

Diggin' in the Dirt: Extreme Cold

By Chip Bubl
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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). 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.

Grafting workshop in February

The OSU Extension office in St. Helens will be hosting a grafting workshop scheduled for February 11 from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Participants will be taught how to graft apple scions on to dwarf apple rootstocks. Each participant will receive 5 rootstocks to work with and supplies to secure the graft. Scion varieties will be available or participants can bring their own varieties they wish to graft. Cost of the workshop is \$15. The class is limited to 20 people so early registration will assure a place. To register or for more information, call the Extension office at (503) 397-3462.

Extreme cold

As this column is being written, we are just escaping a run of very cold weather. Temperatures 15 degrees or less will damage some plants. Snow cover can protect herbaceous perennials but woody plants, with their exposed trunks and branches are more at risk. Sunny days that warm the bark followed by deeply cold nights can increase the risk of trunk tissue damage. Young trees are the most susceptible since their bark is so thin. Zone 8 and 9 trees and shrubs are also susceptible but their hardiness is unpredictable. Some 5-10 degree weather in the late 1980s demonstrated that plant location and innate hardiness function together to either stress or protect semi-hardy plants in extreme cold. Plants in containers should be kept moist and the smaller containers should be grouped and covered if at all possible. Damage from this weather won't be evident until the spring. Trees and shrubs may leaf out only to wither 2-4 weeks later as the extent of the "plumbing" under the bark becomes clear. Damaged trees can limp along for several years and then succumb to the fungi that attack the cold-damaged trunk tissue. Damaged container plants may have tops that are alive but roots that were frozen from being less protected in a container than in soil.

Protected peas could be started soon

Edible peas and the flowering kinds can be planted this month. Don't confuse the two types since flowering

peas are poisonous.

Peas are best planted in a well-drained location. They should be given some cold protection. Some gardeners bend clear, corrugated fiberglass greenhouse sheets in a hoop between two stakes over the seeded rows.

Once the peas outgrow the fiberglass tunnel, you can cover them with floating row cover. Eventually, the taller types of peas will need a trellis of some sort. At that point, they should be able to stand whatever cool weather still remains.

Inoculate seeds so that they will return nitrogen to your garden. Plant them about 2 inches apart. Rows should be 36-40 inches apart. Deer adore garden peas so be forewarned.

Underused fruit trees and shrubs

Here is my opinionated list as to species that should be planted more often:

- Quinces
- Persimmons, especially the oriental types
- Gooseberries and currants
- Figs, especially Desert King which fruits reliably here in mid-August
- European plums

Tips for buying a fruit tree

In January and February, fruit trees start arriving in the retail sales yards. A group of ten trees will all carry the same price, but there are great differences in the structure of the young trees.

Generally, you want to look for a tree that has branches evenly spaced around the trunk, both in direction and vertically along the stem. If the branches all come out from the same point, the tree will be weak.

The branches should leave the stem at about a 45 degree angle, though this can be created in a young branch by weighting it down. Often, branches emerge from the stem at a very upright angle. If this is uncorrected as the tree grows, they will have a weaker attachment to the stem and are more likely to break with a heavy fruit or ice

load.

Salad greens can be started soon

Salads are much more interesting than they used to be. Arugula, chicory, raddichio, chervil, fennel, and mizuna are only a few of the greens that have found their way into gardens, truck farms, and our dinners.

Many of these plants are hardy and will transplant out successfully in the early spring if they can be given a little extra heat from floating row covers, plastic tents or the like.

Arugula has become a favorite in our house. The leaves are dark green with a distinctive not-quite mustard flavor. It is sometimes sold as rocket or roquette. It reseeds itself prolifically and can withstand considerable cold weather once it is established.

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 Country 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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Look for our next issue out February 2.

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