

Diggin' in the Dirt: Growing Sweet Potatoes

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Extension Service - Columbia County

Small Woodland Association tree sale set for March 12th.

The Columbia County Small Woodlands Association has an annual tree sale in St. Helens. You can purchase a variety of trees in very small quantities. The sale this year will be on March 12th at the Lawrence Oil parking lot (845 N. Columbia River Highway) in St. Helens from 8:30 am- 1:30pm. They sell both forest tree seedlings, some native shrubs, and some ornamental tree seedlings. Get there early for the best selection.

Growing sweet potatoes in Columbia County

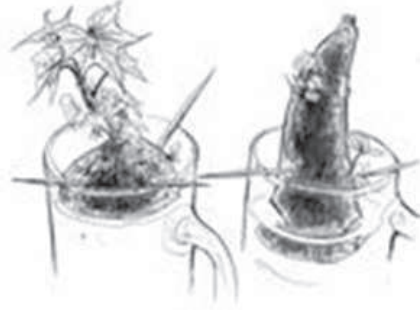
OSU Master Gardeners Susan and Denny Snyder harvest about a pound or more sweet potatoes per square foot in their Warren garden. Yields from their four by eight beds have ranged from thirty-four pounds to forty-five pounds per bed. They have gotten similar results in the OSU Master Gardeners Demonstration garden at the Fairgrounds. Other gardeners have learned from them and

gotten equally good results (see picture of Yankton gardener Glen Werings' sweet potato).

Here is the Snyder method: Sweet potatoes are grown from "slips" which are shoots that sprout from the sweet potato. Slips need to be started indoors in late January or early February. To get slips, the Snyders cut sweet potatoes (from last year's harvest) in half width-wise. They put the cut end down in a shallow container that holds water on some half-inch clean round rocks and fill the container to cover the tubers up to about a half inch. They start the slips, at first, inside their house since sweet potatoes like warmth. They place the "slip" tray where it gets decent sun. Susan says that you need organic sweet potatoes to start with (they are more likely to sprout) but that not all tubers sprout consistently. Some tubers will rot before good slips are formed. Watch carefully and discard tubers that start to decay.

If all goes well, small slips start to grow. When the slips are 1 to 1.5 inches long, they cut or gouge them out of the sweet potato and place the base of the slips in a shallow vase in water until they root well. Once they get good roots, they pot them up into 2 inch by 2 inch

containers in nice loose potting mix. After a little settling in, they move the slip containers out to their greenhouse in trays that hold water. They put the tray on a heating mat to supply bottom heat. If the slips start to root out the bottom of the containers, they re-pot them into larger containers.



Sweet potatoes need loose soil. It is hard to overemphasize that requirement. If the soil isn't loose, the sweet potato tubers won't grow large. Denny prepares the four by eight-foot raised beds located in full sun when the soil is able to be worked easily, adding some fertilizer and lime at that time. He puts a soaker hose or drip tube that will water the sweet potatoes in the summer on the surface. Then he covers the beds tightly with black plastic. This warms the soil and keeps the weeds down.

They start to harden off the slips by giving them several hours per day outdoors in indirect sun several weeks before transplanting. Slips may lose leaves at transplanting (usually they re-sprout leaves).

When it comes time to plant (usually in early May), the Snyder method is to plant three slips per bed, evenly spaced down the center of the bed. They cut holes in the plastic to transplant the slips. One garden-

er (who learned from the Snyders) plants eight slips per bed. The planted beds are covered with row cover to provide extra heat and to reduce transplant shock. Row covers are removed in mid-June. In Vernonia, I might leave them on all summer for additional heat. The light .5 ounce covers would probably work best.

Consistent irrigation is necessary throughout the growing season. Vines will grow in a tangled jungle with some stems getting 10 feet long. Deer eat the foliage and field mice (voles) like the tubers. Be prepared.

The Snyders harvest in late September. You have to dig carefully and gently as sweet potatoes can be quite brittle when first dug. Dry them in a bin. Separate out any damaged tubers and eat them first. Sweet potatoes store best between 50-65 degrees. Don't let them freeze. The Snyders are still enjoying last summer's crop. Sweet potato pie and sweet potato hummus are several of their favorite uses.

Don't cut branch collars

For years, the standard pruning advice was to make your cuts flush with the trunk of a tree. However, we know a lot more about tree physiology now.

You should not cut so close. Instead, look for the raised tissue at the base of limbs where they join the trunk. This is called the branch collar or shoulder.

The branch collar contains rapidly dividing cells that will ultimately close the wound caused by pruning. If it is removed, the tree will be much slower closing the injury and more likely to develop disease or insect problems at that point. In addition, the branch collar contains cells that put out disease resisting compounds in response to wounds.

These physical and chemical barriers compartmentalize the damage to the benefit of the whole tree.

How do you identify a branch collar? On many trees, it is 1/4 to 1/2 inch wide, though it can be larger or oftentimes smaller. The diagram indicates what a branch collar will look like and a little observation in the garden will clarify where cuts should be made. Happy pruning.

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/>.

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NOTICE OF BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

A public meeting of the Budget Committee of the Vernonia Rural Prot. Dist., Columbia, State of Oregon, to discuss the budget for the fiscal year July 1, 20 16 to June 30, 20 17, will be held at Vernonia Fire Station
555 E Bridge Street, Vernonia OR. The meeting will take place on March 8, 2016 at 6:30 a.m. p.m.

The purpose of the meeting is to receive the budget message and to receive comment from the public on the budget. This is a public meeting where deliberation of the Budget Committee will take place. Any person may appear at the meeting and discuss the proposed programs with the Budget Committee.

A copy of the budget document may be inspected or obtained on or after March 8, 2016 at Vernonia Fire Station between the hours of 9 a.m. p.m. and 3 a.m. p.m. Mon - Thurs

Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District

Annual Alarm Summary Report
Reporting Between: 01/01/2015 - 12/31/2015
Printed On: 02/10/2016

| Situation | Jan 15 | Feb 15 | Mar 15 | Apr 15 | May 15 | Jun 15 | Jul 15 | Aug 15 | Sept 15 | Oct 15 | Nov 15 | Dec 15 | Total |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| *NA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 100 Series Fire | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 16 |
| 300 Series Rescue & Emergency Medical Service Incident | 29 | 24 | 26 | 31 | 34 | 41 | 23 | 38 | 17 | 36 | 26 | 31 | 356 |
| 400 Series Hazardous Condition (No fire) | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 37 |
| 500 Series Service Call | 2 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 13 | 17 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 11 | 88 |
| 600 Series Good Intent Call | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 30 |
| 700 Series False Alarm & False Call | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 12 |
| 800 Series Severe Weather & Natural Disaster | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| 900 Series Special Incident Type | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Grand Total | 41 | 39 | 40 | 43 | 51 | 51 | 42 | 68 | 27 | 52 | 42 | 52 | 548 |

Vernonia Veterinary Clinic
Small and Large Animals

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Call for Appointments
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Or 24 hr. Emergency Number (503) 397-6470
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Vernonia Dental

Dr. Christopher M. Scheuerman DMD

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