

GROW Home, Garden & Outdoors

Local knowledge



The Eagle/Cheryl Hoefler

Where's the onion patch? Local legend says when there's no snow on the onion patch on Strawberry Mountain, it's safe to start planting outdoors.

No snow on onion patch? It's safe to plant

By Cheryl Hoefler
Blue Mountain Eagle

Forget about the calendar or Farmer's Almanac. Some folks in Grant County have their own methods, handed down through the years, for gauging when it's safe to start planting outdoors.

Staff at the Grant County office of Oregon State University Extension shared adages they've received from a few locations in the area:

Long Creek

- When you can stand out in the middle of town and not see any snow on the mountains surrounding the Long Creek Valley.

- When the big tree behind the motel in town starts sprouting leaves.

Prairie City

- When there's no snow on the onion patch – roughly an M-shaped area – on Strawberry Mountain.

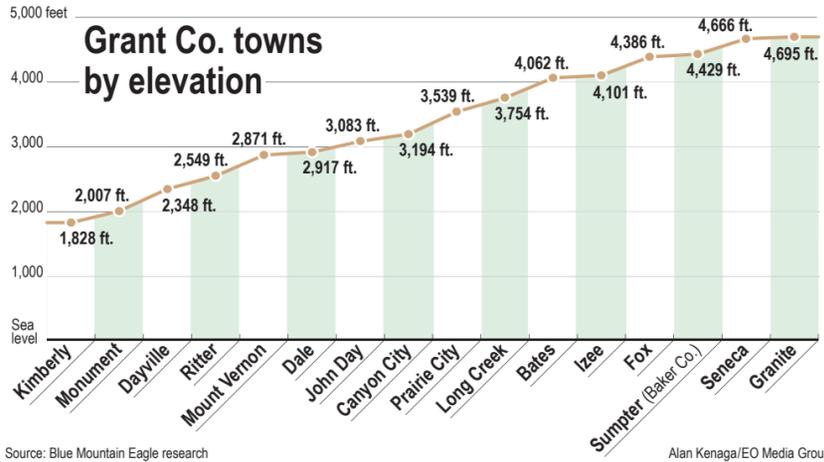
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Elevation matters



Check out the elevations of Grant County communities for a gauge of garden potential — from melon and corn country in Kimberly to frost cloth-required territory in Seneca and Granite.



Source: Blue Mountain Eagle research

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

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BRING on the (mason) BEES!

Species fills needed role as pollinators

By Kym Pokorny
OSU Extension Service

CORVALLIS – Even as the gardening season is young, ma-

son bees come out for their short but productive foray into the blooms of your backyard.

These solitary native bees – most commonly the blue orchard mason bee (*Osmia lignaria*) – get busy before honeybees and set to work on early-flowering plants like forsythia, pieris and especially fruit trees.

“Mason bees fill a spot in the season when other pollinators are not out,” said Brooke Edmunds, a horticulturist with Oregon State University’s Extension Service. “They’re really important for fruit trees, especially in cool, wet areas.”

As honeybees continue to struggle for survival, mason bees take on a bigger role in the backyard garden, according to Edmunds. Both serious and casual gardeners welcome these earnest pollinators to get better yields of fruits, vegetables and flowers.

Mason bees are smaller than honeybees, have a bluish hue and are often mistaken for flies. Rarely do you have to worry

about being stung because these unaggressive bees live alone and have no hive to protect.

Unlike honeybees that fly up to 4 miles to find their preferred food, mason bees don’t go much farther than 300 feet. They move in a zigzag pattern, which makes them especially efficient pollinators for small spaces, according to Edmunds.

The single-minded bees live to bring nectar and pollen back to the nest for their larvae that hatch from eggs laid between walls made of mud – another material the female bees must haul back to the nest. Leaving patches of mud close to nesting areas in trees or other wood will help attract them, Edmunds said.

You can also encourage mason bees by creating a garden that includes plants that bloom during their excursions in spring. Consider plants such as crabapples, redbud, flowering currant, elderberry, huckleberry, Oregon grape and lupine. Even the often-dreaded dandelion is a great source of food.

If you want to introduce the bees rather than wait for them to arrive in the garden, she recommends purchasing a nesting house, which contains straws filled with cocoons that hatch in spring. They’re available online or at garden centers.

Alternately, you can drill holes into a solid piece of untreated wood. Make the holes five-sixteenths of an inch in diameter, six inches deep and three-fourths of an inch apart. Insert paper straws with cocoons inside the holes.

Whatever you end up using, hang houses or containers under eaves or other protected areas where they’ll be protected from wind, rain and sun.

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