trees and shrubs will struggle with their smaller root systems. It makes sense to give some of your newer woody plants a good soaking once a week until normal fall weather returns. There are several disorders of apples that are due, in part, to water-short conditions. These include water-core (that glassy and very sweet center we get in some apples) and bitter pit (which despite its name creates brown dimples just under the skin and a little into the flesh). Apples with either of these disorders will not store well, so eat them first.

Field mice and root crops

Voles (also known as field mice) are the bane of the vegetable gardener. They need cover to avoid becoming a meal and flourish where feed is fairly abundant. Good vole cover is tall grass,

brush piles, thick mulch (sometimes), plastic or landscape fabric mulch, and mole tunnels. Feed can include seed from field grass, birdseed and fruit you provide, and root vegetables. You may not know that you have voles. One test is to put out some pieces of apple in a shallow trench and cover the trench with a piece of plywood, leaving an open-



ing for the inquisitive mouse. If you see no sign of feeding after a few days, you are, for the present, probably vole free for now. But that can change fast. If they find your row or bed of carrots, parsnips, potatoes, or beets, they munch systematically down your row. Carrots

are often left with just their foliage and shoulder. You don't know that anything is wrong until you pull them up. Then your anguish is complete because your carrots are not. Tiny tooth marks give them away.

It is possible to trap voles (they aren't very smart) putting the traps in a trench just like you put the apple pieces.

But a garden can harbor lots of voles so it generally is best to pull your root crops and store the carrots, parsnips, potatoes, and beets in slightly moist sand or sawdust in a cool, dark, and mouse proof place for the winter. You can work on the vole problem for next year by trapping your moles (to reduce the cover provided by the tunnels), keeping vegetative cover low, and trapping the voles early and often. You can be glad you don't have rats.

Plant garlic next month

If you like **garlic**, get out there and plant some late this month or in October. Find a sunny, well-drained space, lime it with about 10#s per 100 square feet, add some compost and/or fertilizer and you are ready to plant. Go to a Farmer's Market soon (they are about to end) and buy several varieties of garlic. Get the names and label them in bags. Separate out the cloves from the bulbs and plant the biggest cloves from each variety. Mark your rows so you know what did well. Eat the cloves you didn't plant. Space the rows about 12" apart and the garlic about 3" apart within the row and the cloves about 2" below the soil surface. Cover with one inch or so of compost or some other organic matter to keep rain from crusting the soil. Sit back and wait. You may not see tops until January but rest assured that the plants are doing just fine. Weed often. Harvest in July. That's it.

Lime in the fall

If you work your garden area at all in the fall, **add some lime**. A good application rate is 100-150#s per 1000 square feet of vegetable garden. Lime takes about six months to fully react with the soil so the benefits will be ready when you start spring gardening. Gardens only need to be limed once every three years.

Final 2015 OSU Extension Canning Class

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 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 – 2 pm starting on July 13th and ending on October 16th.

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