

## Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson  
OSU Master Gardener



While wandering about one of the big box stores, I found small 12-space plastic starter trays w/lids for under \$3, and simply couldn't resist. It's so easy to talk (or in my case write) about getting flowers started indoors in January. As usual, it's harder than it sounds. I followed the directions and planted three trays: one with two kinds of zinnias, one with sweet peas, and the final one with broccoli and cauliflower. I put them on top of the water heater in an effort to keep them in the warm and the dark as directed. I checked them every day and brought them out after they started sprouting. So far, I have poor germination, and damping off. I think I added too much water and/or should have left the covers off for a day or two. I also don't have any control over the temperature so they were probably too hot on top of the water heater and then too cold close to the windows. AND it got cloudy and dark outside, just as they needed sunlight. At least the fiber pots are easy to replace. I'm promising myself to plant again next week. As of today I have one sweet pea ready to put into a bigger pot, three zinnias (only one of which will likely live). The brasicas fared better though I need to use better seed planting technique to be sure the seed is covered with the appropriate amount of soil. Since this was nice fresh seed and a cool weather crop, I had to heartlessly thin by pinching off the tops of all but two broc's in a jiffy-pot.

One of the things I love about gardening is the diversity of opinion about any little thing. For example, this month's issue of *Country Living* contains a recommendation for using water polymer crystals. I've used these in hanging baskets and I thought they were helpful. Then I read "The Truth About Garden Remedies" in *Gardening How-To*. According to the article, while hydrogels absorb enormous quantities of water (as anyone knows who is at all familiar with today's disposable diapers), the water may not be available to plants.

The cool thing is the apparently unending supply of scientists to study this sort of obscure stuff. Though *Garden How-To* does not cite articles, they are apparently reviewing literature. They conclude that the gels generally are NOT helpful in reducing watering frequency, that plant growth was about the same with and without hydrogels, and that the gels reduced the time to wilting by a paltry 12%. Hydrogels did provide some benefit for drought sensitive plants in the landscape. All you can do is continue experimenting. I will attest that I watered my hanging baskets every day, but never thought about putting hydrogel in the ground...though I've scared myself silly getting a handful of hydrogel in the garden by surprise. The only other thing in the garden with that texture is a slug. Have you ever tried to get that nasty slime OFF!

Winter can be hard on a gardener's spirit. Fortunately, a wealth of books, magazines and symposia are available for winter contemplation and planning. If you have the opportunity to landscape, it is well worth your investment in both time and dollars to put some time into design, before planting. Lots of folks have spent lots of time getting plants to exhibit certain desired qualities such as disease resistance, tasty fruit, interesting shape, etc. There are lists for plants adapted to almost any condition and/or climate. Research is a great way to increase your chances of successfully creating a desired effect in a beautiful garden...instead of an addition to the compost pile.

Gardening is experiential and direct. Everybody has their own way, and while many are glad to share their secrets in story, others are driven to hours of tedious research, conducting scientific studies that advance knowledge and the capabilities of industry.

Oregon has a larger agricultural economy than many realize, especially if they see only the Portland Metro area. Just released statistics reveal that "the value of agricultural production in Oregon has reached an all-time high of \$4.3 billion...and produces more than 220 different agricultural commodities." This is mostly in addition to forest products such as logs and timber. The Agriculture Quarterly winter issue has a review of the past two years from every division (Animal Health & Identification, Commodity Inspection, Pesticides, Measurement, etc. for a total of nine divisions). The actions and policies of the departments of agriculture and forestry affect us more directly than some, perhaps, though I'm not sure about that. Educating ourselves is always a good idea.

Stuff to do: bait for slugs, finish pruning fruit trees, set up a cold

frame, order seeds, plant trees and shrubs, clean and oil tools, fertilize the lawn, then...when it's time to stay warm and dry...you can read:

*Oregon Small Farm News*, a brand new FREE online newsletter from OSU is available at <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu>. They describe their focus as "organic/biological and conventional farming systems" and emphasize three areas – Small Acreage Stewardship, Commercial Small Farms, and Community Food Systems.

*Country Living*, the FREE monthly OSU Extension Newsletter, is always interesting and educational.

Just in case you aren't getting enough garden stuff in the mail, go to [www.seedcatalog.com](http://www.seedcatalog.com)

Or go to events:

Yard, Garden and Patio Show, February 23 – 25 at the Oregon Convention Center. Get the schedule and print a coupon for \$2 off the admission price of \$11, at [www.ygppshow.com](http://www.ygppshow.com).

Wholesale Plant Sale, February 24, 10 – 3 at Sauvie Island Elementary School. Highest quality, locally grown nursery stock available at this once a year event.

Oregon Families & their Forestlands, April 27 – 28 A symposium exploring the issues affecting family owned forestland.

Spring is in the air; days are getting longer, plants and insects are starting to wake up. Filberts are blooming now; I've even seen a couple of crocus. The tips of the daffodils are emerging and so are some of the less-well-liked denizens of the

yard and garden. To discourage large populations of yellow jackets, take down yellow jacket traps and empty them before putting them back. I used four placed around the edges of the yard last year, and will add a couple more. The big females that survived the winter will soon start flying around, looking for summer homes to raise their brood. Like slugs, the more of these you eliminate now, the fewer you'll have in high summer.



Box Elder bugs will soon begin emerging from hibernation. The harmless, .3-.5" bug is mostly gray to black with bright red crossed marks on their wings/back. The 'V' on their backs is a bright red contrast to the dark body. Members of the order *Hemiptera*, the box elder bug, *leptocoris trivittatus* feeds on the big maples in our climate and does little damage. However, adults like to congregate and rest on light-colored south- and west-facing walls, sometimes in large numbers. This can be a nuisance, especially if they find a way inside. A vacuum cleaner will quickly reduce the population.

## 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.