

Diggin' In The Dirt: Now is the Time to Plan New Asparagus Beds

By Chip Bubl
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Extension Service - Columbia County

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.

Beginning Beekeeper workshop

This all-day class will be held at the OSU Extension office on Saturday, January 26 from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. Bring a sack lunch. Cost is \$35. Both novice and experienced beekeepers will benefit from the class but it is designed for beginners. For more information or to register, call Sonia Reagan at the Extension office (503) 397-3462 or email her at Sonia.Reagan@oregonstate.edu. Class size will be limited by space.

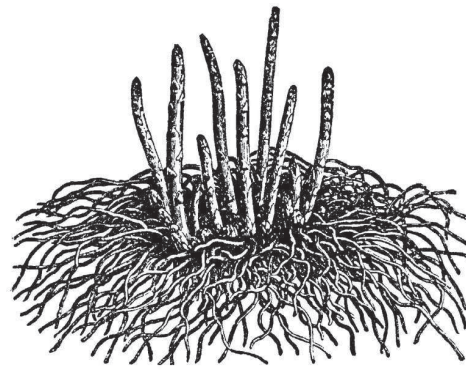
Planting new asparagus beds

This is the month to plan an asparagus bed. Asparagus is a wonderful perennial vegetable that will live for years if planted in a good location. And the flavor of very fresh asparagus is superb – far better than anything from a store.

What constitutes a good location? Sun and drainage are the key elements. On the heavy soils found in parts of Columbia County (almost anywhere not near the Columbia River) digging a trench and planting the asparagus in it simply doesn't work. The months of water saturation are sufficient to rot the roots and crowns. Asparagus will prosper if you construct a raised bed, amend the soil with lime and good compost or rotted manure, and plant the "crowns" so that the "buds" are 3-4 inches below the soil in the bed.

On sandier soils, it is possible to excavate a modest trench (say 6-8

inches deep), add a little lime and some rotted manure, and put the crowns in.



Asparagus can be started from both seeds and crowns. Seeds are cheaper but have several disadvantages. First, you delay harvest by several years. Second, with seed you get both male and female plants. The female plants (being the good mothers they are) produce seeds that reduce the number of spears that crowns produces. Consider buying all-male crowns of varieties like *Jersey Knight*, *Jersey Supreme*, *Pacific Purple*, and *Millennium*.



A rule of thumb is to plant 10-12 crowns per person. Crowns need to be spaced about 12-inches at planting.

A new bed generally is not harvested much during the first season to allow the roots to build up some reserves. A light harvest can be taken from the spears produced in the middle of the first growing season.

Asparagus bed care is rather simple. Cut down any brown fronds that you left at the end of the growing season to replenish the roots. Keep the bed weeded. Fertilize with compost, rotted manure and/or other organic or conventional materials. Lightly mulch the bed in the winter/spring with leaves or compost. Irrigate in the summer and enjoy the crop.

Honeybees shift gears

Queen bees are queen bees and that is how they stay. But worker bees start out as bee nurses, tending the brood within the hive. Then, as they age, they become forager bees, retrieving pollen and nectar. Scientists are interested in the genetics of behavior and look for models that might explain how it happens. The underlying notion is that there are "epigenetic" factors that sit on specific DNA segments and influence the activity (or lack thereof) of specific genes. Since worker bees change behaviors from nurses to foragers without changing their genes, they offered an ideal test model.

First, research showed that, indeed, there was a "methylation" pattern (the "on-off switch") difference between nurses and foragers (on 155 genes). But more interesting was that if they took all the nurse bees out of the hive when the foragers were out harvesting nectar, the returning foragers noticed the nurse bees were gone and a portion of the foragers changed their methylation pattern back to the nurse bee profile and started tending brood.

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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OSU Extension Service - Columbia County

Beginning Beekeeping Workshop

Presented by: The Columbia County Beekeepers

Topics to include Honeybee and Beekeeping History, Bee Biology, Equipment, What to Know in the First Year, and Diseases. Resources provided.

Instructors, Steve Gomes and Linda Zahl are in the Oregon Master Beekeeping Program and Oregon Bee Atlas. DeeAnn Herschbach, Paul Vincent, and Ron McLaughlin all live locally and have completed their first year of beekeeping, bringing with them the wisdom of knowing what the "beginner" needs to know to be successful.

Sat. JANUARY 26, 2019 9am-3pm
Extension Service Conference Room, 505 North Columbia River Hwy, St. Helens, OR 97051
Space is limited, please call 503-397-3462 to register. \$35, cash or check, payable at the door

Accommodations for disabilities may be made by contacting Sonia at 503-397-3462 or Sonia.Reagan@oregonstate.edu

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