

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Keeping Christmas Trees Fresh

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## 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016. The classes will cover vegetable and fruit gardening, soils and fertilizers, insect and disease identification and control, weed identification and management, and lots of other topics of interest to gardeners. 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.

## Keeping Christmas trees fresh

This one is simple. It's the water and the tree. First, it is worth noting that the Christmas tree growers have been funding research for years on the conifer species and gene sources within those species that best retain their needles after cutting indoors. The most popular species are Douglas fir, grand fir, noble fir, and Norman fir. They all have excellent needle retention characteristics. When picking out a tree from a lot, check some of the outer branchlets to see if they snap when bent. On the freshest trees, they do.

But most important, if you keep your tree from running out of water, it will last for a long time in all but the driest homes. When you get your tree, es-

pecially if it's from a lot and may have been stored for a time, cut the base at least one inch to open up fresh wood for water uptake. Place the tree in warm water and don't let it ever go dry. You can keep the tree outside in the shade for a long time before you bring it in. If you do that, cut the base again. Buy a tree stand with a large reservoir, because in the first few days in the house, the tree will take up quarts of water. There is little evidence that any of the preservatives have much of an impact on the longevity of the tree. Smaller trees (sold as "table tops") have a much harder time retaining needles and not drying out, even with the most attentive watering.

A number of insects like to winter in the dense cover of Christmas trees. When the trees are brought inside, the tree and the insects come out of dormancy. You may see the brown marmorated stink bug wandering around, perhaps a box elder bug here and there, and possibly, queen yellow jackets. My perspective has been to gently capture them and release them outside. While the yellow jacket queen may be quite drowsy (or not, depending on how long it's been since she woke up), she can still pack quite a sting, which she can repeat several times. So be cautious.

## Christmas gifts for gardeners

- Nice gardening gloves, especially those flexible kinds that rose thorns don't penetrate or nice-fitting leather glove.
- Knee pads or knee benches for gardeners to make close work less of a pain.
- A well-made spading fork or shovel.
- Cast aluminum hand tools or specially designed "ergonomic" tools for less muscle strain.
- A greenhouse or a good cold frame (could be home-made).
- High quality loppers or hand pruners

- Gift certificates to garden centers
- A soil thermometer is always useful. So are moisture meters with ~12-inch probes.
- Easy grip hand tools for the gardener with arthritis

## Many Extension publications available free online

Are you putting up salsa, saving seeds, or thinking about planting kiwis? OSU has a large number of its publications available for free download. Just go to <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/> click on publications and start exploring. If there was an older OSU publication that you remember but can't find, if you know its exact name or a reasonable facsimile thereof, you can type the name into Google and then add "+Oregon State University" and you will find that publication in our archive.

Another website you should know is our plant disease web site <http://pnwhandbooks.org/plantdisease/>. This can give you pictures and insights into all manner of plant problems to be thankful you don't have and good information/advice on those that do show up in your garden. Also linked at the bottom is our insect management handbook where you can look at apple maggots, bedbugs or flea beetles from a safe distance.

## 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. Co-

lumbia 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 13<sup>th</sup> and ending on October 16<sup>th</sup>.

**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

Oregon State University Extension Service – Columbia County  
505 N. Columbia River Highway (across from the Legacy clinic)  
St. Helens, OR 97051  
503 397-3462  
Email: [chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu](mailto:chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu)

# City Approves Livestock Regulations *continued from front page*

5,000 square feet required for each additional animal. It is unlawful to keep pigs or swine within city limits, except for miniature breeds that weigh less than 95 pounds and are no taller than 18 inches at the shoulder.

Two hives of bees are allowed for every 5,000 square feet of property. Five or more hives must be registered with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Owners must notify all neighbors within 150 feet of any hives. Hives less than 150 feet from any public road, walkway, building, park or residential dwelling other than their own must be protected by a six foot hedge or fence.

Shelters for animals are required to be set

back at least 15 feet from any building used for human habitation and ten feet from any rear property line; no shelter structure can be located in front of the main structure on a property.

Rooster removal will be warranted following two complaints from two separate neighbors within six months.

All premises where animals are maintained must be kept sanitary at all times. Slaughtering of any animal must take place out of view and hearing of the

general public. Slaughter waste must be disposed of in a garbage receptacle.

Any questions about this ordinance should be directed to the Vernonia Police Department Code Enforcement Officer Iwalani Leininger at 503-429-7335 or [leininger@vernonia-or.gov](mailto:leininger@vernonia-or.gov).

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

## 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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