

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Wow! Wham! Frosty fall is here! I know that it frosted several weeks ago at higher elevations, but last Sunday morning we had a good hard frost here on the Nehalem Valley floor. The sun gilded every tiny edge of leaf and grass as the frost melted into individual droplets, each reflecting the morning's glory, as it crept across the white landscape. Even at a distance, the forest sparkled and shimmered Then for a few moments before they dried completely, the colors of vine maple, current, elderberries, snowberries are intensified to jewels! A good time to SLOW DOWN so you can enjoy the ride!

Now is the time to accomplish some important garden and yard tasks: clean-up, bulb/groundcover planting and lime. These can be big projects but they also have big pay-offs for the gardener. I usually feel pretty good if I complete most of one or two of these chores.

Clean-Up: As much as possible it's wise to remove dead plant material and turn it into compost. Our wet climate encourages the growth of all kinds of blights and rusts and molds that overwinter in dead plant material. Obviously diseased plants or parts of plants should be burned. A handy compost pile can help limit the exposure throughout the garden. You can also start shaping perennials, shrubs and trees with an eye to what they will look like with snow heaped on them.

Our growing season also supports the growth of frost resistant weeds, such as curly dock and dandelions, long after the cold has killed off all of the beautiful annuals. Though classified as biennials (vegetative growth the first season followed by a blooming plant the next season, producing seeds and dying) some of these weeds will survive for several seasons. Dock, especially, establishes a loooong tap root and can be nearly impossible to pull and/or will require multiple applications of glyphosate. It's much easier to control these plants when they are small.

Groundcovers and fall bulbs: The more soil you leave exposed to light, the more weeds will grow before you are able to get back to that piece of ground in the spring. The weeds described above (and others) linger long into late fall, continuing to grow actively anytime the sun is out, until finally giving way only when the ground has frozen solid. Then, virtually the instant the top one-quarter-inch of soil thaws, a whole different family of weeds begins to thrive in any exposed dirt. It's unbelievably easy for garden and perennial beds to become jungles. The cold and hard, or soggy wet ground can be impossible to work, and uninviting as well. After cleaning up, a good mulch will provide enormous benefits to the soil. Keeping the top of the soil covered prevents rain compaction and encourages the growth and activity of worms and other invertebrate organisms. One of my favorite Master Gardener class sayings was, 'Standing on the ground there are 16,000 living things supporting you.' Of course, most of them are microscopic, but the more you have, the 'better' the soil. Long and/or extensive weed root systems can be more easily removed from good lively and loose soil.

Mulch can be clean, dead stuff like barkdust, leaves or straw or it can be a living green manure crop. Austrian field peas, crimson clover and Fava beans all grow great in our climate. The fastest way I know to prepare a garden bed for early spring planting is to pull out a crop of clover, leaving the surface ready to rake out for planting. This method does expose weeds seeds that survive for long periods in the soil (as does any form of tilling). I've had great success covering large seeds such as peas, beans, and corn with very loose straw, instead of soil. This slows down some of the weeds, but is light enough for strong seedlings to grow through. I also like to lay out rows of mulch between rows of planted seeds — there's just no good reason to leave soil exposed unless you are very fond of regular applications of herbicide or especially enjoy weeding.

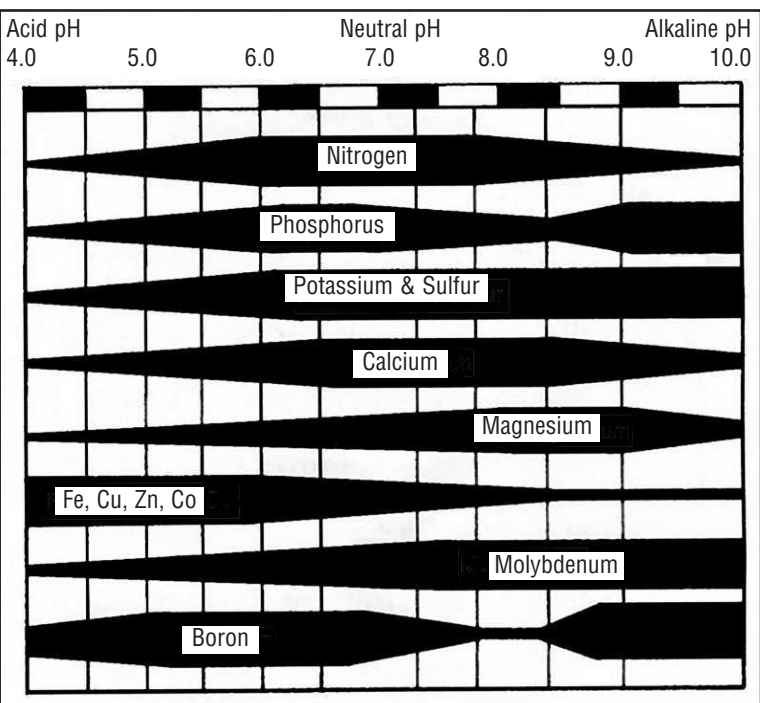
I included the fall bulbs in this category because you want your garlic and daffodils under the mulch. It's also time to begin thinking about forcing bulbs for indoor winter bloom.

Lime: Lime is a mineral powder ground from rocks containing large amounts of calcium carbonate. Agricultural lime is ground limestone which is primarily calcium carbonate. Dolomitic lime is ground from rocks that contain magnesium carbonate as well. Dolomitic lime is preferred in Western Oregon where soils are often deficient in magnesium. It is slow to break down and should be applied in the fall so that optimal pH is achieved by spring. Soil pH depends on mineral content. The effect in the Pacific Northwest is that soils west of the Cascades are primarily acid (lots of rain dissolving those minerals) and east of the Cascades more

likely to be alkaline. Soil pH affects plant growth by affecting the bioavailability of nutrients and toxic metals, and the activity of soil organisms. Living creatures of any kind are not numerous in either very acid or very alkaline soil.

West of the Cascades it's OK to apply 50 pounds of lime per 1000 sq. ft. every three years in the absence of a soil test. Aluminum, which is NOT a plant nutrient, IS very common in soil. When pH is below 6, aluminum availability increases and may cause problems. Columbia County soils have an average pH of 5.5 to 5.8 so it's pretty safe to apply this amount of lime. As you can see from the diagram, micronutrient availability is dramatically affected by soil pH. Aluminum is not on the chart because it can only be toxic to most plants.

Wood ashes are a potent soil amendment and should be used with caution. More than 15 to 20 pounds of ashes may cause injury, whereas lime can be applied at over twice that rate. Wood stove ashes contain the mineral remains of whatever



you put in the stove — glossy paper, especially, has all kinds of chemicals in it. Toxins in ash can be passed through vegetables to you. Better, perhaps to save wood ashes for ornamentals.

N O T E : Rhododendrons, azaleas, blueberries and some other ornamentals and/or fruits are well adapted to our native soil. Do not apply lime or ashes.

NOTE 2: Gypsum will neither hurt nor help your soil. It is effective only in a type of clay that is not generally found in the far west. The best way to break up clay is to *add lots of organic matter every year*.

NOTE 3: The combination of sand and clay produces something akin to concrete. Depending on the type of clay, it might even BE primitive concrete. Adding quarter-minus crushed rock and *lots of organic matter* is a much better idea.

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

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.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

Gary S. Walter, Pastor
2nd Ave. and Nehalem St., Vernonia
503 429-8301
Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m.
Sabbath School 9:30 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 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.

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. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Rev. Luan Tran, Administrator
960 Missouri Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-8841
Mass Sunday 12:00 Noon
Religious Educ. Sunday 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 Mon. & Wed. 9:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer 6:00 p.m.
Tues. & Fri. Adult Volleyball 7:00 p.m.