

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Thou shalt not suffer a flowering plum to exceed ten feet in height, for it will grow great and unsupportable and will become overloaded and break in a most unattractive way.

Like many of you, I planted a cute little flowering plum when we first moved here. They are cheap (because they are easy to propagate), break up the 'sea of green' with their red foliage, have lovely flowers early in spring and somewhat edible fruit (it's sour) that makes great syrup. BUT they can get out of hand quickly, as they will grow many feet every year, up out and away. If given enough space this might not be a problem. However, plum is a brittle wood with a tendency to grow in contrary directions creating a thick canopy of crossing wood. Plums bloom and bear on two-year old growth and small branches die with regular frequency. Still don't see the problem? Snow and ice collect on the outer canopy, the tree simply is not strong enough to support the weight so main structural branches will break rather than bend, taking a good part of the tree with them.

I think this is why so many of these trees receive the fatal one-cut pruning job. The "good" news is that flowering plums are very hard to kill. Nor do they seem subject to disease like their cousins that produce fruit we want to eat. If your chop it to the ground, or just cut big portions of the top out, a plum will do two things. It will send about four million strong branches straight up, with lesser branches in every direction, and it will send up numerous shoots from its spreading roots, most of which will have nasty thorns. Neither of these is a good idea if the goal is to have a nice little flowering tree.

All is not lost however. Because plums are sooo hard to kill, they make excellent subjects for live sculpture, and you can create just about any shape your de-

sire. Mine is right at the corner between the driveway and the road so, while it wants to reach into the road for the sun, it cannot be permitted to do so as the big truck will start taking it out when it pulls off the road to back in. However, I got Dennis to take the chain saw to it in winter and so it was. I left it alone (a mistake) the first summer after it's major pruning back to two main branches, and had to prune out excessive numbers of sprouts and thorny root shoots the following spring. Then I was able to select a few shoots to become the scaffolding of a tree that I could reach (mostly from the ground) to prune. All of the branches that I retained were weighted and tied down, to arch the way I wanted. Plastic jugs filled with water make great weights. It takes surprisingly little string to bring branches into compliance. (I recommend painting milk jugs some neutral color to tone down the "junky look.") Unsightly weights, string or wire can usually be removed after one year.

The best time to begin renovation of such a tree is in the summer, not during our current dreary season. Plums should be pruned back to shape after they bloom, else you knock all the buds off. If you really want to stay on top of shaping the tree up, getting a lot of pruning done in summer would serve you well. Remember, in this case, you are not as concerned with fruit as you are with shape and color. You will not get much flowering the first couple of years because plums bloom and fruit on two-year-old wood. In its third year after decapitation my little plum is coming along nicely. Right now it looks a bit like the brush hog went over it, but in a month the scars will be covered. I have a bit of flowering wood and it should be quite pretty this spring. Hopefully, I can get to it this summer and prevent the top of my lovely arching branches from trying to become 40-foot trees.

Elsewhere around the place lots is going on: pruned the fruit trees, the honeysuckle, the clematis and the kiwi. Completely re-dug an old perennial bed on the edge of the garden. Two years ago I moved a hop plant into this bed to create shade on the lawn in the hottest part of the summer. Last year it made so much

shade that it threatened the kiwi at the other end of the trellis, so we moved the kiwi. It may have been a mistake to plant the hop so close to the garden as I spent two days pulling long thick runners out of the bed and I'm afraid this kind of aggressive containment will be an annual event. A miniature rose that the hop definitely overcame last year had to be moved. Shoveled good garden soil into this bed giving it its first taste of rich, healthy soil (the flower beds are always last). Added a path connecting the fence side of the garden to the lawn and added good soil to the bed around grandson "Ben's tree", which was planted the year he was born. Into all the nice new soil went bulbs, all started from around the place, a good coat of bark mulch and, finally, the cutest little fences Penrhynn made from the prune trimmings.

Still waiting for the garlic to show itself. Planted (probably prematurely) peas in one bed scavenged for soil, and threw about four packets of expired spinach and broccoli seed out in another garden bed. Maybe it will grow. I also have some broccoli seed in flats that I have more hope for. Started using weak liquid organic fertilizer on the house plants. Applied grass killer and grass seed in mutually exclusive locations. Still working up to a thorough antifungal spray.

Lots to do, but so hard to get up and do when the sun is out to bask in.



Salem Scene From page 5

tions related to banking and safety jobs. Studies have shown that credit status is not a valid predictor of job performance or honesty.

Consider the many workers who have been out of work for months, who have become delinquent on house payments, maybe even lost their homes. Of course their credit score will be low. But your credit score doesn't tell an employer if you'll work hard. It doesn't tell them if you'll show up on time. It doesn't tell them if you have the skills you need to get the job done well.

Even if you have made every effort to remain current on your bills, one in four credit reports contain significant errors, and minor errors are more prevalent. Correcting these errors can take more than 30

days, a delay that most likely will cost an applicant the sought-after job. This is an excellent bill and I plan on supporting it.

More Bills of Interest...

SB 1032: Bans the use of Bisphenol A (BPA) in the manufacture and distribution of children's drinking products.

HB 3655: Authorizes the extension of emergency unemployment insurance benefits for six weeks.

SB 991: Allows private community programs to provide medium and long-term child care for families in crisis. This program is modeled after an Illinois program that utilizes volunteers.

HB 3631: Prohibits insurers from discriminating against victims of sexual violence by treating that victimization as a pre-existing condition.

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, Minister
410 North Street, Vernonia
503 429-6522
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Sunday Worship 11:00 a.m.
(meets in Youth & Family Center)
Home Group Meeting
throughout the week
at various locations

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

359 "A" Street, Vernonia
503 429-4027
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.