

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
Columbia County Master Gardener



I can't believe I'm writing another December column. I've written about the advantages of giving gift certificates to gardeners (Pick a favorite catalogue and let your gardener choose) and quoted various stories (the writer's cop-out), but I've never written about the care and feeding of that most

iconic of Christmas symbols, the Christmas tree. It never really seems to be the season until the greenery comes in. Like many people, the smell of evergreens IN the house sends memories cascading through me. Seemingly endless treks down the railroad grade to find the perfect tree. I thought for years that all Christmas trees had the long limp leaders of the "wild" untrimmed Douglas fir. I still find the closely trimmed and shaped tree, not to mention the flocked tree, very odd and unnatural looking.

The most important thing to remember when bringing in your Christmas tree and greens is that they are a HUGE fire hazard. Thankfully, smaller lights and led lights provide plenty of illumination for your tree, but are not nearly as hot as the large bulbs of yesteryear. Be sure to turn your tree lights off at night and when you are not home. Every year, at least one Christmas tree fire makes the news. Let it be the fire department demonstration, not your house.

That scary stuff said, because of where we live, we have access to the finest freshest trees available. Local tree farms can provide beautiful trees of every kind, from stiff richly scented Noble fir to long-needed pines, and well-trimmed nearly perfect cones of several different firs ready to display every ornament you own. Local trees are so fresh that they need a lot of water at first – the more water the trees retain, the less of a fire hazard they represent. So be sure to stay on top of watering.

When you get your carefully selected tree home, the struggle to get it up and keep it watered begins. If you cut your own tree ask that they put it in the shaking machine, a treat to watch but noisy! (Small irritating "hover flies" can quickly fill your house from colonies inside the tree and, since they never land, they are impossible to swat. However, the electric tennis racket-shaped swatters can provide a wealth of family fun – just have your vacuum handy to clean up the aftermath.) In any case, when you get your tree out of the car, but before you bring it in, remove the wooden X-shaped support, if present, and/or tree wrapping. Give the tree a really good shaking to remove loose needles and bugs. Cut at least a thin slice off the bottom of the tree to make sure it will take up water when you get it inside. This is also a good time to shorten trees that children picked out – Invariably a gorgeous 10-foot tree that can't be squeezed under your eight-foot ceiling. Trim the bottom limbs off the tree, in any case, so you have a good clean 6- 12 inches to put in your tree holder. Any limbs you have to trim can be used to fill in blank spots or to make garlands.

Large (2-1/2 to 3 foot diameter minimum) galvanized tubs make great tree supports with just a bit of handyman work. Re-use or make an x-shaped support of waste wood – something in the neighborhood of 1/2 X 4 inches, by the bottom width of your container. Drill three or four small holes near the top of the container. Set the tree, on its support, in the tub. Run wires from each hole to the tree, about a foot above the top of the tub, and wrap them around the trunk. Tighten each of the wires until they hold the tree in place. Fill the tub with water up to the height of the holes. This is my Dad's design and we had one that worked for many years. Its best feature is that it holds LOTS of water so keeping your tree hydrated is less of a problem. One does have to be a bit careful that presents don't fall into the watery deep.

When purchasing a tree holder, buy the deepest and heaviest that you can afford. If you end up with a very small reservoir just check and water several

times a day. Putting a tree up is generally a two-person project. If you do it by yourself, the other will invariably come home and pronounce it crooked – this is a good reason to take a break between getting the tree IN and decorating. Time for a festive beverage!

Filling in blank spots: Trim one of the cut-off branches to the desired length, plus an inch or so. Use an electric drill to make a hole slightly smaller than your branch, then trim the end of the branch and insert it in the hole. This technique is used a lot to fill in giant community trees (not OURS, of course).

Live Trees: The problems of hydration are multiplied many fold when trying to use a live tree. If you intend to plant it in your yard remember that it will probably get VERY TALL. Nonetheless, this is a great experience to have with children. If you can keep it alive and stay in the same place, they can decorate it for the birds many times. However, live trees are hard to keep alive. Try to make the tree's transition from outside to inside as gradual as possible – doing one thing to a plant at a time. For instance, you might move it from the car to a sheltered spot in the yard, to the garage, to the coolest room in the house, to its final display place. Don't set up your tree near any kind of heat source (stove, furnace vent, baseboard or wall heater). The galvanized tub is really nearly essential for a live tree – you want to be able to keep the bottom of the whole root ball damp, though you don't want it immersed in standing water the way you do a cut tree. Bring a live tree in the house for a maximum of two weeks of display, then gradually work it back outside. Keep your tree watered and sheltered from wind. Because our winters are so mild (or at least when they are in a mild spell), you can plant the tree in the ground anytime you can dig a big enough hole. You will have to keep watering through next summer in order to establish a good root system – Good Luck!

Time for another festive beverage! The sun begins returning, entering Capricorn at 9:30 p.m. on the 21st. Of course, we won't notice any longer days for months, 'cause we'll be socked in under the low cloud cover of our rain forest.

Vernonia Christmas Eve services

Vernonia Community Church

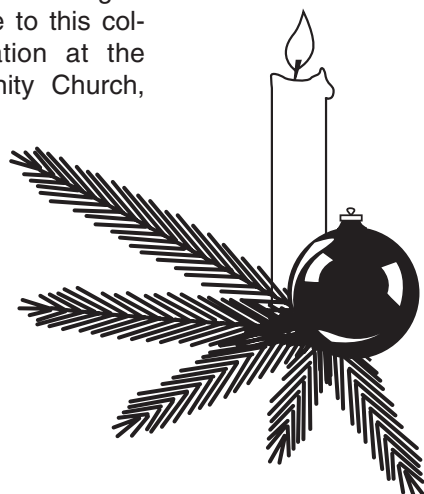
The Vernonia Community Church will hold a Christmas Eve Candlelight Celebration at 7:00 p.m. on December 24.

Included in the celebration will be The Dickens Singers, favorite carols, and the Christ Story in both word and song.

All are welcome to this collaborative celebration at the Vernonia Community Church, 957 State Avenue.

Pioneer Baptist Fellowship

The Pioneer Baptist Fellowship will hold a Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 7:00 p.m. on December 24, at the Vernonia Community Learning Center, 939 Bridge Street.



Church Directory

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

Larry Gibson, 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.

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.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor John D. Murray
359 "A" Street, Vernonia
503 860-3860

Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer Meeting 7:00 p.m.

VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Ralph Young, Pastor
957 State Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-6790

Sunday Bible Classes 9:00 a.m.
Family Praise & Worship 10:30 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer 6:30 p.m.
Thursday Ladies Study 7:00 p.m.
Nursery 10:15 a.m.
Vernonia Community Preschool

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)
Various Home Group Meetings

PIONEER BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

John Cahill, Pastor
939 Bridge Street, Vernonia
503-429-1161

www.pbfalive.com
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Thursday Prayer 7:00 p.m.

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.

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.