

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



I hope you all stayed warm and dry over the cold spell, which I sincerely hope is over by the time you read this. What does a gardener do when it's frozen outside? The answer is that there is, as usual, more stuff that you could be doing than you can possibly get done.

When I was out taking photos of the garden in winter I was wondering about sending in a pictorial article and only having to write the captions. Since, however, I'm writing two days after deadline, and I can't download from the camera since it isn't here, you'll just have to be content to read another ramble. Maybe I'll pull out the pictures in late July when the snow-covered Hawthorne berries, or nearly horizontal icicles might be refreshing.

Mark your calendars now! The annual Columbia County Master Gardeners sale will be Saturday, April 21. NOTE to City: PLEASE, don't schedule clean-up day on this date. I checked the Chamber Community Calendar and it's not on there yet so, let folks get over the hill to buy their tomatoes. This sale is the MG's biggest fundraiser (and opportunity for fledgling MG's to work off their hours) and THE best place to get a wide variety of tomatoes for a very reasonable price (\$1 each in past years). The sale is held at St. Helens High School and there are other plant and garden vendors, door prizes, and an official MG clinic for your garden questions. It's best to arrive early, the sale opens at 9:00 a.m., for best selection. You will have to provide some protection for your tomato babies when you get them home, but I've been very successful getting them in the ground within a week of purchase and under cloches. Last year, they were bursting out of their little plastic homes before I knew it!

I stumbled into the OSU Extension website (<http://extension.oregonstate.edu>) last week and was blown away by the amount of information suddenly at my fingertips. I knew that the Extension Service publishes a pamphlet on just about every topic you can conceive that might even be remotely related to agriculture, forestry, or family life. What I didn't realize was that almost all of these publications are available on the web for downloading, for free.

First, I found an article beginning:

"Testing your soil now will help let you know what nutrients your soil needs, so you will be able to plan your fertilizer program before the planting season begins later in the spring," said John Hart, an Oregon State University Extension soil science specialist.

"A soil test is like taking an inventory of the nutrients available to plants," Hart explained. "Garden soil nutrients may be too high, too low or just right. But gardeners won't know until they test their soil."

A soil test also may solve garden mysteries, revealing causes of scabby potatoes, yellowing plants and slow or poor growth – all potentially caused by soil nutrient problems.

Then I went to a publication, "Soil Sampling for Home Gardens and Small Acreages (EC 628)" which gives very detailed instructions for how to make up your soil sample(s). Finally, I also downloaded another publication (EM8677), which has a list of laboratories in Oregon that conduct the studies. Both of these publications now have a supplementary home on my hard drive. I would encourage you to use this resource for your gardening questions. These folks have answers based on good solid science, unlike my stories, based mostly on experience and time.

Soil testing is a good idea and can save you \$\$\$ by analyzing what nutrients are present and available in your sample. In addition, the test results should give you a recommendation for fertilizer and liming requirements so you won't have to guess which amendments to put in your soil for maximum production. It's recommended that vegetable gardens be tested every year, but this is probably cost prohibitive for the non-commercial home gardener. I've tried the home kits before, thinking that all those college chem classes I endured would finally have some use. Though I could perform the tests according to the directions, the information wasn't really very meaningful. It sounds good to me to get a real test every once in a while. Like, maybe even the first time. It would be nice to know how 20-plus years of (mostly organic) gardening have changed the soil.

As soon as the snow melts it will be time to prune fruit trees. One of my photos has snow on the honeysuckle leaves that are

already about a half inch long. You don't want valuable tree strength going into wood you are going to cut off.

Also a near must for the home orchardist: It is important to get out and spray to control insects such as spider mites, aphids and scale with dormant oil. The Extension Service says dormant oil is widely available but, as of this writing, everything you can buy in town is more toxic. Dormant oil is a light oil which smothers or desiccates eggs and larvae. Unless you know you have a severe infestation of an insect that won't or hasn't responded (i.e. been reduced to an acceptable level) to dormant oil, it seems hard to justify a more toxic response. Dormant oil should be applied when the temperature is expected to rise during the day to prevent the oil from being forced into the bark and causing damage.

Another widely used and effective spray is lime-sulfur which is applied later, just before buds open in spring. A second application of wettable sulfur can be applied just after petals fall for additional control of fungal and bacterial diseases.

After getting your soil sample packed and mailed off to the lab (when the soil thaws enough to dig it), getting all the pruning done (and cleaned up) and the dormant oil sprayed, you can relax with the load of plant catalogues burdening your mail. I consider both Territorial Seed and Raintree Nursery essential. Both are filled with disease resistant varieties and a wealth of locally appropriate cultural information. I also like Wildflower Farms (the only place I've seen the very tempting Ornamec170 Grass Herbicide) and Seeds of Change. They are located however, in Texas and New Mexico respectively, a climate so unlike our own I have yet to order from them. Both have lots of good cultural info, beautiful and inspiring photos and a good selection of books and tools. Johnny's Selected Seeds had lots of nifty tools for the semi-commercial market gardener, and large quantities of single varieties of veggies, flowers and herbs for large scale plantings.

For your information: Mold Control in Your Home, a workshop at PCC Rock Creek Campus, January 24 from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. This is the homeowner version of the class for professionals held earlier in the day. Cost for the homeowner version is \$10. For additional information and registration go to <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fcd/mold>

For the novice eager to start a garden: Clackamas Community College has a Vegetable Gardening Symposium this coming Saturday, January 20, just in case you didn't have anything planned.

Spring IS coming. You can try to get peas in whenever your soil is workable and well drained. You can plant coleus, impatiens and geranium seeds indoors NOW for big summer displays. It's a good time of year to get your soil tested and to clean, sharpen and oil your tools. AND, you can dream your way to a beautiful garden all the way through the winter. Enjoy!

Church Directory

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.

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 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.

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

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

359 "A" Street, Vernonia
503 429-5190
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer Meeting 7:00 p.m.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Wayne and Maureen Marr
662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,
503 429-0373
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.