

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Transplanting Landscape Plants

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## Oregon Season Tracker Program in Vernonia, March 20

From the February fake-out to the February freeze, no doubt the weather is something we've all been watching lately. Daffodils covered in snow, trees beginning to flower only to have the temperatures plunge. Do you enjoy keeping track of the weather, and how plants respond to it? Then consider becoming an Oregon Season Tracker (OST) citizen science volunteer, and make your observations count. This OSU Extension program connects local community volunteers with OSU researchers studying weather and ecology. OST volunteers collect local data on rainfall, snowfall, and native plant seasonal changes from their backyards, farms, woodlands, or schoolyards and report their data online.

Hybrid class with an online training plus classroom session at the Vernonia Library on March 20, 6:00-8:00 pm, for skill building and Q&A. The training costs \$40 and includes the program-approved rain gauge. To sign up, call the OSU Extension office at (503) 397-3462. Learn more about OST at <http://oregonseasontracker.forestry.oregonstate.edu>.

## Introduction to Beekeeping class

Saturday, March 17, 10:00 am-4:00 pm at the Extension office in St. Helens. \$25. Bring a sack lunch. Pre-registration is preferred. Call the Extension office (503) 397-3462 for details.

## Row covers still available

We still have some 12'x50 foot pieces (\$30/piece) and 12'x25 foot pieces for sale (\$15). Call our office (503) 397-3462 if you are interested in them. They warm the environment around plants so they grow faster and can keep insects off your chard, broccoli, and other crops. They are reusable.

## Transplanting landscape plants

Poor planting techniques doom many landscape plants. Most plants that perish do so because they are set into poorly drained soil or have circling roots that haven't been loosened before planting.

The housing boom in Columbia County placed a lot of homes on heavy clay soils. Often what little topsoil there was disappeared in construction and all that is left is the sub-soil, sometimes with a thin veneer of topsoil brought back. These soils present some real challenges for the do-it-yourself or professional landscaper.

Many trees and shrubs are now

grown in containers. Container soil is mainly bark and peat moss. This is a highly aerated medium in which the roots develop. That plant, when stuck in a hole dug into clay, begins to suffocate. Each watering or rain fills that hole with water and the small pore spaces of clay keep water around the roots for extended periods of time. Think swimming pool - not much oxygen there. Plant roots won't function without oxygen, so the plant may begin to wilt and turn off-color. You water it more because it is wilting. You just made the problem worse. Some of our high oxygen-requiring plants like rhododendrons can die in less than four months. Other plants may take a little longer and some more tolerant plants will limp along, alive but not thriving.

Are there solutions? On some of the worst soils, you really only have three choices. First, you can build soil berms for trees and shrubs that provide rooting opportunities above the water table. These should be quite wide and at least two feet high with gently sloped contours. Second, you can install drain tile throughout your lawn area to carry excess water away faster. Drain tiles need an outlet and need to be installed with a constant drop to that outlet. These can be tough installations for the homeowner to do well. Finally, you can select from the limited list of plants that tolerate heavy soils.

Once you have a suitable area to plant into, you need to take a close look at the plant roots. Look for roots that

tend to circle. Try to pull those roots out so that when the tree or shrub is planted, the roots will move quickly into the surrounding soil. If the roots are woody and circling, you may need to cut them with either lopping shears or even a shovel.

Once you have the roots feathered out, place the plant into the hole. The hole should be at least twice the width of the container and no deeper than the height of the root ball. Backfill the hole and plant so that there is good root/soil contact.

Mulch the surface of the soil to slow weed growth and to keep the surface aerated. Water well the first year, especially in August and September when the soil profile becomes very dry.

## 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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