

Diggin' in The Dirt: What Are Those Large Holes?

By **Chip Bubl**
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Extension Service - Columbia County

Upcoming program:

Hunt to Home: Game Processing
Saturday, September 21, 9:00 am - 1:00 pm at Columbia Soil & Water Conservation District office at Millard Road in St. Helens. \$40. Are you a novice or seasoned hunter looking to improve your butchering and processing skills? Class includes hands-on butchery instruction, freezer wrapping, and a pressure canning demonstration. Preregister. (503) 397-3462

Got food preservation questions? Give us a call at (503) 397-3462. Food Preservation recipes and fact sheets can be accessed online at: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/food/preservation>.

What are those large holes?

One day, you notice some large holes in the ground that weren't there before. You see nothing coming out of

them or going in. But it isn't comforting. So, what might be making these holes? There are several possibilities, two more likely than the others.

Rats make holes that are 2.5 to 4 inches wide. The holes generally connect to a modest tunnel system (sometimes old mole runs are used) or end under a protective concrete slab. Rats need three things in life: food, water, and shelter. But these items don't need to be on the same property. Since rats are active at night, you might never see them. I advise my clients to look carefully for food sources, first on your property and then to adjacent properties. Rat project success often involves good neighborhood communication. Compost piles with fruit and vegetable waste and bird feeders are often their dinner table.



When food is removed, rats may leave on their own. If not, trapping or baiting are really the only options and you have to be so careful not to injure wildlife, humans, or pets. Call me for more information on how to do either or both safely.

The next possibility is ground squirrels. These squirrels live in the ground though they can climb trees. But tree climbing is not generally how they find food which includes succulent vegetation, fruit, seeds, insects, carrion, and other odd things.

Their populations have increased dramatically over the last 15 years. They make holes similar in size and location as rats. You may see them, if you observe stealthily, going in and out of the holes during the day. Their tunnels are more extensive than rats and have been known to undermine house supports and especially concrete blocks that hold deck posts. This is a native species (unlike the rat) and used to be common in Columbia County. But since they can affect crops, farmers (with the help of the Extension office from the 1940s to the late 60s) baited them aggressively and knocked the population back to almost nothing. For the first 15 years I was here, I rarely saw them. But they are back with a vengeance. Their main control now are coyotes. For homeowners, control measures are basically the same as for rats, i.e. appropriate baits and traps with proper safety measures.

Two other possibilities are rabbits and mountain beaver. Rabbits seem to be increasing and do make holes but the holes are commonly hidden in dense brush. But they will push their way into sheds with gravel floors and in other places that seem surprising. Mountain beaver (also known as "boomers" and they are not true beavers) are only found on properties nestled next to forests. But in Vernonia country, that is common. More on mountain beaver next month.

Renew your landscape

Fall is an excellent time to review the performance of your plants and decide if you have the right plants in the right places. It is not unusual to find out the plant that should have only grown two feet tall and just as wide has sprawled into a four foot presence, dom-

inating its location. Is there a better place for it or is this simply a mistake that has to be dealt with permanently? Don't be afraid to throw away plants that have outlived their usefulness.

As landscapes mature, the sun and shade relationships change. Trees cast shadows that weren't there earlier. That lilac that once bloomed abundantly is now getting only four hours of sun and simply cannot put on the same show. The lilac, the tree, or lots of tree limbs have to go.

Plants that seem weak and/or diseased should be looked at with a critical eye. Are they in the right place or is the location stressful? Are they just disease prone?

It is possible to improve the landscape just by some artful rearrangements. Fall is a great time to transplant woody or herbaceous perennial plants. While the weather is still dry, pick out new locations and work up the soil, adding compost and other amendments. Wait to transplant until deciduous plants have lost their leaves or, with rhododendrons and other evergreen plants, until the days are cool and moist. You can keep the transplant locations covered with plastic until you are ready to use them.

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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Columbia County Special Election, November 5, 2019

A Special Election will be held November 5, 2019 for all of Columbia County. The content of the election will be exclusively measures referred to the voters. The measures being voted on are:

- 05-275: referred by the City of Scappoose
- 05-276: referred by the Rainier Cemetery District
- 05-277: referred by the Columbia County Board of Commissioners
- 26-206: referred by Sauvie Island Rural Fire Protection District.

Approximately 39,000 ballots will be mailed to all active registered voters in Columbia County. Each ballot's content is tailored to the voter's residential address. The main mailing of ballots for Columbia County will begin October 16. Overseas and out-of-state ballots will be mailed at an earlier date.

Verify registration/absentee voting. The last day for a new voter to register to vote in this election is October 15. Residents that will be out of state may request absentee ballots by either:

- Submitting an Absentee Ballot Request Form to the County Elections Department.
- Updating the voter's registration information. Voters can review and update their registration information at www.oregonvotes.gov by clicking the "My Vote" tab.

• Contacting Columbia County Elections via email (elections@co.columbia.or.us).
Returning voted ballots. Ballots must be received by the County Clerk no later than 8:00 pm on November 5 - postmarks do not count. It is advised that if you cannot put your ballot in the mail before October 31, you should plan on returning your ballot to a dropsite.

Drop sites for this election will be as follows:

Columbia County Court House Elections Department

230 Strand, St. Helens
24-hr Drive-up Drop: Lower parking lot
Clatskanie Library
11 Lillich St

Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD

12525 Hwy 202

Rainier City Hall

106 B St West
Vernonia Public Library
701 Weed Ave

Scappoose City Hall

24-hour Drop Box
33568 E. Columbia Ave
Public Certification Test. The Public Certification Test of the tabulating equipment for the Special Election will be held on Tuesday, October 29. The testing will begin at 10:00 am in the County Elections Dept. The public is welcome to attend.



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