

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson



HELP! My squash plants are exploding! I thought that I had been very conservative this year by planting only six hills of squash in a 5x8-ish bed. BUT, this is the most vigorous of any squash I've ever planted, and it's at least three different types of squash. Three hills, which should have been thinned to three plants, of Tromocino, have taken over not only their assigned end of the bed but also the entire path next to them and

part of the bed across the path. I should have some at the country market on Saturday if you want to see one. It's a lovely pale green squash that can't decide whether it's a summer squash or a winter squash. With some support off the ground (I have mine in a large square tomatoe cage) it grows up to three feet, but unlike monster zucchini, is only a couple of inches in diameter and has a very small seed cavity at one end. I think it has a better taste and texture than zuke when raw, and retains a better shape when cooked. The skin does get a little tough like a winter squash though. The other part of the bed is winter squash, at least one of which has vined everywhere the Tromocino hasn't taken over, including into the peas in the next bed.

I spent most of Jamboree at the Master Gardener's Mini-College at Oregon State University. I took some great classes in hydroponics, compost tea (which it turns out is NOT just a bucket of water with a shovel full of manure in it), soil chemistry and gardening around the house. The challenge is which one to write about first.

Since my personal yard is suffering from a lack of attention and hydroponics and compost tea are too technical for the lazy days of August, I guess I'll tell you about septic tanks. Huh? Apparently, one of the most frequently asked questions of master Gardeners is, "What can I plant on my septic tank?" I've never understood how a septic tank works, I'm just glad that it's there, which it wasn't when we first moved to this house. I've bumbled along under the mistaken impression that, if you're careful about what you put in, you shouldn't have to pump the thing. This is, most emphatically, NOT TRUE!

The major causes of septic tank failure are not pumping the tank regularly (ACK!) and physical destruction of the drain field. I gues I'll be scheduling the pumper as soon as possible. Turns out that the proper functioning of a septic tank depends on the space between solid material (that sinks to the bottom of the tank) and the scum that forms on the top of the sludge. As the depth of this space decreases (or becomes non-existent !) more and more solid material moves from the tank into the drain field, filling the drainage that needs to be available for purification of water before it re-enters the soil.

The good news for my tank is that we have never subjected the septic tank or drainage field to anything that would physically destroy the drainfield. Many times, homeowners don't know where their drainfield is and all kinds of bad things can happen, like driving over it, or building on top of the tank, or planting huge trees next to the tank or in the drainfield. Systems approved since the 1970's include an alternate drainfield to be used in case the original fails, BUT sometimes people pave or build in this area. Failure of any septic system is very expensive to repair. Having to discontinue use of an existing drainfield, without the space to install a new drainfield, is VERY expensive.

Back to "Gardening Around the House", the title of the septic tank management class taught by the very funny Gail Glick Andrews, OSU Extension Service Water Quality Educator. Grass is the ONLY (officially) recommended thing to plant in or near a

septic system – though Washington Sea Grant Program (WSGP) has a more liberal view. The soil level in the drainfield should never be altered in any way by the addition or excavation of soil, as these are very closely engineered systems requiring drainpipe covered by a certain depth of soil. Though newer tanks have risers that extend service ports above ground, older tanks do not. If you don't know where the service port is, you may end up with a bunch of big holes in your yard from looking for it, and obviously you can't properly maintain it if you don't know where it is. It's also easy to plant a large tree too near, where the roots of the tree can damage either the tank or the field. Remember, septic tanks and trees have long lives. Plan for the future.

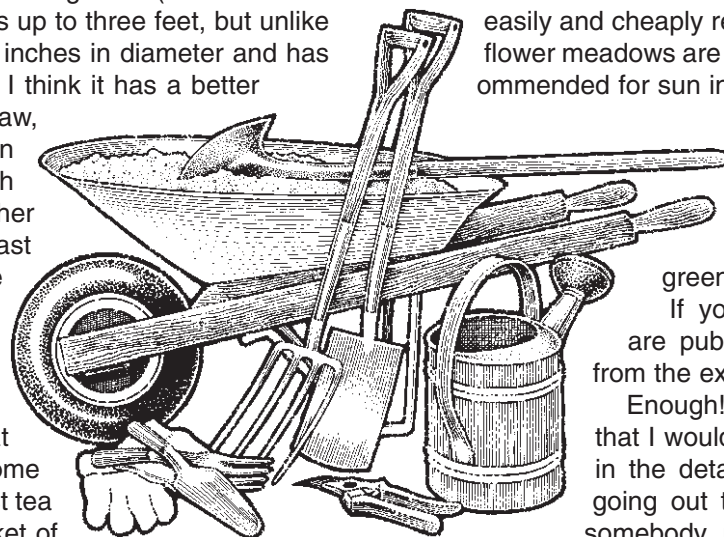
So what should you plant? WSGP (and even Andrews) recommend low-value herbaceous plants. First, find and be creative about a way to mark and/or disguise the location of access ports.

Plants over the tank should be drought resistant and easily and cheaply replaceable. Native plants and wildflower meadows are a good choice. Ground covers recommended for sun include ajuga, heather, cotoneaster, kinnikinnick, periwinkle and soapwort. Ground covers for shade include bunchberry, houtuynnia, ferns, mosses, sweet woodruff, wild ginger and wintergreen.

If you want further information, there are publications available on the web or from the extension service.

Enough! I sort of indicated at the beginning that I wouldn't get too technical but I got "lost in the details," as my editor would say. I'm going out to enjoy the weather! I just hope somebody puts some water on the garden

while I'm camping!

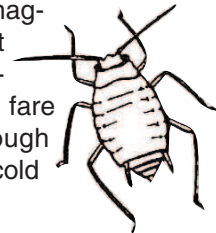


August garden notes from OSU Extension

Dripping trees

There has been a lot more "sap" dripping from trees this season. The sticky stuff is actually "honeydew" which is excreted by aphids, scales and other similar sucking insects.

It is a bit of a puzzle why it is worse this year. Speculation is that the warm April moved the aphids into high reproductive gear early. Alternatively, it is possible that the *Harmonia* lady beetle (a magnificent aphid predator) didn't fare well through the winter cold and snow.



Fading flowers

Annual flowers tend to fade without a fertilizer boost. You can apply a blended fertilizer granule or water with liquid fertilizer solutions. The liquid fertilizer doesn't last as long, so more applications will be necessary. Organic gardeners can use bloodmeal or manure teas.

Church Directory

VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-6790
Sunday Breakfast 9:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 9:45 a.m.
*B.L.A.S.T. w/Nursery 10:00 a.m.
*Bible Learning and Scripture Training
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

375 North St. (Vernonia Grange Hall)
Vernonia, 503 795-2173
Sunday Services 10:00 a.m.

VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Sam Hough, 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.