

# Diggin' in the Dirt: A Love of Redwoods

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## An inordinate love of redwoods

Rod Nastrom has a love affair with trees. He credits that to a childhood spent around logging and lumber mills in the McMinnville area and an early visit to the giant coastal redwoods in northern California. We met recently to talk about the coastal redwoods that he has been planting on his timber and Christmas tree farm in Warren. Some of you in the Vernonia area may have rural property that might be suitable for redwoods.

In 1985, you couldn't buy redwood seedlings, so Rod started his own from 2" tall redwood sprouts he started. He grew them out to 4" tall and then planted. He "guarded those first four trees with my life." Of the original four, one is now 142 inches in circumference or 45 inches in diameter, two are about 96 inches (31 inch diameter), and one is 75 inches (23 inch diameter). Darned impressive for 33 years of growth.

In the mid-1990s, redwood seedlings became more available. Rod now has hundreds of redwoods at all stages growing on his property.

Rod is a careful observer and interpreter of his tree planting efforts. When he got started, there wasn't much written on planting coastal redwoods, no surprise since there weren't any seedlings to plant. Part of his property had been in fields when he purchased it and

he quickly discovered that seedlings planted into weeds in the full sun won't do well, especially if the seedlings were less than a foot tall. In general, he prefers seedlings that are 15-24+ inches tall. The ideal time to plant is early February. He did note that in full-sun, some seedlings turn coppery. But Rod says, "don't give up on them, they aren't dead, and they will turn green." Western red cedar trees have a similar annoying pattern.

Rod has a lot of microclimates on his property. He started his serious redwood planting in a north/south canyon under a canopy of alders. There are a lot of seeps and springs coming out of both sides of the canyon wall. He found that trees planted under a deciduous tree canopy grew much better than trees planted in full sun on higher, open ground. He reasons that the redwood trees are actively photosynthesizing perhaps a month before the alder leaves come out and several months after they drop. They are also getting recycled minerals and nitrogen from the alders. And the trees are somewhat protected from temperature extremes. Trees planted under Douglas fir grow spindly and tall. There is too much shade and he doesn't recommend it.

Rod has never lost a coastal redwood directly to winter weather alone. He does some lower limb pruning when the trees are 4 to 6 inches in diameter but not before. But Rod found that if he prunes off branches of well-established trees within 2-3 months of cold weather, the trees can be killed or have severe die-back. As a consequence, he does pruning in late May to early June. He also discovered that if he prunes out lower limbs all around a tree, there is a good chance that the tree will produce a multiple leaders. This isn't good as it weakens the growth from that point on. So, in a given year, he only prunes one side.

He has found that most redwood trees grow too tall and too fast for the diameter of the trunk. Trees 5 inches or less in diameter can just bend over into a "U" from the excess upper canopy weight of a snow or ice load. But they don't snap. Rod has pulled some back upright and tried to stabilize them but it isn't easy and he doesn't recommend it. But the remarkable redwood will send up a new leader at the top of the "U" and the tree will continue and thrive as if nothing happened. There will just be this odd,

U-shaped buttress on the tree that will eventually die or be pruned.

Rod learned that deer and elk don't browse redwoods but they antler rub them. They can kill a redwood two inches or less in diameter above where they rub, but redwoods, unlike most conifers, can re-sprout and create a new leader ("if the roots are alive, the tree is alive"). He protects his seedlings with wire cages until the tree trunks are 4 inches in diameter. After that, rubbing won't kill the tree.

Rod has seen swarms of squirrels of various types descend on his trees, pulling off bark and, in some cases eating the cambium layer. Sometimes squirrels appear to be harvesting the bark for nests. Small trees can be killed but once they get to a certain age, the bark-stripping doesn't really hurt them.

It has been a great pleasure to get to know Rod and watch the trees grow. Besides redwoods his farm has different species of conifer Christmas trees. His native trees include Douglas fir, big leaf maple, western red cedar, cascara, alder, and serviceberry. But there are a number of other trees. His English oaks (from acorns carried back from England) produce prodigious quantities of acorns that the jays and the squirrels are planting everywhere. Same with the European chestnut, a few of which were growing on the farm when he bought it. Now there are many more, planted by wildlife, cared for by Rod and Sandy. The tree farm has approximately 100 different conifer and deciduous trees in total. This is real forest diversity. One year his farm was the site for the Oregon Truffle Society's annual fall truffle hunt. It had been a warm moist fall and the truffles were abundant among all the different species that grow there. They returned several years later, in a dry fall, and few truffles were found. Nature, as Rod knows, bats last.

If you are interested in planting redwoods on your land, let me (Extension office number - (503) 397-3462) know. If there is enough interest, it might be possible to get Rod to talk about them in more detail. This column only touches the surface of what he knows.

**Food Safety or Food Preservation Questions? OSU Extension Service Has Answers.**

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You can find free publications at the Columbia County Extension office located at 505 N. Columbia River Highway in St. Helens (across from the Legacy Clinic). If you have questions, phone the office at (503) 397-3462. There is a statewide Extension food preservation hotline that you can reach Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm at 1-800-354-7319. You can download for free all our food preservation publications at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>. An additional great resource is the National Center for home Food Preservation at <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/>.

## Free newsletter (what a deal!)

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 or emailed to you. Call (503) 397-3462 to be put on the list. Alternatively, you can find it on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/> and click on newsletters.

**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.**

## Contact information for the Extension office

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