

Diggin' in the Dirt: Fall Gardening Topics

By Chip Bubl
Oregon State University Extension Service - Columbia County
Master Gardener™ class signups being taken

The OSU Extension office in Columbia County will be offering the Master Gardener™ training again this spring. This year the class will be in St. Helens. The classes will be held on Mondays from 9:30 am – 3:30 pm for about 10 weeks starting February 1st, 2016. Cost of the program is \$80.00 which includes a large resource book. Master Gardeners are responsible for providing volunteer gardening education to the community as partial payback for the training. If interested in the program, call the Extension office at 503 397-3462 for an information packet.

Has the stink bug met its match?

Cool weather pushed the stink and box elder bugs into cracks and crevices outdoors (or possibly into your wall voids) until the next warm day, probably in 2016. The brown marmorated stink bugs (BMSB) provoked a lot of anxiety. They are quite large and rather striking in appearance. When smashed, true to their name, they do stink. The smell has been described as like that of a bunch of rotten socks. Since their numbers increased so much this past summer, homeowners want something done.

And now, it looks like there is a tiny wasp that lives to lay their eggs in the eggs of the stink bug. This wasp (which doesn't sting and is about as big as a comma in this paper) is from Asia, just like the stink bug. Scientists have been researching it as a biological control for the BMSB but had not released it from the bio-secure facilities where they were under study. Recent BMSB parasitic wasp finds in Vancouver, WA and on the east coast were clearly from wasps that made it to North America on their own. They probably were inside BMSB egg masses on cargo containers shipped from Asia.

How does the wasp control the stink bug? The wasp eggs inserted into stink bug eggs turn into wasp larva. These in turn eat the stink bug larva in the eggs. Then the wasps emerge as adults. This sounds strange but there are a number of tiny native wasps that feed on developing insect larva. At this point, it seems like the wasps have a very specific host preference and are not

likely to become a pest on native insects. But at this point, with lots of stink bug eggs to choose from and virtually no options to control the wasp, even if we wanted to, this biological drama will continue to play out. Actual reduction in stink bug numbers probably won't be apparent for a couple of years but there is some room for optimism long-term.

Fall Topics

Mushrooms in lawns or pastures are quite common since the rains began. Mushrooms are fruiting bodies from the large mat of fungi in the ground that is the real "mushroom". It is impossible and thus a waste of time and money to try to control these fungi with chemicals. They generally disappear as the weather gets colder. Some of the fungi that produce mushrooms have beneficial relationships with trees in your yard. That is why the same types appear in the same place year after year. Other fungi turn undecomposed organic matter into compost, thus recycling nutrients. While most mushrooms are not toxic, there are some that are. If you have a dog that "will eat anything," you might want to keep the pooch out of the yard until the mushroom show is over. Alternatively, you can periodically mow the mushrooms into tiny bits. Same caution goes for young children and their desire to forage in lawns.

Winterizing equipment should be done now to reduce problems next spring. If you have a pump that you only use for irrigation, get that system drained and turned off. At the same time, drain and store hoses and other watering equipment. Clean power equipment and fill gas tank with fuel with a "stabilizer" added to it. Clean gutters and downspouts. Sharpen pruning tools for the work ahead.

Sort and store seeds left over from this (or past) gardening years. Some seeds have a fairly long storage life (cabbage family, squash, beans, peas, and corn) if stored cool and dry. Others like onions are rarely good past one year. Tomatoes and peppers are somewhat in between. It is worth noting that the capacity of a seed to germinate is not the same as its ability as a seedling to grow vigorously. Seed vigor declines faster than seed germination rate. I have found seed stores well in a frost-free freezer in an airtight container.

Garlic can still be planted this month. Pick a sunny place that you can allow

the garlic to grow until mid-July. Lime the soil at the rate of about 10 pounds per 100 square feet, fertilize with a bit of organic or conventional fertilizer, and work the soil (into raised beds if there is a concern about drainage in the winter).

You can order garlic or if you find good looking garlic at a farmers market, you can use it as well. Break the bulb into cloves and plant the medium to large cloves.

Garlic is generally planted with the clove tops about two inches deep and spaced about four inches apart within rows that are roughly a foot apart. Cover the surface of the soil with a light amount of organic mulch (sawdust, compost, etc.) and keep the bed weeded. Garlic roots will start to grow immediately but the tops may not show until early January. Keep weeding through the winter and spring, fertilize again in February and late April, and bait for slugs if you see any top damage. Harvest in mid-July.

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. **Take excess produce to 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 sign up for email notification of when to find the latest edition on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/>.

Contact information for the Extension office

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WOEC Continues Direct Install Savings Program

West Oregon Electric Cooperative has announced they are continuing their Direct Install Program, which provides residential members with two FREE energy-saving Tricklestar APS Smart Power Strips, along with Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFL's) and High Performance Showerheads to help you save energy and reduce your energy costs. The High Performance Showerheads are only

available to members who have an electric water heater. Efficiency Services Group (ESG) will be administering this program for WOEC and helping members install the new energy saving devices when they stop by to visit with home owners. The ESG representatives will be wearing name badges that include WOEC's logo as well as traveling in vehicles with a WOEC logo on the door.

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