

Diggin' in The Dirt: Our Perennial Vegetables

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Service - Columbia County

Columbia County Small Woodlands Association Annual Tree Sale

On Saturday, March 14, the Columbia County Small Woodlands Association will hold its 22nd annual tree sale. The sale begins at 8:30 am at the Lawrence Oil (Pacific Pride) parking lot at 845 N Columbia River Hwy in St. Helens on Highway 30. 22 different species of deciduous and conifer trees will be available for purchase. Prices range from \$1.50 to \$6. They will also have bags of Douglas fir, noble fir, western red cedar, and coast redwood available for purchase. Cash and checks will be accepted for payment. As always, buyers are advised to come early for best selection.

The selections for this sale are mostly bare root with ornamental trees being selected for colorful fall foliage, flowers, and/or fragrance. Species include the following: elite Douglas fir, noble fir, western red cedar, coast redwood, incense cedar, western hemlock, giant sequoia, mimosa, grand fir,



ponderosa valley pine, giant dogwood, Japanese snowbell, Korean fir, red Japanese maple, black gum, European beach, Shantung maple, katsura tree, purple lilac, river birch, Japanese zelkova, and twinberry honeysuckle. Many of the species are small and desirable for small properties.

Columbia County Small Woodlands Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to responsible forest stewardship and clean water. Over the past 22 years, the association has provided well over a million seedlings most of which have been planted within the county, to members and the public. The organization has a number of activities throughout the year such as a summer tree farm tour, dinner meetings, guest speakers, panels, and clinics on forestry issues. For additional information on the sale contact Lynn Baker at (503) 708-9066.

Our perennial vegetables

Rhubarb and asparagus do well in Columbia County. Asparagus is more than a bit touchy about location. It needs full sun and well-drained soil. Asparagus is generally started from purchased "crowns" but can be grown from seed if you have the patience to let the seeds develop into good, productive crowns over 2-3 years. I have found on our clay soils, the recommendation in books to plant the crowns 12 inches deep in a trench is the kiss of death. On the heavier soils, don't place them deeper than six inches. Often, making a raised bed on the soil surface and covering the crowns with lighter soil is the best approach. As-



paragus have two beetle pests that are sporadic in their appearance. Slugs like to chew the emerging shoots so baiting ahead of their emergence is important. Fertilize in the spring before shoot emergence and keep the weed pressure, especially quack and other grasses down. Manure used in the fall may be able to substitute for most of the spring fertilizer. Don't eat the shoots from first year crowns but let them develop into tall, fern-like plants that you can leave until they turn brown. These aid the development of the young crown.

Rhubarb is planted exclusively with root and crown pieces divided from an established plant. While rhubarb does best in full sun, it is somewhat shade tolerant and can be a fairly attractive landscape plant. Don't harvest the stems/leaves the planting year and always leave a few vigorous shoots and leaves to feed the developing crown in subsequent years. Fertilize several times, starting about now, then again while the plant is actively growing, and finally once after the first harvest. Covering your rhubarb plants in the late fall with a healthy top-dressing of barn manure can replace your first fertilizing in the spring.

If you keep rhubarb watered, it will produce a second flush of stems and leaves which you can harvest most but not all. In some unusual years, you might even get a third flush of growth but leave that for the plant. For those of you who are new to rhubarb, **only** eat the stem of the leaf, not the leaf itself as it is toxic. Deer don't tend to eat it but it isn't deer-proof. There are a few rhubarb diseases and insect pests but I

rarely see them in home gardens. Rhubarb can surprise you by flowering periodically on an established plant. Just remove the floral stalk when it appears to make sure the root and crown get all the sugars the leaves are making.

Rhubarb is quite acidic and needs a fair amount of sugar to reveal the true taste hidden by the acid "bite." Rhubarb stalks will keep their quality refrigerated in plastic bags for several weeks. Stalks can also be cut into 1-2 inch pieces and then quick frozen and stored in freezer containers for later use. Rhubarb is hot in the culinary world right now. What you may not know is Oregon and Washington produce the bulk of the rhubarb sold in the United States. Most Oregon rhubarb comes from around Canby and North Plains. Washington "forces" a lot of rhubarb in greenhouses to get the highest price for the first rhubarb of the year.

Rhubarb is native to China and also has a long history of medicinal uses, though the root is the usual part used. It can also have some adverse health outcomes so don't dive into rhubarb self-treatment without consulting your physician.

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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