

## Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson  
OSU Master Gardener



The last two years, when I've written my anniversary article (Can it really be three entire years of garden articles?!) I've talked about the burgeoning spring. This year it seems we're finally having winter, following the way-too-early spring weather we had in January and February. At least we (hopefully) did get adequate chilling when we had all those beautiful warm days and COLD nights. Apparently, the valley floor was not so lucky. Last week somebody reminded me "to enjoy the lilacs! They're rare this year because it didn't get cold enough." Well, my lilacs, while nowhere near blooming yet, appear to have plenty of flower buds.

It's the fruit trees that need the chilling hours. I'm sure there is a chart somewhere on the OSU Extension website that will tell you exactly how many hours of chilling each fruit (and probably each named variety of each fruit) requires. I'm of the opinion that it will not be a great apple year, since last year was a bumper crop on every tree. This is based on years of experience and me pretending to be the Farmer's Almanac, not any scientific source. I sort of remember that apples were mentioned at some talk or other as being an alternate year crop. I hope this is true because I pruned my trees with this thought in mind, making more structural change and using a saw more than I might have otherwise.

Last year's experiment covering the pluot yielded only three (YUMMY) fruits. Not nearly enough. This year, though the tree was covered during most of the really cold nights, I did pull off the remay in late February. I stood, with my nose inches away, from a humble bumblebee working his way up the blossom-covered stem getting to each and every flower. When he reached the top, he laboriously took 'flight' (or hopped) to the next stem and started again. The remay cover never got put back on, so the poor tree has been subjected to all of the nasty weather of the last few weeks. I also pruned the strongest growing of the remaining grafted varieties way back in an effort to balance the growth. I started with a four-variety grafted tree and I might have three varieties remaining. This is typical of the multiple graft fruit trees, it's unusual for all varieties to survive. Having discovered the value of spraying in the fall for the prevalent fungal diseases, I'm hoping to save the tree. It has a huge lesion, where half of the trunk is dead. But this year, I don't see any new dead spots and the edges of previous years' damage look healthy.

A brief myth buster: Trees (and plants in general) do NOT heal. At least not in the same way that the phase is applied to humans or other animals. Plants do not replace damaged tissue with new tissue. Once killed by accident, on purpose or by disease, the plant will grow AROUND the wound and eventually over the wound, but the damaged tissue will remain in the tree. In the same way, the height of a branch (relative to the ground) will remain the same throughout the life of the tree. The tree will make new branches higher up, and maybe even lower down, but a specific branch that you decide to leave at say 4-feet off the ground, will still be four-feet off the ground on the mature tree. The lesson: Be thoughtful about what and where you cut!

The lawn experiment is still not progressing very well. I have greatly increased the diversity of plants in my lawn but the clovers are just not taking off. Also, I've noticed that the areas of the lawn that I seeded a couple of years ago with a grass and flower blend (some kind of eco-lawn mixture that included English daisies and yarrow) have much thicker, greener, more uniform grass than the rest of the lawn. So, I finally caved and bought some shade tolerant grass seed to spread in the barest areas. Understand that my 'lawn' is just the part of the yard that has been mowed. It's very uneven, full of mole hills (and their counterpart – similarly sized depressions that I think are places where underground caverns have collapsed over the years) and a wide variety of plants commonly known as weeds.

I've written in the past about my hellebore. These slow to bloom plants are great for shady areas and mine is both beautiful (a delicate combination of pink and green blooms) and really likes its home. The second year it bloomed, I let it go to seed. The first year I always try to keep perennials from setting seed because I want their energy to go to the roots. Last year it became apparent

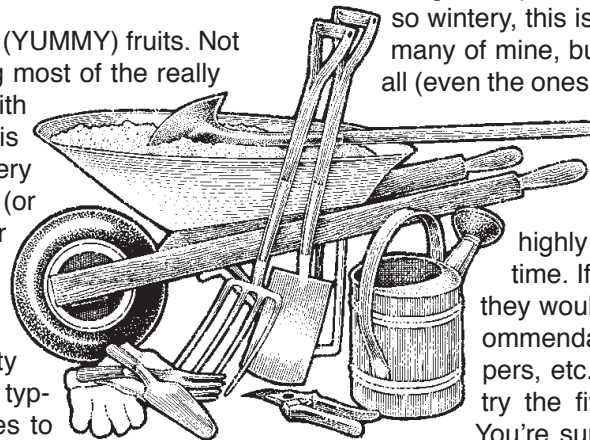
that the hellebore was too close to one of the hostas and one of them would have to be moved. Something to ponder over the summer, fall and winter. Imagine my delight when I discovered a whole bunch of baby hellebores coming up. Now I get to move the hosta and pot-up or transplant a bunch of baby hellebores. Since I only have the one, I should get a good color mix. Hellebores (common name Lenten Rose) have a color range from almost chocolate through pink to white, and bloom beginning in February. Unfortunately, the bloom stalks are only about a foot high and the blooms face downward AND they're poisonous. Not a plant for every garden or gardener, but I like mine.

A confession. I lied last month. Even though the weather was still beautiful when I was writing and I said I was going out to plant the peas, I didn't get to it. Was lucky and glad! The weather almost immediately became winter and seeds would surely have rotted in the ground. I did, however, get them in the ground yesterday, just in time for a nice rain. Hopefully, the sun, when it does peek out, now has enough warmth to keep the soil temperature. I plant only shelling peas to eat fresh and freeze. This year I planted in a sunny part of the garden and hope to pull it together to plant a fall crop after the peas are done. It just works best for me to be able to get in there and harvest the whole bed and be done with it.

Oops! I may have just let out one of my big gardening secrets. I really don't much enjoy the vegetable harvest part. Anytime I can talk somebody else into going out there and picking the fill-in the-blanks, I'm a happy camper.

One other garden job accomplished for the first time this year. With the weather so wintery, this is a great time to look at your tools. I've sorely neglected many of mine, but this year I bought a can of linseed oil, collected them all (even the ones from the barn) and oiled the handles. I sharpened some and intend to sharpen the remainder (which will require a flat file and a vise – so the flaky factor may interfere with accomplishing this goal). I invested some fairly serious bucks in good tools early on, a practice I highly recommend. My spading fork and shovel will last a lifetime. If I had taken good care of them for the first fifteen years, they would be in much better shape than they are now. The recommendations are to sharpen as needed (shovels, hoes, clippers, etc.), oil wooden parts, and keep rust controlled. I want to try the five-gallon-bucket filled with sand and used motor oil. You're supposed to be able to clean, oil and polish those nasty shovel and trowel blades (after scraping off the clay) easily and quickly by just sort of jabbing them into the bucket. Sounds good to me!

PS. Don't forget the Master Gardener's Plant Sale! It's not on 'Make Vernonia Shine Day' this year. See you at St. Helens High School, April 30, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



## Church Directory

### ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

375 North St. (Vernonia Grange Hall)  
Vernonia, 503 705-2173  
Please call for service schedule.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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  
Grant & North Streets  
Vernonia, 503 429-5378  
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.  
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.  
Nursery available  
Wednesday Service 7:00 p.m.

### VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

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

### ASSEMBLY OF GOD

662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,  
503 556-1961 for Information  
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.  
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

### SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

John Aitken II, Pastor, 396-1856  
2nd Ave. and Nehalem St.  
Vernonia, 503 429-8301  
Morning Worship, 9:15 a.m.  
Bible Study 10:30 a.m.