

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



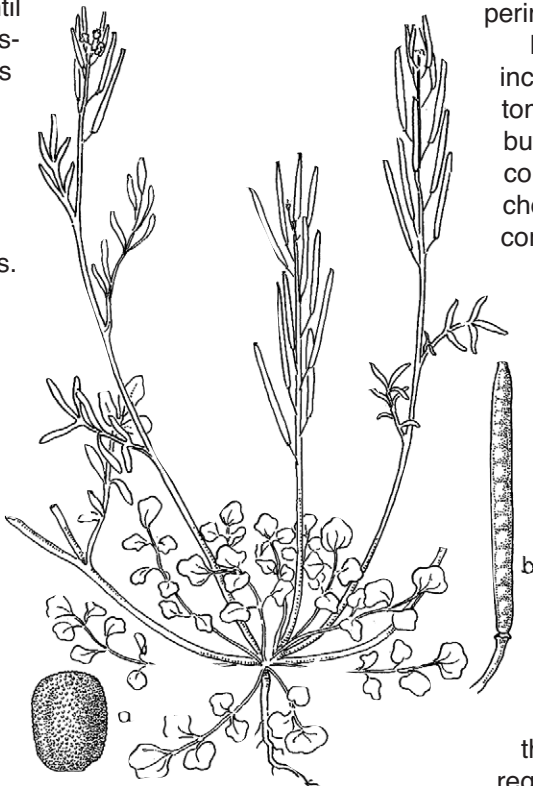
Late fall, as the weather progresses toward winter, is a good time to take stock of your garden. In our mild climate there's still time to move perennials and shrubs to different locations in order to get that slightly different microclimate for the 'WOW' response we like to achieve. Do NOT apply any fertilizer. The goal is to fool the plant into thinking that it hasn't been moved until spring. Be sure to water well after transplanting to eliminate any air pockets and set plants in their new homes. A nice layer of mulch is good to control weeds.

"Control weeds?" you ask incredulously. Oooh yes! We have whole families of plants that grow best during the long, cold fall and spring. As soon as it gets wet any freshly turned soil will soon green up with any number of lovely little weeds. My favorite is the Little Bitter Cress (see illustration), a native 'weed' treasured by pioneers as a salad green in the long cold winters. Helen Gilkey, in her 1957 classic *Weeds of the Pacific Northwest* says, "It is generally accompanied by Chickweed and Shepard's Purse in newly cultivated moist soil and though, like these, is easily eradicated temporarily by hand pulling or cultivating, it's persistence, like theirs, necessitates equal persistence on the part of the gardener." Chickweed and Shepard's Purse are both European imports that admirably illustrate the success of weedy plants to adapt, as they are now common weeds throughout North America.

Another good thing to move during this season, if they are still green and healthy, are first year biennial seedlings. My yard always has lots of young Foxglove and, this year, young Evening Primrose has sprung up in an expanded perennial bed. Both will die back completely as the weather gets cold, to start growing lushly in the spring to send up their flowers. If you are lucky, you can move these small plants to where you want them now (both enjoy lots of sun). It can be hard to catch them in the busy spring planting season and they don't like to be moved once they begin to send up their flowering stalk. The best days to do this kind of moving around are misty and moist. If you prepare the planting site before digging up what you want to move, they shouldn't notice the move at all. Be sure to water them in even if it IS raining! After blooming the usual biennial cycle would be to die completely in the fall producing another crop of non-blooming seedlings the following spring. However, many biennials are so successful in our climate that the blooming plant may survive for two or even three years before dying back completely. There are also several 'perennial' cultivars of foxglove that have been developed. I prefer the 'native', even though it, too, is a European import dating from the discovery of the New World.

This is a good time to get bulbs put in pots for 'forcing'. Not much force is required usually. There are lots of exotic and combination kits available in stores and through the mail, but any good quality daffodil, hyacinth, or crocus will work and can often be purchased in bulk. This is a great project to do with kids! Almost without exception kids love to play in the dirt. A few old containers, a bag of bulbs and a bit of soil can produce a bunch of great gifts for kids to give with very little expense. If you are using daffodils that you dug up to thin out (something you have to do every few years or they get overcrowded and quit blooming) use only the largest and healthiest bulbs. This is a great way to get rid of extras if you don't have any more room in your yard.

Be creative choosing containers! Clear or colored glass vases allow you to see the roots growing. Old cooking pots, shoes and boots, purses, anything you can fit a bulb into will work. For once you don't have to worry about drainage! Baskets can be lined with a couple layers of plastic and the handle of that recycled Easter basket is handy for tying up the drooping tops as they reach for the light.



Little Bitter Cress
Cardamine oligosperma
a. seed b. seed-pod

Earlier in the month, in my constant perusal of any gardening article I can get my hands on, I found a solution for this over-abundant growth. Paperwhite narcissus are often sold in kits to force and are a delight with their multiple blooms and fragrance. However, they often get top heavy and fall over just as they begin to bloom. The suggestion was to add a small amount of rubbing alcohol (I think) to the water, which stunted the growth just enough to keep the flowers upright. Unfortunately, I can't remember if the lovely photo of a mantle full of upright unstaked Paperwhites was in *Sunset* or *Real Simple* or *Gardening How To* or something I saw at the doctors office, or who knows what. You'll just have to experiment with my unreliable memory.

Regardless of the type of container, you will need a couple of inches of soil or some other medium to hold the bulbs off the bottom of the container. I've gotten the best results with potting soil but marbles and/or polished rocks look lovely in a glass or metal container. Bulbs should just touch the surface of the water if you choose not to use dirt. In either case the supply of water must be constant. If you want to get scientific you can start them in a cold, dark place. Bringing them to a warm, sunny window will immediately stimulate the growth of flowers, especially nice for Christmas and New Year's blooms.

After forcing, you can plant daffodils and hyacinths in the ground in the spring and in a couple of years they may bloom again. Forcing takes a LOT of strength out of the bulb. It used to be that Paperwhites did not survive our cold winters but it's worth a try in our warming climate. The incredible giant Amaryllis is readily available in a kit and it is astounding to have these big gorgeous flowers in the dead of winter. After the flowers come the long sword-like leaves that can take up quite a bit of space. If you have the space and the patience to keep them alive they can be planted in the garden in the summer, but they are not hardy. It takes more effort to get them to bloom again. Not only do they need lots of sun and fertilizer to regain strength, they also require a period of drought to go dormant before blooming. It's just not that easy to replicate their native African climate in the Pacific Northwest.

Yippee! A full five weeks before another 'Dig This' is due!

Happy Thanksgiving to all!

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.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

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

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.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

2nd Ave. and Nehalem St., Vernonia
503 429-8301
Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m.
Bible Study 9:15 a.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.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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

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.

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.