

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Isn't instant karma great! No sooner was my article published last month – critical of weather people and the attitudes they express about rain or sun – than a week-long, beautiful, misty Oregon rain descended. Truly, I don't remember this happening in August for at least twenty years. But then it's obvious that my memory is about as good as a soggy newspaper. Unfortunately, I also seem to remember that when the rain did start this early, the rain and/or cloud cover continued more or less unabated until well after the Fourth of July the following year. So prepare to be soaked in for awhile.(Now if my instant karma will just work again, we will get another few weeks of sunny weather before it freezes.)

The lesson I draw from this is that prediction based only on past experience is pretty much impossible in this continuously changing climate. Years ago, before G.W. Sr. realized that the science was accurate, early models of global warming said that while most areas would grow significantly hotter and dryer, others might actually get more rain than in the past (but would still get warmer). I always hoped that this little corner of the planet would be lucky enough to get MORE, rather than less, rain.

As I study a topographical map of North America, particularly the enormous watershed of the Columbia River and the significant barrier to moisture-filled air from the Pacific, it seems to me that much of the continent 'breathes' through the mouth of the Columbia River. You can watch a smaller action at the coast, as the sun pushes back the fog that you watched move in from the ocean the previous night. In much the same way, the vast plains of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the mid-west pull desperately at the comparatively moist air west of the Rockies. Often, they get more water than they can possibly handle, causing dire flooding. In winter, the breath of the continent is especially noticeable, when cold, icy wind comes sweeping down the mountains and is concentrated in the gorge.

Here in our little valley bowl, we are generally protected from the worst of the wind from any direction. But you don't have to go very far away from town (which in nearly all cases involves an increase in altitude) before the effects of this powerful 'breath' can be significant. In the early '90s, just as lots of folks put their Thanksgiving turkeys in the oven, a wind storm took down trees all over the WOEC area causing massive outages. While power was restored in town fairly quickly, remote areas like Elsie, Birkenfeld and Mist were without power for weeks. Again, the lesson I draw from this is that prediction based only on past experience is pretty much impossible in this continuously changing climate. Modern computer modeling is increasingly accurate (even if they don't say a thing about our valley on the news). Recent history seems proof that whatever else happens, the weather will become more violent.

Winter is definitely coming. Be prepared. The yard and garden should be cleaned up, removing dead and dying plant material for compost. It's NOT a good idea to include diseased plants in your compost since this will most likely encourage the spread of that disease with your finished compost next year. Diseased plants belong in the burn pile. I have even cut short diseased branches off the lilacs or blueberries (especially if it even looks like it might be the beginning of a blight that has caused the tips of branches to wilt dramatically and turn brown) into the woodstove just to make sure it didn't get in the compost. The ambitious gardener can begin to prune perennials and shrubs, paying attention to accenting winter color and creating shapes that will be pleasing when covered with snow.

NOW is the time to begin spraying copper (or another fungicidal product) for the many molds, blights, etc. that curse our (nearly) always damp climate. In particular, black spot on roses and fruit trees is most vulnerable before the leaves fall off the trees. This can be tricky to accomplish on fruit trees, since you have to wait until after you've picked the fruit. To be effective, however, you must get copper directly on the leaves in order to prevent them being used as incubators for the next disease cycle in spring. Though I'm not usually successful in getting my timing right, I have seen a reduction in black spot by spraying both the leaves remaining on the trees and on the ground before raking them up in the fall.

As always READ THE DIRECTIONS and follow all recommendations for safe use. It can be difficult to figure out when to begin spraying from these generic directions but it is important to deter-

mine if there are any plants in your yard and garden that should NOT be sprayed with a particular fungicide. While your basic copper sulfate fungicide can be applied to pretty much anything with leaf curl, anthracnose, blight, powdery mildew, or galls (weird little orange spiky bumps), another common fungicide, sulfur, can injure evergreens and arborvitae. Sulfur also cannot be combined with an oil spray or applied shortly after an oil spray BUT is an effective dormant spray to reduce infestations of mites, aphids and scale in addition to anthracnose, mildew, rot and curl.

Repeated spraying will be necessary if you want near elimination of black spot and/or powdery mildew during the spring and summer months. Both of these diseases have a warm weather reproduction method and will continue to expand their grip on your landscape throughout the summer if left untreated. However, the fall sprays are vital to a significant reduction by reducing winter dormancy of disease in the ground and (hopefully) preventing or reducing early infestation in the spring.

On slugs: Cultivate natural predators. Snakes, frogs, and the big black beetles that are so surprising when you uncover them, all eat slug eggs! Ducks positively go bonkers (and are incredibly gross) eating adult slugs. Chickens, on the other hand, don't care for slugs much but will eat slug eggs if they scratch them up. The last thing I want in my garden beds is a bunch of chickens. While they might provide a good tilling over the winter, they would also develop a habit of scratching around in the yard and garden, scratching up anything and everything. Though I've seen the occasional chicken in gardening magazines, I think it's stupid and was probably added because somebody thought it was cute.

Bunk! Gardening is often recommended as a peaceful and life-long hobby that can, and does, provide many hours of relaxation without a lot of physical strain (if you can get the young and strong to do the heavy work). However, it can put a lot of strain on your wrists and back. Repetitive motion injury, such as carpal tunnel, can result from using hand tools as well as from a keyboard. Recently, I have become intimately acquainted with another age and overuse condition, described in unofficial medical jargon as "Gardener's Butt". Over the years, I've spent hundreds of hours sitting or kneeling next to garden beds, planting seeds, weeding, harvesting, etc. While it was obvious that my back was sore after a day spent in the garden, it seemed a natural consequence of the work. What I didn't expect was that I would develop degenerative arthritis. This condition causes bones to grind together as cartilage breaks down, and the disks between vertebrae become less gel-like and more like a dry sponge. Nerves that go to your legs all come out of the lower back and pass through the pelvis. Sciatica (Gardener's Butt) produces sudden shooting pain from the back, down the leg to the toe. This nerve/muscle spasm is NOT FUN, especially at oh-dark-thirty when awakened from a sound sleep. Oh, well... Take care of yourself. Enjoy the color and freshness of autumn.

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.	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.	CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS Marc Farmer, 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.
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 2nd Ave. and Nehalem St., Vernonia 503 429-8301 Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 9:15 a.m.	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 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.	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.	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.	