

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Great Christmas Ideas

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2017 OSU Master Gardener™ class will be held in Vernonia

The Columbia County/OSU Master Gardener™ training will be held in Vernonia on ten consecutive Tuesdays from about 9:30 am to 3:30 pm starting on February 21, 2017. If you think you might be interested, call the OSU Extension office in St. Helens at (503) 397-3462 or email either myself (chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu) or Vicki Krenz (vicki.krenz@oregonstate.edu) to get on a mailing list for the classes when the informational packets and applications are sent out. The class will be held at the Vernonia Health Center and space is somewhat limited. Cost of the class is \$80 and there are a few scholarships available.

## Jan's Great Christmas ideas

Jan McNeilan, our thoughtful emeritus OSU Extension Service Master Gardener program leader in Metro Portland (and whose husband, Ray, co-founded the program in the late 1970s in Oregon), has the following gift ideas to share (slightly edited):

- A gardener's journal to record planting dates, varieties, successes from year to year
- A gift certificate for 'x' hours of help in the yard
- Hand soaps and creams designed especially for extra dirty, chapped hands
- A nice pair of leather gardening gloves to prevent injury and chapped, rough

skin, or flexible, rubberized cotton gloves that keep fingernails clean and hands dry while mucking about in the garden

- A water timer for hose-fed sprinklers for carefree watering
- A high-quality pruning saw, hand pruner or lopper to make winter pruning a pleasure and a good pruning book to help the education process (the one by Christopher Brickell is especially useful)
- Easy grip or smaller hand tools for gardeners with arthritis
- A long spouted water pot for easy houseplant care
- A new ever-sharp pair of garden scissors for snipping herbs and flowers
- A hand-woven basket with a handle for gathering herbs and vegetables
- A large garden cart to carry tools and soil amendments out to the garden in one trip
- Kneepads or a gardening stool to make weeding and low work less of a strain
- Metal supports for tall spring tulips and later for supporting tomato plants
- Permanent tags to mark the sites of your favorite perennials and bulbs or to mark the rows in next spring's vegetable patch
- A seed sower to easily set tiny seeds into soil at exactly the proper interval
- A soil thermometer to measure soil temperature, vital for spring planting
- Tools, tools and more tools - those hand trowels by OXO are really well made as are some of the cast aluminum products; well-designed and constructed shovels and spading forks are a joy
- A gift certificate for plants/tools from a

favorite nursery or garden center

- Children's gardening tools to encourage young folks to start the gardening habit
- And, of course, presents for wildlife such as bird feeders or baths, bat houses, orchard mason bee blocks, etc.

## Winter fruit sprays needed

Fungi and bacteria love moist weather. They work their way into trees and berry plants through injuries, buds, leaf scars or other locations. The peach leaf curl symptoms that we see in April are caused by the curl fungus infecting peach buds over the next few months.

Many diseases can be lessened by winter dormant fungicide applications over the next three months. The useful products for the home gardener are lime sulfur and copper sulfate. Both are considered organic and both will help. There are a number of trade names available. These spray treatments can be used on any fruit or berries with this exception: Do not use lime sulfur on apricots as they are very sensitive to the typical concentration of sulfur in these sprays.

But neither spray is a cure-all. Pruning helps to improve air circulation. But weather patterns determine the ultimate disease potential. Some varieties are very disease resistant. If you love peaches, try Frost or some other curl resistant variety and place it where it gets good air circulation. Scab free apples include Akane and Chehalis.

## Mice and more mice

It is time for my annual rodent

warning. Judging by the size and heft of the voles (also known as meadow mice) that our cats have brought home, they aren't going into the winter hungry. However, as the temperatures cool and the rains beat down, vole fat cover starts to erode. They may find your young trees and shrubs tasty additions to their diet. This is especially true when snow is on the ground. This disrupts the voles' normal foraging routes. They tunnel up next to your young tree and start to eat. If they are there for a while, the tree may be girdled, right at ground level.

Your best defense is to keep the vegetation around trees and shrubs as low as possible in a three feet radius and keep the area as a whole cut short. This helps cats, hawks and owls eat more mice, which does make mice nervous. It can also be helpful to put a small collar of aluminum foil or some kind of mesh protection around the trunks of small trees. Place mouse traps baited with peanut butter in shallow ditches (deep enough to allow the trap to spring) and then cover the ditch with a piece of plywood or something else to keep out pets and children. It's amazing how many voles you can catch. Finally, a conversation with your cats may help.

**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 info for the Extension office**  
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