

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Sometimes I get ideas for arrangements that take a while to come to fruition. I've been wanting to do something with twigs, stems and other winter stuff, and I finally got outside to cut the necessary materials. Two days ago, the filberts were still tight, hard and dark auburn buds just beginning to lengthen. Today, some are beginning to open up, a surprising chartreuse and gray up close.

This will be an 'assemble outside' bouquet that won't last long in the warmth of the house. Once inside, my lichen covered, mossy branches will dry out, the buds of creek dogwood will fall apart and (most alarmingly) the filbert will bloom into 2 – 4 inch yellow sprays redolent with pollen. NOT what I want in the house, but worth putting together for a large space display and then returning to the earth.

I had the opportunity yesterday to drive from Forest Grove up Blooming Hill Road. After my delivery on Winters Road (which goes up to the top of the hill that you can see from Hwy. 47 looking east on the south to Gaston), I went down the other side of the hill, which dropped me into the Scholl's valley. Over there, the filbert orchards are just waiting for a bit of sun to burst into full pollen production. It took me years to actually be able to SEE the yellow that is described as the flower color. Eventually I figured out, by observation of the remarkably nice specimen in the pasture, that you can see the color for only about a day, two if you're lucky. The flower sprays have nearly microscopic flowers that wait for those oh-so-few days when the sun peeks out. It is truly amazing how the bloom waits for this brief warmth from the low winter sun, then lightens an otherwise drab landscape with a glowing, bright golden presence and fills the air with clouds of pollen.

The thing is, in this part of western Oregon, there is nearly always something growing. Even in deep winter, the lichens, mosses and even some of the grasses continue to grow. As it has grown warmer over the years, I have more and more 'survivors', finding an occasional pansy or primrose blossom on a sunny day. Some of the alyssum has managed to survive the winter with very little protection, completely by accident, which never happened ten years ago. Of course, I often think that something is going to survive, only to find after the next cold snap that it has disappeared. This year I have fox glove, evening primrose and phlox seedlings that have yet to succumb completely, though these, at least, will reliably come back for their second (flowering) biennial year.

This quality of always growing is one of the great joys of working in the yard and garden in the winter and spring. Weeds, such as spurge, dock and buttercup remain green. Under the right conditions, when the soil is wet but not saturated (which creates an insurmountable vacuum as you pull), the long tap roots of curly dock can be extracted, removing the thing completely from your perennial or vegetable bed. While it's incredibly rewarding to pull three- or four-foot roots, you bring about a million seeds to the surface. On the other hand, by pulling the root you've created a pathway through the clay for water, nutrients and perhaps even worms to penetrate where not much of anything CAN penetrate. Oh! The dilemma!

Winter can be an excellent time to apply herbicide, if you are so inclined. If you choose to try this, pick a day with some sun, when the spray won't be immediately washed off, to encourage plants to suck nutrients (or in this case poisons) down into their roots. The most commonly used and available herbicide is glyphosate (marketed as Roundup but available generically). While effective under ideal conditions (no wind or rain, some sun), there are at least two problems with glyphosate (beside it not being considered organic). First, it really doesn't work too well on a variety of weeds, such as the aforementioned dock, but including blackberries and invasive morning glory. You will need multiple applications of product to eliminate dock, dandelions or buttercups. In my experience it's worth my time and effort to PULL the dock when it transgresses into the garden, but I've been known to use it to control dandelions and buttercups in areas where I want grass. I say 'control' because even with multiple applications and ideal conditions these will not be eliminated. I think this is an advantage! As for blackberries, get a goat! It doesn't seem justifiable to spray the large quantities of product repeatedly necessary. I

don't want to use anything poisonous enough to kill blackberries. [When we first moved here we did have a few goats. The problem is goats are WAY too smart for their own good. A week after we got rid of our last goat we got FIVE sheep which were far easier to control.]

A second disadvantage of glyphosate is that it is completely nonselective, but seems to have the nasty habit of being effective when accidentally sprayed or carried by the wind unto prize plants. You really don't want this stuff riding the breeze around your yard. If they survive, the poor things will be very strange looking and deformed. Other herbicides that can be carried into non-target plants include 2,4-D and dicamba; notably in established trees after several years application of a weed-and-feed type product (this effect through the soil and into the tissue of large trees you've had for a long time that have weird yellow growth in the spring).

I do maintain that the Western Oregon gardener, unless blessed with unlimited energy, strength and time to devote to mulching, pulling and other means of control simply MUST SPRAY to control certain vigorous plant attackers. There are plenty of organic controls that require distribution by spraying. As I've said before the vast array of molds, mildews, rusts etc. enjoy our damp climate so much that I don't believe there is a time when you can go outside and NOT find evidence of their growth and reproduction (spreading!).

Another bane of the perennial grower, especially those of us who envision a full flowering border or bed, is grass. It seems impossible to keep it out and even a few stalks can ruin the shape of a planting. It will take over your carefully prepared bed if you don't exercise some method of control. There is a reason that this (or at least very few miles away) is THE grass (seed and turf) growing capital of the world.

After fighting this battle for years (and using up valuable energy), I finally got brave and tried a selective grass killer. It works! And doesn't turn the grass that nasty orange color that glyphosate does, the grass just dies! You CAN spray garden grass killer in a perennial bed and it just kills the grass! I've found it particularly effective at killing the grass along the fence lines where the grass can thrive in a narrow strip the animals (on the other side of the fence) can't graze and I can't pull or dig up without making a hole under the fence. If you can get it on as soon as new growth appears most of your desirable plants won't be growing yet!

Regardless of what you decide to use be sure to use extreme caution READ the LABEL and follow all directions. This is one area where old folk remedies may be

Please see page 21

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.