

Careless Burning of Fern, Brush Greatest Hazard to Forests

Greatest fire hazard in the 4,000,000 acres of forest land and brush land which farmers and small land holders own in western Oregon is the careless burning of fern, brush, and other debris by some farmers themselves, County Agent W. G. Nibler reported, after attending meetings recently with other county agents and with officials of the state forestry department.

Forest Grove, Salem, Springfield, Coquille, and Medford.

In northwestern Oregon, three-fourths of all fires handled by state forest wardens in 1946 were caused by careless burning which got out of hand, those attending the meetings were told.

Although farmers have the right to burn fern on their own land, some question exists as to the merit of such means of clearing ground, the officials at the meeting said. Observation of areas on which repeated burning has been done has shown no lessening of growth of new fern. The only apparent gain has been an immediate clearing of the areas burned, which lasts only until the new growth. Many farmers no longer burn fern but are using such methods as prior cultivation and intensive grazing and seeding to get rid of it.

Most fern burning is done in the months of February, March and

April, when an escaping fire is not apt to do much damage to mature forest. Most fern areas are in old burns or cutover areas being restocked with new forest trees, when may be from one to 40 years old. A fern fire in a new reproduction area will kill everything in its path and thus cause a severe setback to attempts to reestablish the area as forest land. Actually, fern helps young tree seedlings by protecting them from heat and dryness, according to Charles R. Ross extension forester.

If an individual wishes to burn brush or fern, no objection will be raised as long as the fire is kept within the boundary of property he controls. The moment the fire protection agencies and the person who set the fire is responsible for damage caused other property as well as cost of supervision.

During the closed season, which lasts normally from May 15 until sometime in the fall, permits must be obtained for burning. Forest wardens will issue the permits if the farmer's land is within the forest protection boundary or near it, while the chief of the rural fire protection district will issue them if the land is in a solid farming district. Permits will be issued at any time, free of charge, if reasonable precautions have been taken and the weather is reasonably safe.

If a fire started without a permit gets away, the person starting the fire is subject to arrest and fine, since the fact that the fire escaped is considered prima facie evidence that proper precautions were not taken.

County Agent Nibler said that the meetings reported farmers in northwest Oregon have been able to proceed with grazing development without organizing special grazing districts. Such districts were authorized in 1937 and Coos county has a 20,000-acre district.

Machinery to organize similar grazing districts has been set up in Curry, Josephine, Douglas, Wallowa, Columbia, and Clatsop counties, but there seems to be little agitation at present to go ahead in formation of the districts. The law requires that the acreage must include at least 2,000 acres and that at least 50 land-owners must petition for the district.



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Agent Tells Garden Tips

Sweet corn picked during the late morning or afternoon is sweeter than that harvested early in the morning. That is a timely garden reminder from County Agent Nibler, who explains that sugar is stored in the corn during the day and changes to starch at night.

A second pointer for getting top quality in home grown garden products is to remove the tops from root crops very soon after digging. While in the ground, the plant feeds from soil; but when the plant is dug, the tops draw upon the food stored in the root and thus reduce its value. This applies to all root crops, including beets, carrots, turnips and parsnips for example.

If ground is available in good shape for planting, this is a good time to plant some fall spinach, mustard, turnips, radishes, and lettuce, Nibler adds. These are nutritious foods that will be very helpful to the family budget later on.

A letter received by Nibler from R. Ralph Clark, extension horticulturist at OSC, comments that gardens are looking very good now in most sections of Oregon. "The gardens which were planted following the wet period in the

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spring have grown exceptionally for the time and expense involved," fast and are giving good returns Clark says.

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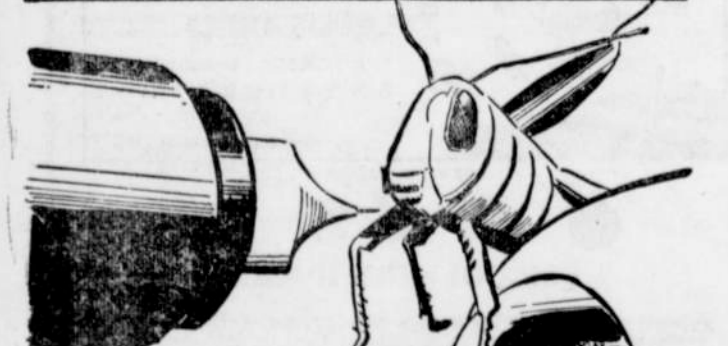
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