

Diggin' in the Dirt: Name That Weed

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Small Woodland Association tree sale set for March 11

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 11 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.

Slug Patrol

Herbaceous perennials are showing green tips, vegetable starts can be purchased, and onion sets should be planted soon. So what time is it? It's slug time. Yes, they're back. Of course, I know they never left but at least they stayed out of sight for a while. As slugs emerge from under rocks and from cracks in the soil, the wise gardener must take action.

Slug baits come in two basic formulations. The most common active ingredient is metaldehyde.

This compound, which by itself isn't particularly attractive to slugs, is paired with something they will eat readily. Once consumed, metaldehyde causes intense mucous production and if there is any sun, slugs quickly desiccate. This compound works well as a quick "knockdown" of the slug population and depending on the bait material, may stay active for several weeks. The big concern with "meta" baits is their toxicity to pets, especially dogs. Recent formulations have tried to create repellent compounds that dogs will avoid but slugs will not. The jury is still out on whether they have succeeded in both objectives. I would not allow a dog in an area that has had recent slug-bait treatment with metaldehyde. There are many trade names of products with metaldehyde in them.

Iron phosphate is the other common active ingredient. It is far less toxic to pets, though I would still discourage a dog from playing unattended in a heavily baited area. It does not provide as quick a knockdown as metaldehyde but over a period of several weeks, seems to give comparable control. The trick is to plan ahead. Bait where you know dahlias or other slug-attractive vegetation will soon emerge or where you intend to transplant tender vegetables. Trade names for these materials include Sluggo and Escargo. I have noticed that the Sluggo formulation is eaten by juncos and towhees. So we have taken to covering areas that we have baited with Sluggo (or any pelleted slug bait) with row cover to keep birds away.

The non-chemical options include:

- Chopping them with a hoe – best done early in the morning and made easier if you put some wooden boards in the garden that they can crawl under. That concentrates them and makes the time spent per slug eliminated a lot less. This is a fairly efficient management method if you are persistent. Best for the large slugs (*Arion ater*). Not so useful for the small gray garden slugs.
- Beer or yeasty sugar water placed in a shallow pan – they are attracted to the liquid and then drown. Makes kind of a

gloppy mess. Don't let your dog drink beer! They don't make good choices afterwards. Roads and drunk dogs don't mix.

- People have sprayed or dusted slugs with lots of compounds, none of them registered for this act. Favorites seem to be dry salt and ammonia solutions. For me, a quick hoe is easier but to each their own.
- Diatomaceous earth and physical barriers are not very effective.
- Chickens and ducks work well until your seedlings and transplants start to grow. Then the bird plant damage often becomes more than desirable.

Name that weed!

A quick glance at the vegetable garden and landscape beds will demonstrate that our rather intense winter to date may slow some weed germination a bit but it will recover quickly as temperatures return to normal. Most of these weeds are loosely classed as "winter annuals." The name indicates that they are quite comfortable growing in the cool and dimly lit months now with us. Less competition equals freedom for these plants. Some of the most common species are chickweed, little bitter cress, red dead nettle (not a nettle at all but a

usually learn accurate names for the weeds (and other plants) in their garden. Once you can properly identify a plant, you can learn about its life cycle (annual, biennial, or perennial), how it spreads, and get some ideas about its management. So how can you learn to identify weeds? Every gardener should have at least one weed identification book. One I have found helpful for gardeners is Northwest Weeds by Ronald Taylor. I have never met Mr. Taylor nor do I have any knowledge of his publisher, I just think it is a good reference and modestly priced at that. Another helpful approach is to give the weeds that are particularly irritating to you a name that you will remember and associate with that weed. Then, if you look in a book and see "popweed" is little bitter cress or if you bring the "Velcro plant" to the office and I tell you it is Galium or bedstraw, you will have a better memory connection. Learning weeds is not an overwhelming challenge. I think that if you learned forty weeds, you will know most of the ones that cause gardeners here heartburn. And you will amaze your friends with your brilliance! What could be more fun?

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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Little bitter cress, often called popweed or shotweed

plant in the mint family), and groundsel. I get a lot of calls about the cress because it can be so abundant. It is a somewhat flattened weed with a deep emerald leaf color. It will soon start producing white flowers which then lead to seed pods that expel their seeds with a vengeance once they are ripe, hence the common name I often hear of "popweed" or "shotweed." It is helpful for a gardener to ac-

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Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month
on the 1st and 3rd Thursday.
Look for our next issue out March 2.



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