

Diggin' in the Dirt: Where The Wild Things Are

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Master Gardener™ class signups being taken for 2019 class in St. Helens

The OSU Extension office in Columbia County will be offering the Master Gardener™ training again this spring. This year, we are trying a new schedule that allows people that work to attend. The classes will be held on Mondays from 6:00 - 9:00 pm and on Saturday from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm for about 10 weeks starting on February 4, 2019 at the Extension office in St. Helens. Cost of the program is \$100 which includes a large resource book. Some scholarships are available. 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 <https://tinyurl.com/ColumbiaMG2019>. We can also send you an application and you can come into our office to sign up.

Bee class Monday, November 19 in St. Helens: The event will be at the OSU Extension office in St. Helens at 6:30 pm. Speakers will present new research gleaned from the recent Oregon State Beekeepers Association Fall Conference. It will include the latest research on honeybee health: nutrition, pathogens, and pests such as Varroa mites. All this information is useful to both the backyard beekeeper and commercial beekeeper. The class is free and open to all.

Where the wild things are
I have received an extraordinary number of calls about bear and cougar this fall from locations throughout Columbia County. Do these calls represent a dramatic increase in both species? That is less clear. There are several factors that might be in play. First, the dry weather this summer altered the behavior of many animals and birds as they sought water and food. This could have moved both cougar and their prey (mostly deer) to locations closer to houses or at least in a different pattern

than in the past. Extensive logging currently taking place in Columbia County may have had a similar effect.

Bear were lured closer to houses and farms by the tremendous apple crop this year. Their prints are shown with the smaller prints the front paws.

Another factor in the calls may have been the number of people that have installed trail cameras. They are now seeing what may have been there for a very long time. Finally, the speed of social media in pushing out information may also contribute to the perception (or reality) of higher bear and cougar numbers. From my perspective, I think there are more cougar but I am less sure about bear. There may be more bobcats. Several years ago, my wife and I detoured from Highway 6 to Timber and Vernonia to get home. Walking through the middle of downtown Timber, in midday without an apparent care in the world, was a beautiful bobcat. I don't think he or she was anyone's pet, but I could be wrong.

How hot was it?

Farmers use "heat units" also known as "growing degree days" to assess when a crop will be ready to harvest or when a particular insect pest might appear. Winegrowers use this information to determine which varieties to plant. If you are interested in taking your own measurements, I can tell you how it is done (it is really simple). So, without further ado, here are the heat unit numbers for the last six years for St. Helens, Clatskanie, Rainier, and Vernonia using, for the plant nerds, a base 50 degrees F.



	Year	St. Helens	Clatskanie	Rainier	Vernonia
	2018	2614	2317	2497	2196
	2017	2357	2014	2341	1955
	2016	2326	2027	2347	1972
	2015	2596	2259	2612	2171
	2014	2549	2122	2581	2122
	2013	2246	1902	2267	1822

You can see that, for Vernonia, St. Helens, and Clatskanie, it was the hottest growing season (April 1 - October 31) in the last six years. Rainier was the anomaly, being slightly cooler than the 2014 and 2015 seasons. The gardening results? An excellent tomato season (albeit with some blossom end rot issues), lettuce that got bitter faster, great

fruit set in the spring, fantastic wine in the Willamette Valley, high water bills, and some tree loss due to excessively dry soils.

The average for St. Helens in this six year period was 2446. The average for the previous five year period was about 2200. The average for Vernonia in this six year period was 2040.

Fall topics

Mushrooms in lawns or pastures are quite common since the rains began. Mushrooms are fruiting bodies from the large mat of fungi in the ground that is the real "mushroom." It is impossible, and thus a waste of time and money, to try to control these fungi with chemicals. They generally disappear as the weather gets colder. Some of the fungi that produce mushrooms have beneficial relationships with trees in your yard. That is why the same types appear in the same place year after year. Other fungi turn undecomposed organic matter into compost, thus recycling nutrients. While most mushrooms are not toxic, there are some that are. If you have a dog that "will eat anything," you might want to keep the pooch out of the yard until the mushroom show is over. Alternatively, you can periodically mow the mushrooms into tiny bits. Same caution goes for young children and their desire to forage in lawns.

Winterizing equipment should be done now to reduce problems next spring. If you have a pump that you only use for irrigation, get that system drained and turned off. At the same time, drain and store hoses and other watering equipment. Clean power equipment and fill gas tank with fuel with a "stabilizer" added to it. Clean gutters and downspouts. Sharpen pruning tools for the work ahead.

Sort and store seeds left over from this (or past) gardening years. Some seeds have a fairly long storage life (cabbage family, squash, beans, peas, and corn) if stored cool and dry. Others like onions are rarely good past one year. Tomatoes and peppers are somewhat in between. It is worth noting that the capacity of a seed to germinate is not the same as its ability as a seedling to grow vigorously. Seed vigor declines faster than seed germination rate. I have found seed stores well in a frost-free

freezer in an airtight container.

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

Are you planning to preserve food from your garden, from a farm, or caught in the wild? If so, call or visit the OSU Extension Service office **before** you start canning, freezing, or drying. Costly and potentially harmful mistakes can be made by using outdated canning recipes and instructions. We can also test the accuracy of your pressure gauge. You can drop your canner lid with gauge off and pick it up later in the day. Sometimes it might be possible to have it tested on the spot. An inaccurate gauge can lead to canning at a lower than recommended pressure which could lead to serious food poisoning concerns.

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. You can download for free all our food preservation publications at <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/mfp/publications>. 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.

Extension Office Contact Information

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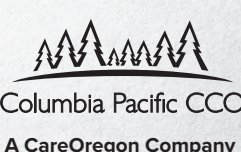


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