

## Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson  
Columbia County Master Gardener



April 20, was shown on my calendar as the first day of spring, but it sure felt like the drag end of winter. At least I hope it's the end of winter. Another long wet spring would be hard to deal with. Though I will say that it makes the few warm sunny days truly glorious.

I talked about a rough home analysis of your soil a couple of months ago. If you get ambitious and send your soil in for analysis, your results will include specific recommendations for the amounts of basic nutrients to add to optimize crop growth. If you are just trying to figure out what to use to improve your soil, here is a way to translate fertilizer labels into something useful.

Example: You are following a fertilizer recommendation for adding two pounds of 4 – 4 – 4 per 1000 square feet of garden. Fertilizer nutrients are always expressed with a three part number representing the ratios of Nitrogen(N) - Phosphorus (P) – Potassium (K) in numerical form.

Choose a fertilizer with an appropriate analysis. You could choose an 8-8-8 or a 10-10-10 but not a 21-4-4 as that would have an incorrect ratio of fertilizer

Calculate, or read on the label, how much 8-8-8 is needed for 1,000 square feet. Divide the amount of nitrogen recommended for 1,000 square feet by the number of square feet in your garden.

Find a way to spread this amount of fertilizer on your garden evenly, i.e. not in your paths but on your garden beds. If your go in for rototilling it's a bit easier to get everything even, but that carries its own problems.

If you don't get the free, local extension publication "Country Living" you are missing out on all kinds of local (well usually St. Helens) events such as the pruning workshop (already happened) and monthly pre-

sentations such as "The World of Insects, Spiders, and their Relatives" by local gardeners who call themselves The Bug Chicks. This will be held in the extension classroom at 6:30 p.m. on March 22. Parent and budding young scientist special night out? One-to-one time with a parent is incredibly valuable to a certain age group. Get them started early, parenting points and exposure to adults in a learning environment. Great times!

The newsletter also includes one page of suggestions from our local agent which are always completely overwhelming. I feel great if I can get a few done. This month's newsletters is particularly full of maintenance and cleanup tasks, planning, propagation/planting, pest monitoring. Here are a few gems from that list and my own projects:

Clean, sharpen and oil garden tools.

Since the soil will not be dry enough, start cool-season plants indoors (carrots, beets, broccoli, leeks, parsley, chives, radish)

Plant onions as soon as possible, especially if you are planting seed. If you plant sets, you can plant them in wet soil – known as mudding them in – and they will probably grow. If you didn't get garlic in the ground in the fall, plant NOW!

Begin mowing when dry enough – probably next month.

Finish pruning if necessary. Then clean up. Yuck.

Get plants (tuberous begonias, dahlias, geraniums, fuschias) out of winter storage and begin to grow them in potting soil, fertilize lightly. Another effective method, especially with geraniums, is to take cuttings now and start a whole raft of new plants to brighten your summer days.

Another hugely helpful thing you can start now, is to begin a few simple yoga stretches. I really hate getting to that first gorgeous dry day, then working myself into a Vicodin coma for the next three days because I simple can't remember to START with stretching. A very brief internet search got me a list of five easy exercises to increase core strength. Core strength involves the muscles that support your back. All of these stretch-

years of unsuccessful attempts at yoga classes, which were great fun because I have VERY flexible joints, I finally discovered in physical therapy that I had very poor core strength. I had to start by *finding* my ab muscles. I did this lying on the floor and poking at my belly until I could see and feel my belly flatten and tighten. Then I had to learn to breathe at the same time. This is not easy after three children, one by cesarean. I'm getting better, but I really have to concentrate to incorporate this into other exercises or daily activities – like going over bumps in the van. I will describe my findings briefly but more complete descriptions are readily obtained from a variety of sources including local instructors, television programs and the library.

The five positions are:

**Lateral Stretch:** Standing with feet apart and shoulders relaxed, gather your core (abdomen) and slowly lift one arm up at your side and overhead. Stretch that side of your body to a point where you can still breath, hold your abs and not tip your stretch forward. This may mean that your stretch is going straight up to the ceiling but that is OK. Work with your body. Repeat on both sides until warmed up.

**Standing Forward Bend:** Begin standing with feet shoulder width apart. Slowly lean forward, relaxing arms and head down, to a comfortable position. Relax your head between your arms. Gradually lift your arms behind you until you can clasp your fingers. Gather yourself, hold that core and BREATHE. After a few breaths slowly unwind and give yourself a good wiggle and shake.

**Cat:** Begin evenly balanced on hands and knees, back in a neutral position. Pull in your abs and arch your back up into a curve while dropping your head. This should be a relaxing position (except for that core). Slowly return to a neutral position and proceed immediately to ...

**Cow:** From the neutral position slowly arch your back and lift your head to a position opposite the Cat. Don't overextend your neck; your eyes should be directed at the horizon. Breathe. Return to neutral and back to Cat. This Cat/Cow cycle can be done in a continuous motion and I find it very soothing after a day in the yard. Another variation from either position is adding a bit of tail wagging. Fun!

**Supine Twist:** Lying on your back, bend your knees and, keeping them together, gently roll your knees from side to side. This is by far the most difficult of these stretches. Don't be discouraged if you have to use some props to get the stretch without hurting yourself. Instead of trying to get all the way to the ground you can set up a pillow (or two) on each side so that you can successfully complete the stretch.

These stretches will let you begin the day ready for anything the garden can throw at you. The same exercises are also a great way to work out the kinks after completing your day. Relax, and enjoy the work you have accomplished for yourself and your garden. Remember, if you prepare now there will be fewer problems later – so true for so many things, gardening and life in general.

After

## Church Directory

<p><b>VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH</b></p> <p>Carl Pense, Pastor 850 Madison Avenue, Vernonia 503 429-1103 Sunday Worship Service: 10:30 a.m. Children's Sunday School</p> <p><b>SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST</b></p> <p>Larry Gibson, Pastor 2nd Ave. and Nehalem St., Vernonia 503 429-8301 Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m. Sabbath School 9:30 a.m.</p> <p><b>ASSEMBLY OF GOD</b></p> <p>Wayne and Maureen Marr 662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia, 503 429-0373 Sunday School 9:45 a.m. Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.</p> <p><b>ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH</b></p> <p>Rev. Luan Tran, Administrator 960 Missouri Avenue, Vernonia 503 429-8841 Mass Sunday 12:00 Noon Religious Educ. Sunday 10:30 a.m.</p>	<p><b>COVENANT CHURCH VERNONIA</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH</b></p> <p>Ralph Young, Pastor 957 State Avenue, Vernonia 503 429-6790 Sunday Bible Classes 9:00 a.m. Family Praise &amp; 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</p> <p><b>VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH</b></p> <p>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 &amp; Family Center) Various Home Group Meetings</p>	<p><b>PIONEER BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>NEHALEM VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH</b></p> <p>Gary Taylor, Pastor Grant &amp; 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.</p> <p><b>CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS</b></p> <p>Marc Farmer, Branch President 1350 E. Knott Street, Vernonia 503 429-7151 Sacrament Meeting, Sunday 10 a.m. Sunday School &amp; Primary 11:20 a.m. Relief Society, Priesthood and Young Women, Sunday 12:10 p.m.</p>
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