Extension agent has many tips for winter

by Charles E. Bubl
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Test soil

Winter is the traditional time for gardeners to plan ahead for spring planting. Testing the soil for its nutrient content is an important consideration that can best be done in the winter, according to Chip Bubl, Columbia County Extension agent.

A soil test is a laboratory chemical analysis of soil that determines the supply of available nutrients such as phosphorus, potassium, and calcium, the percent of organic matter, and the soil acidity or alkalinity.

A soil test can help gardeners overcome nutrient shortages or excesses in their soil. For example, many garden soil samples show that gardeners tend to apply too much phosphorus and potassium and not enough calcium, Bubl observed.

When nutrient imbalances exist, applying a complete fertilizer can be costly and frustrating because the garden is not likely to produce up to its potential.

Soil tests are also valuable if there were problems in a garden that couldn't be attributed to some other cause, or if a plot is being gardened for the first time.

To obtain a soil test, contact your county Extension office and ask for a soil testing kit. The kit includes directions on how to collect a soil sample and other necessary information. A standard soil test costs $5.

About a month after sending the soil sample to OSU Soil Testing Lab, the results of the analysis are sent to the county Extension agent, who interprets them and mails recommendations for a soil fertilizing program directly to the home gardener. "With a soil analysis as a guide, home gardeners have a better chance of growing a productive garden and using fertilizer efficiently," SAYS Bubl.

Some vegetables grown in the home garden are known as "cool season crops."

"The term refers to vegetables grown in cooler weather which other garden crops such as corn and beans will not tolerate," says Chip Bubl, Columbia County Extension agent.

Not only do cool season crops survive in cold weather, many of them actually grow best under relatively cool temperatures (50 to 65 degrees F). With some, the quality is reduced by the summer heat.

Cool season crops grown in Oregon include bruccoli, cabbage, lettuce, onions, peas, potatoes, spinach, and turnips. Others are beets, carrots, chard, parsnips and radishes.

Naturally, cool season crops are usually the first to be planted in the home garden. However, specific planting dates vary from vegetable to vegetable and on the local growing seasons in different parts of Oregon.

Bubl gives the following advice on some of the more popular cool season vegetables.

Peas. Among the earliest to be planted of all the cool season crops. They should be planted as soon as the soil can be worked in most parts of the state. Plant seed directly in their permanent row. Young plants do not transplant well. Peas are sensitive to summer heat and many varieties are susceptible to virus disorders spread by aphids and other spring insects. Early plantings usually do best.

Onions. Plant from seeds, transplants or sets. Onion sets can go in as soon as the soil is workable. Sets can be grown in flower pots in the house if the garden remains too sloppy.

Lettuce. Grown from transplants, but cheaper to grow from seed. Early plantings tend to excape the ravages of insect infestations that can quickly destroy summer plantings.

"Home and Farm Vegetable Garden" EC 871, an OSU Extension publication contains more specific information on all garden vegetables, including varieties and planting dates for the different growing conditions throughout the state.

EC 871 is available free from the Columbia County Extension Office, Courthouse, St. Helens, OR 97051

Apple scab

Apple scab, a common disease in home apple orchards, can be controlled by a series of four fungicide sprays beginning in February.

"Apple scab causes brown, scabby blotches on the surface of apples," says Chip Bubl, Columbia County Extension agent.

Often these scaly, crusty areas become cracked. When the spots overlap, the cracking may be severe. Although the scab results in unattractive fruit, the apples are safe for eating.

In addition to apple trees, the disease also attacks flowering apples.

In the spring, the disease first appears on the blossoms and leaves as olive-green spots with uneven feathery margins. The spots on the leaves turn brown-black, become raised and take on a velvety appearance.

On the fruit, scab spots appear as rough, dark green areas on the end or side of the apple and eventually cause it to be misshapen and dwarfed. The spots later turn brown and develop cracks.

"Apple scab spreads quickly from early infections to other leaves and young fruits, causing both leaves and fruits to drop," says Bubl.

Scab continues to spread through the growing season whenever moisture is present from rains, irrigation or dew.

Because scab is spread so easily, the best method of control is by the application of fungicides. Several sprays are necessary because the leaves and fruit are continually enlarging, and within a few days of a spray application new leaf and fruit tissue appear which need protection.

Good results can be obtained by using the following spray schedule:

1. Dormant spray. In the early spring just before the buds open—usually the middle to end of February—spray the tree throughly with lime sulfur mixed at dormant strength as indicated on the label.

2. Pink stage spray. When the blossom buds show pink (just before the blossom opens), spray with lime sulfur mixed at a rate of one-half cup per gallon of water.

3. Petal fall spray. When most blossom petals have fallen, spray with a wettable sulfur powder mixed at a rate of six tablespoons per gallon of water.

4. Three weeks after petal fall spray. Repeat petal fall spray. Through spraying is essential, Bubl advises. Be sure all parts of the tree—limbs, branches, twigs, leaves and fruits—are covered.

The amount of spray required will vary, according to the size of the tree and amount of foliage. An 8 year old dormant apple tree will require approximately one and one-half gallons of spray. The same tree in full foliage may need 3 gallons of spray.

Be careful when using lime sulfur, Bubl advises. It will discolor paint on houses and other buildings. Use a large piece of cardboard, canvas, or other sheeting to prevent the lime sulfur spray or spray drift from getting on nearby painted buildings.

Prune raspberries

Some wintertime attention to red raspberries will stimulate spring growth and berry production for good eating next summer.

"You want to prevent the individual raspberry plants from growing in a tangled thicket by pruning and training them," says Chip Bubl, Columbia County Extension Agent.

Pruning is done to remove weak canes and the tips of long canes and to help maintain some sort of trellis system. The canes of one-crop varieties are biennial in habit; that is, they grow the first year and make fruit the second year.

The new canes that appeared last