Pamper fuchsias, geraniums and dahlias through winter

BY KYM POKORNY
Special to the Sentinel

Just like perennial plants, some garden questions come up year after year. How to keep geraniums, fuchsias and dahlias from dying over winter is one of them.

"Some plants are what we call tender perennials and are living outside their hardiness zone," said Brooke Edmunds, horticulturist for Oregon State University's Extension Service. "In most places in Oregon that includes geraniums and fuchsias. If we get a cold snap, they'll have problems and most likely die."

To keep that from happening, bring potted plants into shelter for winter, she said. But keep in mind each plant needs different conditions.

Geraniums — more accurately pelargoniums — continue to grow throughout the cold season, albeit slowly. Fuchsias go dormant in cool weather so need less fuss. Dahlias, which are tubers, need even less attention and can be dug up and stored like potatoes.

For geraniums, Edmunds advises moving them into a bright spot in the house or greenhouse where the temperature doesn't get above 70 degrees. They won't tolerate too much moisture on the roots, so leave off watering until they dry out almost completely, about once a month. Fertilizer isn't necessary.

To get geraniums to fit in the space you have available for storage, pruning is OK. Don't, however, get too severe. Be sure to leave some leaves and green stems. Be aware they won't be very attractive as they take a winter break.

The hardiness of fuchsias depends on the cultivar.

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The City of Cottage Grove Urban Forestry Committee currently has three vacancies to this volunteer body. Committee positions are appointed by the City Council. The Urban Forestry Committee meets once a month. People interested in applying for these positions need to complete the Volunteer Appointment Application available at the Library/Community Center or City Hall. The **deadline for submitting applications is 5:00 on Friday November 27th, 2015**. For further information please contact Teresa Cowan, City of Cottage Grove Community Coordinator at 942-1185.

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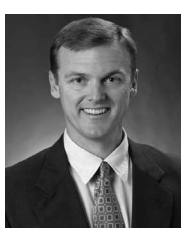
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Tis' the season already for Christmas tree harvest

ODA inspectors help clear the way for Oregon, the nation's top producer of Christmas trees

For one of Oregon's top agricultural commodities, the 2015 holiday season is well underway. Between now and the middle of December, up to 7 million Oregon Christmas trees will be harvested and sold locally, nationally and internationally.

Some of the early trees are already on their way to distant export markets with the bulk of activity just around the corner. It's a very busy time for inspectors with the Oregon Department of Agriculture who issue the necessary certificates that clear the trees for entry into the marketplace.

"We are about a week earlier than last year," says Gary McAninch, manager of ODA's Nursery and Christmas Tree Programs. "We have already inspected and issued certificates for trees going to Hawaii and we are just starting to do the same for trees bound for Mexico."

Oregon remains the nation's top producer of Christmas trees. While those trees can be found in numerous international markets, including many Pacific Rim countries, the U.S. neighbor to the south remains the biggest foreign customer at about 12 percent of Oregon Christmas trees harvested annually. Those trees don't cross the border without the all-important inspection and phytosanitary certificate.

"Our customers don't want to get any dangerous pests or diseases from Christmas trees and we don't want to give them any of those pests and diseases," says McAninch. "So we are required to inspect the trees here in Oregon before they are shipped to other states and countries. That ensures we are meeting the importation requirements."

With as much as 90 percent of Oregon's 530 licensed Christmas tree growers shipping out of state, ODA inspectors will be working seven days a week between now and about the first week of December when harvest and shipping finally ends.

"Other states and countries want to make sure we provide Christmas trees that are clean of insect pests and diseases, and that requires a very good working relationship with the Oregon Department of Agriculture," says Bryan Ostlund, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Growers Association. "ODA inspectors come out and spend considerable time to make sure the trees we ship out of Oregon are what we say they are."

The inspection of Christmas trees actually begins well before the holidays approach. ODA inspectors examine fields in late summer and early fall, looking for potential problems that could put a snag into out-of-state shipments. Receiving countries want to make sure those trees arrive without problems that could become established in their own backyard. In some cases, trees are required to be mechanically shaken to dislodge larger insects as well as dead needles.

ODA inspectors even look at Christmas trees that never leave the state. Growers will often request the expertise of inspectors to identify problems in the field even though there is no requirement for certification of trees that remain in Oregon. It's just another way of upholding the good reputation of high quality Oregon Christmas trees.

An additional challenge this year — at least for the younger trees that won't be harvested for a few more years — was the warm and dry summer.

"The bigger, more mature trees are generally pretty hearty, so when we have a year of extended warm and dry weather during the summer months, those trees handle it fairly well," says Ostlund. "Fortunately, the recent rain is fully hydrating the trees being harvested. We want those trees being shipped out of Oregon to be in the best possible condition. The rain we are currently having is perfect timing."

On the other hand, seedlings that went into the ground to replace the 2014 harvest are small without a lot of water carrying capacity and root systems that are not fully developed. There has been more seedling mortality in 2015 than what has taken place in recent years, which could have a slight impact when that planting is ready for harvest seven to nine years from now.

All in all, it should be a decent year for Oregon Christmas tree growers. In other parts of the United States, production is down, which is directing buyers to look to the Pacific Northwest for ample supplies of trees. Ostlund refers to the shift from a national oversupply of Christmas trees as a right-sizing of supply.

"Buyers have to work a little harder to find the types of trees they want and the sizes they want. That will be reflected in prices going up a bit this year. That may not be the case so much in Oregon, but with our major markets like California — where about 50 percent of Oregon's Christmas trees are sold — there will be a bump in price at the wholesale level for the first time in many years. What that means to the consumer at the retail level remains to be seen."

Ostlund expects the export market to be down somewhat this year since Oregon growers can more easily sell their inventory inside the continental United States. While the bread and butter of Oregon's industry remains the Douglas fir and the noble fir, newer species are increasing in popularity. Nordmann and Turkish firs perform well after harvest in terms of keeping their needles, color and fragrance.

In terms of production value, Christmas trees have annually been a top 10 agricultural commodity in Oregon.

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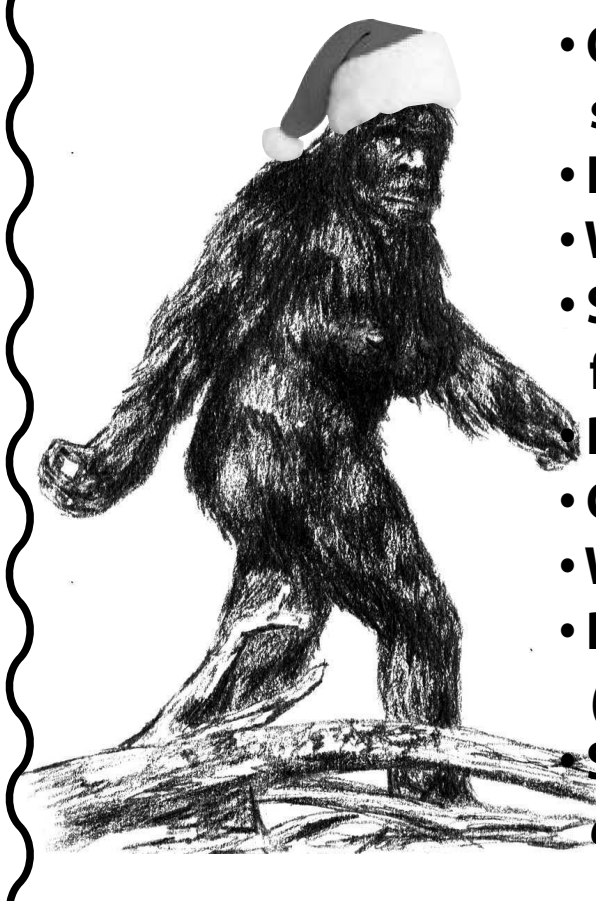
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