

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Winter Water for the Birds

By Chip Bubl  
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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. The classes will be held on Mondays from 9:00 am - 4:00 pm for about 10 weeks starting on February 5, 2018. Cost of the program is \$95.00 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. Online registration is now available at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/master-gardener-volunteer-program>. We can also send you an application that you can mail or come into our office to sign up.

## A gardener wish list

- Nice gardening gloves, especially those flexible kinds that rose thorns don't penetrate or nice-fitting leather gloves.
- 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.
- Q Knot reusable cable ties are handy for staking tomatoes or trellises. Get them from a local hardware store.
- Manual or electric water timer. This device can be attached to any faucet, and automatically shuts off water after a set amount of time. Get a single or dual model from a hardware store.
- Water bubbler with flow control or other interesting sprinklers.
- Corona Quick Tool Sharpener. A pocket-sized tool for sharpening pruners, shears, blades.
- Floating row covers are lightweight blankets to put over vegetables that help capture warmth and protect plants. May be available from the Extension office in February/March. Call us.
- A Hori Hori Knife is a transplant knife from Japan, that's part trowel and part knife. Also, good for dispatching slugs. It is a great tool.
- Folding pruning saws are necessary for pruning, also handy for camping or backpacking. Fiskers, Barnel, or Corona are good brands.
- LED headlamp is handy tool for gardening or locating slugs at night (if you are so inclined). If you have close neighbors, warn them of your new hobby. Also good for looking for carpenter ant evidence under your house.
- A good Insect, Mushroom, or Weed identification book. Call or email me for

suggestions.

- Support for our Food Bank and other local efforts to help those in need.

## Keeping Christmas trees fresh

This one is simple. It's the water. If you keep your tree from running out of water, it will last for a long time in all but the driest of homes. When you buy your tree, especially if it's from a lot, cut the base at least one inch. Place the tree in warm water immediately and don't ever let the tree go dry. Buy a tree stand with a large water reservoir. In the first few days inside, 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.

## Other topics

It was exceptionally dry and cold earlier this month. Check outdoor containers for moisture and water as needed. Also look at plants under eaves. They can dry out fast. It is worth noting that dry soil in planted containers or under eaves are more likely to show winter cold injury (to both roots and/or tops) than adequately moist ones. That said, you don't want to overwater them, either.

Peach leaf curl shows up in the spring but is controlled in the winter (as in now!). This fungal disease causes new leaves in April to crinkle, redden and often drop off. The spores overwinter on peach bark and twigs. As buds begin to swell in late winter, the spores enter through bud scales. Once inside, they are protected from sprays and are free to infect the tender pre-emergent leaves. Copper sprays, with a spreader sticker added, or lime sulfur should be applied as often as you can get around to it in December through early February. Six sprays are not too many but anything will help. There are a few resistant varieties including *Frost* and *Charlotte* that do fairly well, especially if planted in a location with good air circulation.

## Winter water for the birds

A lot of us feed birds in the winter. Yet how many of us think to provide those birds with water? As easy sources of water freeze in cold weather, birds may have trouble finding the water they need. Birds use the water not only for drinking and bathing, but as a source of water-borne foods such as insects and algae.

Bird lovers can help by provid-

ing shallow puddles or bird baths. The containers should be from one to three inches deep, preferably with gentle sloping sides. The surface of the bath should be rough so the birds can get sure footing.

Place flat rocks at water's edge to allow birds a place to rest or drink from. Make sure cats cannot reach the watering area.

Keep water unfrozen by adding warm water as needed. There are even some birdbath heaters available at specialty stores. Hummingbird feeders can be brought in at night and taken out early the next morning if temperatures are below freezing.

*Adapted from an article by Dan Edge, former Department Chair, OSU Fish and Wildlife*

## Many Extension publications available online

Are you putting up salsa, saving seeds, or thinking about planting grapes? 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.

**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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