

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



IT'S SPRING! Nothing compares to a spring day, especially if you can take the time to enjoy it! The dark green gloom of the deep forest begins to shimmer with islands of color; wild currant, plum, cherry, dogwood and every variation on green possible. In town and on the farm, backyards burst into every brilliant and subtle shade of the palette. Color and warmth and sweet cool air are everywhere.

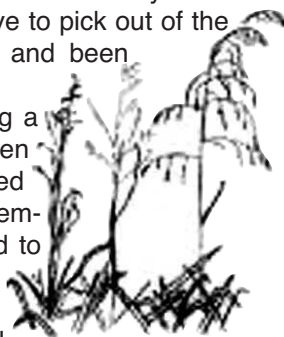
I shanghaied my box of Territorial plants from UPS driver Doug, in town, and I HAD to open the box. This annual ritual of spring continues to get more complex and time consuming, designed to force you to be patient. Territorial does a great job of packaging their plants and obviously takes a lot of time to enclose them in their mailing boxes. Because we compost all of our corrugated cardboard, we have learned to be vigilant about getting ALL the tape off. Turns out that as big a pain as this is when you're unpacking stuff, it's WAY more trouble to have to pick out of the garden after it has turned into compost and been moved to the garden.

One of the exciting things about getting a box from Territorial is that I've totally forgotten what I've ordered. Of course I remembered ordering the Calibrachos, but I didn't remember what other temptations I'd succumbed to from the new specialty catalogue. (See last month's article) Now I have to find the catalogue(s) or go online to find cultural info about what I've got.

Boy, oh boy, that high speed connection is sure great. Sitting right here, I can look up information on the Territorial site and have what I need without looking for a thing! I'm not sure I believe that a plant with 9-16" flowers is hardy, but according to Territorial, *Hibiscus 'Carafe Bordeaux'* is a hardy perennial in zones 5-9, growing these fantastic flowers every year on it's 3-5 foot bush. The idea of a 'tropical garden' gets more and more attractive with great plants like this available along with hardy bananas(!), palms, bamboo and lots of other plants that are relatively new on the home market. All of the sudden, this spring, I'm seeing lots of things in stores that I've never seen before. Plant breeders across the world continue to develop unusual colors and textures, as well as disease tolerance and drought resistance.

Which brings my thoughts back to the 'invasive plant' issue. As the world becomes more and more interactive globally, plants that were once restricted to small areas are now carried all over the world. As vigilant as customs officials are, I'm sure that individuals do manage to slip things into suitcases from time to time. This is how North America got 'possums, snails, Scotch broom, Japanese knotweed and many other things that have since became way too prevalent. Native species are losing the battle in a lot of places. This does not seem like a good thing. I certainly don't want a world where fewer and fewer plants and animals can survive. Neither can we.

However, I am unreservedly fond of unusual plants. Since I



convinced the neighbor to allow me to plant iris on her side of the fence (so the cows wouldn't eat them), I've been eyeing another spot (also on her side of the fence). It's the perfect spot for a *Gunnera*. A swampy area too steep to mow, it seems like the perfect place for this Chilean native that looks like rhubarb on steroids! WOW! Imagine a rhubarb that's taller than you are, "Thrives in the Pacific NW" and loves moisture in the air – sounds made for our climate! I'm pining away thinking about how cool it would be. BUT, it would be horrible if our riparian areas, already largely overtaken with canary reed grass, were to be overtaken by giant rhubarb like the McKenzie is with buddleia. Yikes!

This month I can SEE the big changes that a bit of work can accomplish, especially if you cheat. I used to try and start my own seeds, either in the ground or inside, and occasionally met with limited success. I rarely have the patience anymore. Besides it gives me an excuse to always, always check out the plant department wherever I happen to be. There are some great finds hidden in the oddest places sometimes. For instance, I scored a nice round unusual bog rosemary, *Andromeda polifolia 'Blue Ice'* at Costco, one of only two in a small sea of one-gallon six-packs of perennials for under \$20. Not a bad price, though at first I wasn't too interested because most of the plants I either already have, don't like or can't grow. Then I saw a few nice pink azaleas, decided to cruise the other side of the sea of plants and scored. With just a little recombining of six-packs, I got the "dwarf evergreen shrub with gray-blue leaves and tiny, urn-shaped pink flowers in spring," two azaleas, two Dianthus, and another small ground-cover-y flower. Not bad!

My other favorite place to pick up plants is the local building supply store. Willow has managed a nice connection with Iwasaki Brothers and their plants are a joy to put in the ground. Yes, you can get the some of the same plants at [Fill-in-your-favorite-big-box-store] but they are usually too dry, or too wet, root bound and of unimaginative varieties. Right here in town, the small number of plants and rapid rotation ensure healthier plants. And we benefit from the attention and focus necessary in a small store.

As usual, I get to about this point and remember all kinds of interesting factoids to convey. BUT, the sun is out and we're packing up for Mother's Day camping trip at Cape Lookout as soon as I'm done. Guess what? I'm packing now!

Weed management and lawns are topics of Extension classes

There will be two gardening programs for the general public in St. Helens offered this May. The schedule is:

May 23 – Management of weeds in the garden and landscape (common weed identification, weed life cycles, weed control techniques and herbicides available for home gardeners). Bring your favorite weeds. The speaker will be Chip Publ. This is a free program.

May 30 – Everything you need to know about lawns. New seeding, installing sod, lawn renovation, irrigation for lawns, weed control and other problems. Steve Price will be the speaker. The cost is \$4.

The classes are open to the public and will be held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Extension office in St. Helens. Space is limited to 30 people so pre-registration is advised. Call 503-397-3462 to register for one or both classes.

For more information about the program contact the Columbia County Extension office at 505 N. Columbia River Highway in St. Helens, or call 503-397-3462.

Church Directory

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 COMMUNITY CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-6790
Sunday Breakfast 9:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 9:45 a.m.
Children and Nursery 10:00 a.m.
Youth Group 6:00 p.m.
Preschool Tues. & Thurs. 9:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer 7:00 p.m.
Friday Adult Volleyball 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.

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.

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.

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