

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Welcome to real Oregon weather! In case you missed it, I was dancing in public as those first, oh so welcome, drops fell from the sky. I wasn't nearly as happy when the rain got heavier and I was (mostly) stuck outside selling eggs and produce last Thursday without an umbrella. Just another time when better planning would have been a good idea.

This latest rainy weather is just a reminder that true fall weather will be here soon and winter WILL follow. I've heard that the winter is supposed to be warm and heard the words "el nino" applied to winter predictions on the news. The bowl-like area that Vernonia sits in sometimes responds oddly to winter weather, particularly large, circular lows bringing moisture off the ocean. While we can rely on having clouds hanging close to our heads on most days between October and June, we may not necessarily get the rain they contain, or only a small portion of it. While it would seem that we should catch the same drenching rains that swoop in from the coast, sometimes they just fly right over us, taking all that wonderful water further east. This weather pattern has been the beginning of a drought and very low river levels in this corner of the state. The water in our rivers must come from deep within the earth, generally without the benefit of significant snow melt, and we are dependent on constant rain-forest mist that allows water to soak deeply into the soil. It's one of those 'only in Oregon' sorts of things: we can be in a drought status and, in the same season, have a flood; you can stand in the sun and get rained on; you can drive from the ocean to the desert in half-a-day.

More weather related thoughts, remember that it COULD freeze any night now. Usually cloudy days and/or foggy nights will provide enough insulation that we don't get a hard freeze at ground level. Watch out if the sky is clear and you can see the stars, that's the time to be running around the yard with your blankets. Be prepared to cover tender (vacationing) houseplants, and things in the garden that you need to squeeze a few more weeks out of. In many ways, September and October are the best growing months we have because we have lots of warm sunny days in the fall. Things like corn, squash and tomatoes that may not have performed earlier can finally manage to produce some kind of crop. Of course, if you're lucky to have your garden in a good sunny spot that gets sun all day you probably won't have this problem. Many of us, however, try to feel lucky that we get half a day of sun after it clears the trees. I swear parts of my garden are a full month behind the rest of town. Understanding the microclimates in your yard will greatly increase your chances of success.

One good example of taking advantage of the local weather is in the timing for planting new lawn or re-seeding existing lawn. Often the recommendation is to plant in the fall, establish grass before winter to have a nice, full, green lawn in early spring. This is the recommendation in the big master gardener book. However, my experience is somewhat different. It's impossible NOT to have a green yard in the spring because everything is green, including any abandoned vehicles, the entire roof, and even some of the outside walls. It's probably not grass, but it will be green. I love the look of the moss garden and I let it compete freely in the lawn. As you know if you've been reading my column for long, I've been working on our lawn for several years because I don't think that mowing the weeds makes a lawn.

Anyway, MY recommendation is to take advantage of the more dependable winter and spring rain by planting new grass seed in late winter or early spring. We usually have enough moderate, wet weather so that you won't have to water your seed or baby grass too much. The problem in the fall, as I said earlier, is that it may not rain enough. Once you put grass seed on the ground you must be committed to keeping it evenly moist until the grass is well established. This can mean daily irrigation. Obviously, you would be unable to do this inside the city limits during the current water restrictions. Outside of the city your well is probably dry, and if you suck water out of the river, it's better to leave it in the river for the salmon than to try and start a lawn.

An established lawn in western Oregon consumes about 1/8 to 1/4 inch of water per day. Irrigation once per week with one inch of water will replace this. Over-watering causes more problems than it solves, in the form of various molds and blights. Grass growth is regulated by temperature and grass becomes dormant when soil temperatures are above 80 degrees. Irrigation lowers

the soil temperature and forces continued growth but robs the root zone of nutrients (by leaching) and encourages surface rooting because saturated soils are very low in oxygen, needed by all plant roots to some extent.

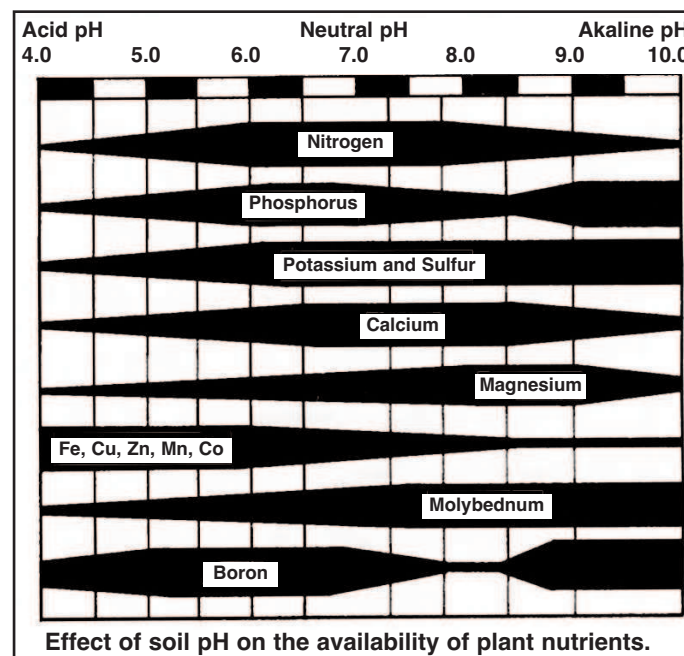
Be sure to pick a seed mix that is appropriate for the location (sun or shade). I prefer seed blends that have several different kinds of grass in them and I try to get Oregon-grown seed. Be absolutely sure that the seed you buy will grow in northern latitudes because the southern grasses will not grow here. The type of seed you buy should also be appropriate for our moist climate, not a blend made for the east-side of the Cascades. My master gardener notes say that the classic Kentucky Blue grass will die out of your lawn in three years to five years, but can provide soil stability for that initial period (as on a football field). Turf-type perennial rye grasses, fine fescues, and bent grasses work well in western Oregon.

The key to my success to date was the addition of peat moss to provide a bit of mulch for the baby grass. I would also recommend having the soil tested in order to add an appropriate amount of lime (pH), nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (N-P-K on your fertilizer label). If you can't get grass in and established before October, I think you'd be better off waiting a few months, starting grass seed in March. You can plant sod year 'round but in the long run sod-turf does not create a self-sustaining happy lawn. One more (disturbing) message from my notes, Americans

put more fertilizer on their lawns than India (the country) uses on all of its crops. Perhaps, we need to re-think our need for green, green grass.

Fall is the time to apply lime, a slow release fertilizer. In the absence of a soil test, you can add about 50 pounds of lime per 1000 square feet. Don't put lime on rhodies, azaleas, blueberries or other acid loving plants. As the table shows, soil pH affects the avail-

Please see page 24



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.

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

Rev. Luan Tran, Administrator
960 Missouri Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-8841
Mass Schedule
Sunday 12:00 Noon
Religious Education
Sunday 10:30 a.m.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

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

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.

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.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.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 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.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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