

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



I started writing out my ten things to do to start a garden when, lo and behold, a book by the American Horticultural Society, *Northwest Smart Garden Regional Guide*, jumped into my cart at Costco! Turns out AHS has a system, developed by Dr. Marc Cathey, that offers ten tenets that “offer the key to a scientifically sound, environmentally responsible approach to gardening.” The book has lots of photos, a plant catalogue of more than 4,000 plants and a good section of techniques for selection, planting, pruning and propagation. All for less than \$20 (\$30 publishers list).

My recommendations are specific things to do to get started. AHS takes a more philosophical approach that promises good results over the long haul. So, squishing my stuff into their tenets, I come up with: (AHS material in *ITALICS*).

KNOW YOURSELF

I sort of jumped over this point since it’s impossible for me not to garden. However, I would have had better success with better planning. Questions to ask yourself include: How much time do I want to spend maintaining the yard/garden? Do you have physical limitations? What’s your budget? The goal is to make the garden “the size and complexity you can handle” successfully. I’ve failed miserably at this over the years, planting too many areas to keep up, but it’s a darn good idea.

ASSESS YOUR SITE

Select the site. Discussed at length in the January article, I hope you have done this and covered your ground. For those of you gardening on the deck of your apartment, it’s critical to determine what kind of sun exposure you have. If your balcony faces north you’ll be very frustrated if you plant tomatoes, but you could have gorgeous begonias and impatiens. AHS includes in this book both a USDA Hardiness Zone map and an AHS Heat Zone map. While the familiar hardiness zone map graphs, along with other factors, the lowest average minimum temperature, the Heat Zone map was developed in 1997 according to the average number of days per year that the temperature reaches 86 degrees. Use caution when interpreting zone maps at your site. The Nehalem Valley is, in general, a small pocket zone surrounded by colder (USDA map) and cooler (AHS heat zone) areas. Study your microclimate.

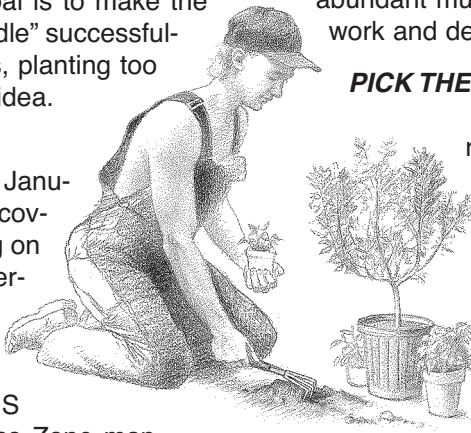
Cover the site with organic material and let the worms work the soil for you. Don’t try to rototill until the soil is workable, it should crumble in your hand. You can hand spade organic material into the soil if you’re up for that much work mucking about in the mud. It’s never to late to add good organic material.

Have your soil tested, if possible. It’s nice to know what your soil is lacking before you start adding other stuff like fertilizer or lime. You will probably have acid soil but adding lime now may not be as effective as waiting until fall.

ADAPT WHEN NECESSARY

This is part of the magic. You can develop a microclimate for a desired specimen, and greatly improve drainage (which is a major problem in this area.) Plan a garden design that takes advantage of available sun. Garden beds and rows should run from north to south, so that plants can take advantage of morning and afternoon sun.

Making garden beds without boards: After rototilling the entire area mark and dig paths between beds by shoveling soil from the path to the bed. Paths between beds can be quite narrow, just enough room to stand, or kneel and work the bed. You should be able to reach the center of the bed from either side. Beds longer than 10 or 15 feet are frustrating to walk around. In my veggie garden I have a wider path in the middle to accommodate a garden



cart. Once you define your paths, don’t walk on your beds ever again!

Using a spading fork, work the soil in each bed by inserting a spading fork straight down. Work all of the soil inside the edge you’ve created up and into the center of the bed. The goal is to get beds that are raised above the base level of the soil and that drain well. I don’t have board edges, so the shape of my beds has become more organic over time.

This is the time to dig in amendments such as quarter minus gravel, compost, etc. If you’re really ambitious, you can double dig your beds. This is a good project to undertake in the fall and incorporate lime. I’ve done it, it might have made a difference to the parsnips. Otherwise, It doesn’t seem worth the effort unless you have a lot of good organic material that you can distribute throughout the bed. An enormous responsibility, being responsible to your soil.

Rake out the top of your beds and plant. Push the big clods to the outside, try to keep the good stuff. You’ll be amazed at how wide you can get your bed when you rake the top flat, with steep sides to the edge of the path. I try to get the sides as steep as possible. I like to plant in an even spaced grid, rather than rows. This allows plants to self-shade the soil surface, slowing the weeds.

If you are starting from scratch, consider planting potatoes the first year. You can ‘plant’ seed potatoes by pulling back any mulch, placing them on, or just under the soil and cover back up with abundant mulch. By next year the soil will be much easier to work and develop into beds.

PICK THE BEST PLANTS

Research disease resistant varieties of plants to reduce or eliminate the need for aggressive disease, fungus and insect treatment. This is especially important if you want to grow organically. Be prepared to eliminate or move unhappy plants. (I’ve moved a *Rose of Sharon* three times and I’m NOT moving it again!) Be sure to consider the mature size and growth habit. I’ve got a flowering plum, some shrubby lilacs and an Italian plum/prune crowded in the

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Noxious weeds will be topic of OSU workshop

Come hear Beth Meyers-Shenai with the Oregon Department of Agriculture’s Noxious Weed Control Program discuss the noxious weed challenge in Oregon!

This talk will provide tips on the identification and impacts of Oregon’s ornamental noxious weeds. Learn how to keep them out of your garden and be part of the solution to the noxious weed problem in our state. Each workshop is worth one(1) pesticide recertification credit.

The workshop will be held twice. The first will be on March 23, at 6:00 p.m. in Mist/Birkenfeld 12525 Hwy 202. The second workshop will be at the OSU Extension Office, 505 N Columbia River Hwy, St. Helens on March 28 at 6:30 p.m.

Call 503-397-4555, ext. 106 with any questions.



Japanese knotweed

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.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

David Jenkins, Pastor
662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,
503 816-1989
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m
Sunday Evening Service 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study 7:00 p.m.
(in the parsonage)

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.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

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

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.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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

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.

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.

VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Sam Hough, Evangelist
410 North Street
Vernonia, 503 429-6522
Sunday School 9:45 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 7:00 p.m.