

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson



Well, spring is well and truly here! Our typically changeable spring weather is very much in evidence, as we go from sunny and warm to cloudy and damp, sometimes many times a day. I hate to admit it, but very little has happened in my vegetable garden yet this year. Partly, this is because of new knowledge (at least that's what I keep telling myself). Since I've learned that stuff doesn't really grow until the soil warms up,

I have only just planted a few brassicas under hot caps. This is no excuse, however, for not starting greens and stuff indoors.

It seems I have created some confusion about amending soil with a previous article. The key to improving the area where you want to grow a plant is not to create an interface, where soil of one kind (such as potting soil) meets soil of another kind (such as our wonderfully nutritive red clay). I have been known to use the interface to my advantage. By making a sort of "pot" in the ground by digging a hole in the clay, filling it with potting soil and a lovely nursery plant and watering it in. I've used this strategy with moderate success for annuals. The in-ground pot won't dry out as fast as a pot above ground and the water you put on the plant will pretty much stay where you put it. Growth of these flowers has never been what it would have been if planted in fertile, full-of-organic-material loam.

However, this is a terrible way to plant any kind of perennial, shrub or tree. You want these plants to establish themselves and be successful for a long time. This means you need to either create a large area of loose, fertile soil or plant directly in the clay and hope for the best. Certainly there are some things that will survive in the clay, though they will perform better with better soil. In addition to adding organic material, such as compost, improving drainage is usually a good idea.

This year, as I planted the ferns and hostas I ordered this winter, and the two apple trees from the scion sale, I carefully followed the instructions from Master Gardener's class. I dug big holes, forked up the clay in the bottom, added compost and gravel and then used my shovel and fork to stir and mix this together, filling the huge hole back up. Then, in my carefully amended and integrated soil, I dug a hole to the same depth that the plant was grown in at the nursery. Leaving a mound in the center of my hole, I scraped out an area around this mound. Placing my baby carefully on top of the mound, I spread the roots out, making sure they were pointed DOWN (Roots do not grow up!). Then, I back-filled until the soil was at the same level on the plant it was in the nursery. (Yes, I already said that because it's that important.)

This method should allow time for the action of soil organisms to blur the barrier at the edge of your hole and provide a good environment for root growth throughout the life of the plant. A final layer of mulch tops the whole mess off to control weeds and pre-

serve moisture. The last step, and according to our instructor you need to do this even when it's pouring, is to water new plants in so that soil, not an air space, surrounds each and every little rootling. If you've done all this right, the water you pour in should drain through your plant and seat it permanently.

In addition to working on the perennial beds and fruit trees, I'm making a stab at improving the asparagus bed by adding a landscape brick wall on the downhill side. Though I planted two rows in the middle of this bed, on one side the asparagus come up right at the edge of the bed because the soil has disappeared into a dip. I've also gotten pavers to cover the area around the gate into the barnyard because this turns into a soggy, nasty mess in the winter. I've got a narrow window of time in the spring when the soil can be worked before it turns cement-like. In the fall, it just seems to go from super hard to slimy in minutes, so I have to get it done soon.

I almost forgot the pluot story! A couple of years ago I fell in love with this cross between an apricot and a plum and bought a four-variety tree. Pluots are sometimes available in the store, sold as "Dinosaur Eggs." Unfortunately, I've since discovered that the blossoms almost always freeze in the early spring and that my yard doesn't get enough sun-hours per year to ripen much fruit. This year after a class discussion about various methods of adding heat to your garden I decided to cover the tree with floating row cover. So, for the last month I've had this little tree shrouded, trying to remember to take off the cover on warm days. NONE of the blossoms froze, even on dark days I could peek in and see little (I hope) pollinators flying around, and now, most of the blooms are fully open! Part one of a success, now to see if I get the pluots.

Believe it or not, this is the beginning of the second year of these columns. Thank you all for your many kind comments. Keep digging!

Master Gardeners Plant Sale ready for eighth year

The eighth annual Garden Fair and Plant Sale sponsored by the OSU Columbia County Master Gardeners will be on April 24, at the St. Helens High School Commons, 2375 Gable Rd. The fair will be open from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

There will be \$1 tomato plants, educational materials, a cold frame example, a plant clinic, and a raffle.

For more information contact the OSU Extension office at 503-397-3462 or go to <www.mstrgardener.org>.



Church Directory

VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-6790
Sunday Breakfast 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 10:45 a.m.
*B.L.A.S.T. w/Nursery 11:00 a.m.
*Bible Learning and Scripture Training
Youth Group 6 -8:00 p.m.
(Jr. & Sr. High)
Wednesday
Prayer Meeting 7:00 p.m.

GRACE REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

D.J. Dickey, Pastor
Grant & North Streets
Vernonia, 503 429-1919
Sunday Services: Adult Prayer &
Children's Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:15 a.m.
Evening Worship 5:00 p.m.
Evening Service will change to
3:00 p.m. on Sept. 7,2003
Wednesday Service:
All Family Bible Study, 7:00 p.m.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Darwin Harvey, Pastor
662 Jefferson
Vernonia, 503 429-4615
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Evening Worship 6:00 p.m.
Bible Study, Wednesday 7:00 p.m.
Youth & Kids , Thursday 7:00 p.m.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

John Cahill, Pastor
359 "A" Street
Vernonia, 503 429-1161
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Evening Worship
Saturday, 6:00 p.m.

NEHALEM VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH

Gary Taylor, Pastor
500 California Ave
Vernonia, 503 429-5378
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Nursery available
Wednesday Service 7:00 p.m.

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Pastoral Associate Juanita Dennis
960 Missouri Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-8841
Mass Schedule
Sunday 12:00 Noon
Religious Education
Sunday 10:30 a.m.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

Kevin Reiner, Pastor, 543-2254
2nd Ave. and Nehalem St.
Vernonia, 503 429-8301
Sabbath School 9:15 a.m.
Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m.
Prayer Meeting, Wed. 7:00 p.m.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rev. Robert Grafe, Pastor
375 North St. (Vernonia Grange Hall)
Vernonia, 503 429-3700
Sunday Services 10:00 a.m.

VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Jim Kirby, Evangelist
410 North Street
Vernonia, 503 429-6522
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Every Wednesday:
Ladies' Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Ladies' Worship 10:00 a.m.
Children's Choir 3:00 p.m.
Family Bible Study 6:30 p.m.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

850 Madison Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-1103
Sunday Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.
Children's Sunday School

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

Jeff Cheney, Branch President
1350 E. Knott Street
Vernonia, 503 429-7151
Sacrament Meeting, Sunday 10 a.m.
Sunday School & Primary 11:20 a.m.
Relief Society, Priesthood and
Young Women, Sunday 12:10 p.m.

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