

# Diggin' in the Dirt: Meet Our New County Extension Forester

By Chip Bubl  
Oregon State University  
Extension Service – Columbia County

*The OSU Extension Office is fully reopened. The best way to reach me directly is with the email below but calls are always welcome.*

**Master Gardener™ class signups being taken for 2022-23 class in St. Helens**

The OSU Extension office in Columbia County will be offering the Master Gardener™ training starting this fall at the OSU Extension office in St. Helens. This year, we are trying a new schedule that allows people that work to attend. The classes will be held on alternate Saturdays from 9:00 am-noon starting on September 10 through Thanksgiving. Then there will be a winter break. The classes will start again in early February and go through the end of April. Cost of the program is \$100 which includes a large resource book. Some scholarships are available. OSU Master Gardeners™ are responsible for providing volunteer gardening education to the community as partial payback for the training. If you might be interested in the program, call the Extension office at 503-397-3462 for more details.

**Meet Alex Gorman, our new OSU/Columbia County Extension Forester**

Alex Gorman started work in the Columbia County office on June 30, 2022. His educational and research assignment covers three counties, Columbia, Washington, and Yamhill counties but he is housed in our Extension office in St. Helens. Those of you that have woodlands will find him very knowledgeable. Here is a brief Alex Bio.

*I grew up in Northern California, where I spent my childhood among the wildland urban interface and the forests of the Sierra Nevada. I received my Bachelor of Science in Forestry from California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, where I focused on the interface between forest health and active forest management in Douglas-fir and redwood forests.*

*After Cal Poly Humboldt, I worked for Green Diamond Resource Company (GDRC), where my main role was to manage crews as they carried out active forest management practices in the form of vegetation management, burning, and planting. Afterwards, I went to work for Foothill Ho-*

*rizons Outdoor School in the Central Sierra Nevada.*

*I recently earned my Master of Science degree from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, in the Natural Resources Science and Management Program. My thesis research focused on the role that eastern spruce dwarf mistletoe plays in forest regeneration and management of black spruce, as well as the influence fungal root pathogens have on aboveground disturbance agents. My thesis was part of a collaborative and multidisciplinary research group looking at the intersection of forest biology, management, health, and socioeconomic outcomes related to forest health phenomena.*

*I look forward to serving Columbia, Washington, and Yamhill counties as the new Extension Forester. Please feel free to contact me with any questions by email at alexander.gorman@oregonstate.edu, or by phone at 209-565-9543 or the office phone at 503-397-3462.*

**“Weediness” and forest, riparian, and home landscapes**

What is a weed? A glib response is that it is a plant out of place. But that doesn't get close to what really makes a weed, a weed. One person described weeds as having an “innate disposition to GET into the wrong place” and, I might add, multiply. Most of our weeds are not native. Good examples in Columbia County include Scotch broom, English Ivy, and Armenian (formerly Himalayan) blackberry. Most of these plants aren't seen as weeds in their native landscape.

What unites them is that they are from landscapes and climates similar to ours. In their place of origin, there are living organisms including herbivores (mammals that eat plants), diseases, insects, and competitive plants that keep them in check where they came from. But those competitors are largely absent here. We often look in their botanical home to find insects and sometimes diseases that could control the challenging weeds if they were to be introduced. That is a good approach but not without some risk. A lot of research has to be done before the introduction.

Our **non-industrial** forests are facing several serious



plants. The worst seems to be English ivy which is spreading on a remorseless march to cover much of western Oregon forests if not controlled. Other species of concern include Herb Robert (it is a fungal disrupter) and English holly.

One positive note is that persistent control efforts targeted to weedy shrubs and vines can bring back the native understory. I have seen it on north-west Oregon English ivy “monoculture” sites and read positive outcomes in research reports from East coast ivy

management in deciduous forests. One conclusion is a bit daunting, though. It took seven years of continuous ivy removal to engender an understory that recovered enough and then was resilient enough to hold its own against the invaders. But there is hope.

Unfortunately, climate change may turn some **native** plants into thugs of the first order. That may now be what is going on in England with, surprise, surprise, English ivy. There are roaring battles over the role that English ivy should play there and when it needs to be controlled to save other valuable native plant communities. Ironically, English deer eat English ivy (our deer abhor it) but maybe they are getting overwhelmed.

I welcome all weed questions from home, woodland, and farm clientele. It is a significant part of my Extension work in Columbia County.

**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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