



Country Living

Provided to you by the

OSU Extension Service Columbia County

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The office will be closed Fridays from Noon to 1 p.m.

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April 2016

Programs for you . . .

Listen to the **Gardening Spot** on KOHI (1600 am) radio - **Every Saturday, 8:05 to 8:15 a.m.**

- Apr. 20 **Soil & Water Conservation District**. 7:30 p.m., SWCD office-35285 Millard Rd., St. Helens
- Apr. 21 **Good Food, Bad Food: Agriculture, Ethics, and Personal Choice**: Food plays a profound role in all our lives. Our food system is very complex and constantly evolving. Farms, in general are getting larger but the number of commercial small farms is also increasing. So are community gardens and interest in fruit and vegetable gardening. Do food choices have consequences? This program should be interesting and should stimulate discussion. I don't know the speaker (or her perspective) but plan to attend to hear what she has to say. Location: St. Helens Public Library/Columbia Learning Center, 375 S. 18th St., St. Helens. Time: 7:00 pm.
- April 27 **Water Rights and Water Resources**. A Presentation and Discussion by staff from the Oregon Water Resources Department. If you are interested in how water rights are allocated, what is an agricultural water right and when do you need it, how cities/districts/industrial users and private water systems access water, or any other water resource related question, this meeting should be worth your time. Location: St. Helens Library/Columbia Learning Center. 375 S. 18th St., St. Helens. Time: 6:30pm.
- Apr. 28 **Master Gardener™ Chapter Meeting**. 6:30 p.m. Speaker will be Dave and Annilese Doolittle on cool plants and new trends, OSU Extension Classroom, St. Helens. **The public is invited. Free.**
- Apr. 28 **Upper Nehalem Watershed Council**. 7 p.m., Vernonia Grange, <http://nehalem.org/> 503-429-0869
- Apr. 30 **21st Annual Spring Garden Fair**, by Columbia County Master Gardeners™. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. St. Helens High School. About 5,000 tomato plants from at least 30 varieties at \$1.50 a plant.
- Apr. 30 **NW Regional Sheep Forum**. North Willamette Research Extension Center. Article page 7.
- May 7... **2016 Fair and Plant Sale**, 9 a.m. to 3 pm., Vernonia School

Chip Bubl

Chip Bubl, OSU Extension Faculty, Agriculture



Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources, Family and Community Health, 4-H Youth, Forestry & Natural Resources, and Extension Sea Grant programs. Oregon State University, United States Department of Agriculture, and Columbia County cooperating. The Extension Service offers its programs and materials equally to all people.

In the garden

Seedlings and soil temperatures

Oregon's erratic spring weather, often with below freezing conditions one day, a downpour the next and 70 degrees the following day, may play havoc with warm season crop seed germination.

As a result, Oregonians have the greatest success growing tomatoes, eggplants and pepper plants started indoors or in a greenhouse, then transplanted into the garden when the soil has warmed to at least 60 degrees.

But some warm season crops, including beans, cucumbers, squash, corn and melons are more successfully grown if they are directly seeded into the soil.

Here are some hints to avoid seed germination failure in direct seeded, warm season crops:
Wait to plant warm weather crops until the soil reaches 70 degrees at the two-inch depth during the day.

Plant shallowly. Small seeded crops such as tomato and pepper should be planted no more than one-fourth to one-half inch deep when direct seeding. Larger seeded crops such as beans and corn seed should be covered with sand, vermiculite, fine peat moss or perlite instead of soil.

Buy cold tolerant or short season varieties.



Warm the soil prior to planting and until seedlings emerge with a plastic mulch, cloche, Wall-o'-Water, spun fiber or fabric "floating" row cover or cold frame. After seedlings emerge, remove close fitting, non-breathing covers such as clear polyethylene to prevent cooking the seedlings. Floating row covers of spun-bonded fabric may be left on the seedlings if they are loose enough to allow the plants to grow, for up to six weeks after emergence. Watch for and remove weeds that may also emerge quickly with the crops.

For planting, prepare a well aerated soil, incorporating plenty of well decomposed organic matter.

Do not soak any type of seed to pre-sprout for more than four hours. In four hours most seeds will have become fully imbibed and the first chemical changes in germination will have begun. If you do pre-soak seeds, rinse them several times with tepid water, being careful to discard the soaking water which may contain seed treatment

chemicals. Plant the seed promptly after soaking.

Do not soak bean and corn seed, as soaking can seriously damage them.

From Dr. Bill Mansour, retired OSU Extension Vegetable Specialist

Alternate bearing apples

I often get questions about why some apple trees have big crops followed by small crops. This is called biennial bearing. The fruit (floral) buds of most hardy fruit trees

are set during the previous summer, and an especially heavy crop one year may prevent adequate floral bud formation for the following year. This is the result of plant growth regulators (sometimes called hormones) being sent from the seed of this year's fruits to the buds that will produce the flowers for next year's fruit. Gravenstein, Honeycrisp, King, Empire, and Fuji can be alternate bearers as can a number of other apple varieties.

Biennial bearing is difficult to alter or correct. However, it is possible to return to normal yearly fruit production by early and heavy thinning during the year in which the trees are producing their large yield. Thirty to 40 healthy leaves are needed to produce good quality fruit; within 30 days after bloom, thin to leave only four to seven fruit per yard along the branches.

Strong spurs also reduce biennial bearing. Good light penetration through the canopy will improve spur quality. Weather can also play a role in fruit set. Rain during pollination can reduce fruit set as can frosts during blossom time.

Northern Willowherb

Northern willowherb, also known as Watson's willowherb, fringed willowherb, and slender willowherb. (*Epilobium ciliatum*) is a challenging plant for many gardeners. It is native to much of the United States and is an



introduced species to Eurasia. It is in the Evening Primrose family and closely related to another native species called fireweed.

Northern willowherb is a clumping herbaceous perennial plant that can grow to five feet tall, given the opportunity. Lance-shaped, slightly toothed and fairly large

leaves grow opposite each other on slightly square, often red-tinged, herbaceous stems. As the plant matures, it may develop hairs on both the leaves and stems.

Flowers are small, trumpet-shaped, with four notched petals colored white to pink to red. Abundant seeds disperse easily in the wind. The seeds resemble those of fireweed.

Northern willowherb is common in home landscapes, natural areas, Christmas tree farms, and field and container nurseries. It prefers moist areas but is really quite adaptable to gardens receiving some summer irrigation.

Willowherb is fairly deep-rooted and often breaks off if you try to pull it up. It will then push new stems from the remaining crown, irritating the gardener. Each time stems are



yanked from the crown, the crown thickens. Dig Northern willowherb out by the roots. You will save time over the long run.



That's the Way it Grows

Seed-starting Frenzy

It's the time of year where I am itching to get some seeds in the ground. But the ground is not cooperating. It's wet and cold—not at all what seeds like for germinating. By the time the soil is warm enough to plant seeds, I will already be way behind in the growing season.

There are good reasons for starting your seeds early. Healthy seedlings started early will flower sooner or provide an earlier harvest. You can find a greater variety of colors, sizes and growth habits as seeds rather than starts. You can start cultivars from seed that may not be available from nurseries as transplants. And, it's just loads of fun checking for little leaves to pop out of the soil.

I like to use the little greenhouses with seedling trays and clear plastic domes. I received one of these for my 10th birthday and have loved starting seeds ever since.

You can use anything that holds soil to start your seeds. I prefer to use plastic pots or seedling trays. I clean and sanitize them and reuse them until they just can't take it anymore. I have a multitude of saved nursery pots in various sizes that I reuse every year. If you are reusing containers, clean and soak them for 30 minutes in a weak bleach solution to kill any pathogens.

I have tried the biodegradable pots that are a lot like cardboard. I have not had luck with these, as they dry out and wick away moisture from the soil. You can tear the top portion off before transplanting to alleviate the wicking, but that often damages roots. And they just don't seem to break down. I also have mixed feelings about the compressed pellets that expand with water, forming a little jiffy little "pot" of peat mix wrapped in a netting of sorts. When I have used these, I find the little netting sacks in the garden and compost for several years. They don't seem to break down either.

I like to invest in sterile soilless mix for starting seeds. It doesn't contain the pathogens that are found in soil. Sterile mix can prevent damping off, where seedlings wither and die at the soil line from fungal disease. Soil can be sterilized in an oven, but I just don't feel like going to that trouble.

The rule of green thumb is to plant seeds about four times as deep as they are wide. However, some seeds need light to germinate, including begonia, impatiens, lettuce and petunia.

I plant 2-4 seeds in each cell of the seedling tray. Since I don't always buy fresh seeds, I will plant extras due to reduction in the germination rate as the seeds age. When the seedlings pop up, I clip off all but the strongest one with scissors at the soil level. Separating seedlings will damage roots, so it just isn't worth it. One exception is onion seedlings, which don't mind being separated.

Seeds grown in smaller cells will need transplanting sooner, possibly into larger pots if the garden soil is still too cold. Transplanting can be damaging to roots.

Corn hates being disturbed, as well as root crops. I don't try starting either. Peas, beans, melons, squash and other cucurbits don't really care for transplanting, so those seeds can be started in large pots and babied to transplant successfully.

I'm trying something new this year—I bought heat mats for seed-starting. Bottom heat is supposed to hasten germination and root development. I can't wait to plant some seeds and fill my full-size greenhouse outside with seedlings! Happy Spring at last!

Lisa M. Long
Columbia County Master Gardener™
Free gardening ebooks at:
Smashwords.com/profile/view/LisaMarieLong



APRIL

Garden hints from your OSU Extension Agent

Oregon State University Extension Service encourages sustainable gardening practices. Always identify and monitor problems before acting. First consider cultural controls; then physical, biological, and chemical controls (which include insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, botanical insecticides, organic and synthetic pesticides). Always consider the least toxic approach first.

All recommendations in this calendar are not necessarily applicable to all areas of Oregon. For more information, contact your local office of the OSU Extension Service.

Planning

- Write in your garden journal throughout the growing season.
- Prepare garden soil for spring planting. Incorporate generous amounts of organic materials and other amendments, using the results of a soil analysis as a guide.
- Prepare raised beds in areas where cold soils and poor drainage are a continuing problem. Incorporate generous amounts (at least 2") of organic materials.
- Use a soil thermometer to help you know when to plant vegetables. When the soil is consistently above 60°F, some warm season vegetables (beans, sweet corn) can be planted.

Maintenance and Clean Up

- Allow foliage of spring-flowering bulbs to brown and die down before removing.
- Apply commercial fertilizers, manure, or compost to cane, bush (gooseberries, currants, and blueberries), and trailing berries.
- Place compost or well decomposed manure around perennial vegetables, such as asparagus and rhubarb.
- Cut back ornamental grasses to a few inches above the ground, in early spring.
- Cover transplants to protect against late spring frosts.
- Optimum time to fertilize lawns. Apply 1 lb. nitrogen per 1,000 sq.ft. of lawn. Reduce risks of run-off into local waterways by not fertilizing just prior to rain, and not over-irrigating so that water runs off of lawn and onto sidewalk or street.
- Optimum time of year to dethatch and renovate lawns. If moss was a problem, scratch surface prior to seeding with perennial ryegrass.
- Prune and shape or thin spring-blooming shrubs and trees after blossoms fade.

Planting/Propagation

- Plant gladioli, hardy transplants of alyssum, phlox, and marigolds, if weather and soil conditions permit.
- It's a great time to start a vegetable garden. Among the vegetables you can plant, consider:
 Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, chives, endive, leeks, lettuce, peas, radishes, rhubarb, rutabagas, spinach, turnips.

Pest Monitoring and Management

- Clean up hiding places for slugs, sowbugs, and millipedes. Bait for slugs; iron phosphate baits are safe to use around pets.
- Monitor strawberries for spittlebugs and aphids; if present; wash off with water or use insecticidal soap as a contact spray. Follow label directions.
- If necessary, spray when flower buds appear for apple scab, cherry brown rot, and blossom blight. See EC 631, Controlling Diseases and Insects in Home Orchards
- Cut and remove weeds near the garden to remove potential sources of plant disease.
- Use floating row covers to keep insects such as beet leaf miners, cabbage maggot adult flies, and carrot rust flies away from susceptible crops.
- Help prevent damping off of seedlings by providing adequate ventilation.
- Manage weeds while they are small and actively growing with light cultivation or herbicides. Once the weed has gone to bud, herbicides are less effective.
- Spray stone fruits, such as cherries, plums, peaches, and apricots for brown rot blossom blight, if necessary.

Columbia County Master Gardener™ Association's
21st Annual

Spring Garden Fair

April 30, 2016

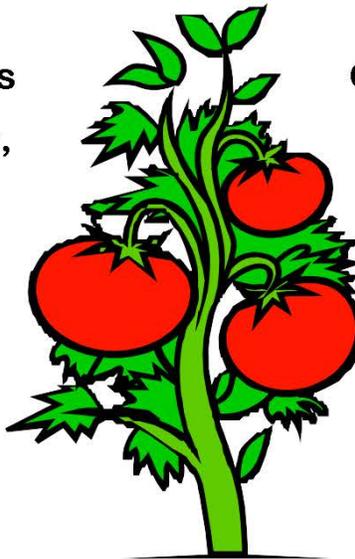
9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

St. Helens High School Commons

2375 Gable Road, St. Helens, Oregon

free parking - - please carpool
free admission - - ATM on-site - - shop indoors & out

Dozens of local vendors will offer annuals, trees, perennials, shrubs, trellises, garden art, vegetables, ceramics, herbs, containers, hanging baskets and more.



Certified Master Gardeners will offer 5,000 tomatoes in over 30 varieties for only \$1.50 per plant, tomato and general gardening information, raffle tickets, hourly prizes and displays.

Raffle tickets are on sale now for \$1 each from many Master Gardeners and at the OSU Extension Service in St Helens.

Gardening information on plants and insects provided on site by Master Gardeners.



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Farm and livestock notes

Sheep Symposium

2016 Let's Grow Lamb and Wool

Symposium: Saturday, April 30th from 8:30 am-5pm. At the OSU North Willamette Research and Extension Center, Aurora, Oregon (I-5 Charbonneau exit 282B, 18 miles south of Portland).

An opportunity to learn new ideas and discuss:

1. Improving ram and ewe fertility through breed, genetics, nutrition, and management.
2. Feeding for great lamb
3. Applying existing genetic selection tools to improve lamb reproduction, growth, carcass value
4. How ewe nutrition can impact growth and carcass quality and composition of lambs.
5. Round table session topics include improving reproductive efficiency and promoting genetic selection tools in the Pacific Northwest.

Cost is \$15 which includes a lamb lunch. Registration deadline is April 27th. For more information or to register for the symposium, go to this link:

http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/sites/default/files/2016_lets_grow_2.pdf

Internal parasite management pays

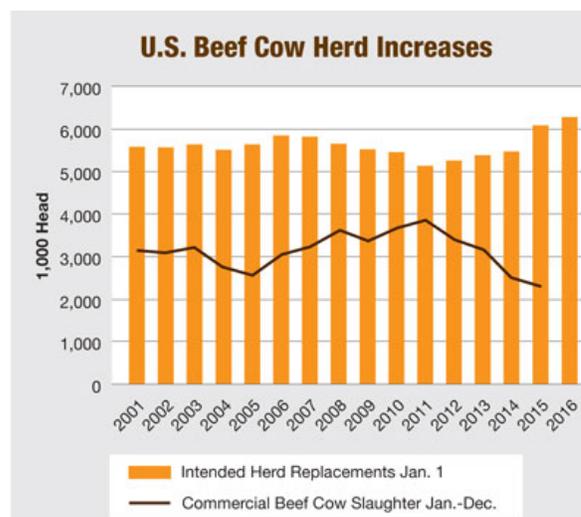
Cattle, sheep, and goats all benefit from a sound internal (and external) parasite management program. "Worms" rob your livestock of weight gains they might have made and can lead to a general reduction in the vigor of your herd. It can become a vicious circle because a less vigorous animal responds poorly to vaccinations (doesn't develop as strong an immunity that the vaccine would provide to a healthier animal). It is important to work with your veterinarian to plan an integrated program

for internal and external parasite management. This might include fecal testing, timing of parasite treatments (often in conjunction with times you are working the livestock for other reasons), pasture management to reduce parasite loads, and selection for parasite resistant animals.

Beef cow numbers increase

Calf prices hit record highs from 2013-15. This was a direct result of a beef herd that had shrunk to its lowest level since the early 1950s (thus fewer calves were available) and an increase in the demand for beef as the economy improved. The calf shortage was exacerbated as ranchers then began to retain their heifers to increase their breeding herds (banking on a more profitable future in the cow/calf business) and slowed the sale of older cows into the meat market for the same reason (see chart below). Finally, alternate meat protein sources (poultry and pork, mainly) were also somewhat expensive which tended to raise the base price for all meat sales.

Where does it go from here? Prices for calves are lower than a few years ago but are still generally profitable for most cow/calf producers. Feedlot grain prices are low which makes the feedlot operators happy but not so much the grain farmers. There has been some distress at the feedlot level over buying some calves priced, perhaps, higher



than markets could support. This price pressure has been due in part to an increase in supplies of pork and chicken (holding down protein prices) and an economy that is moving forward but at a slower pace than some cattle buyers had anticipated. But the overall picture for cow/calf operations is positive.

Agriculture and a strong dollar

The U.S. dollar is considered strong when its purchasing power rises in relation to the purchasing power of other national currencies. For example, about five years ago, .95 Canadian cents bought one U. S. dollar. Today, it takes roughly \$1.27 Canadian dollars to buy one U.S. dollar. This fluctuating pattern has been repeated with the yen, the Euro, and other major world currencies.

From a consumer's standpoint, a strong dollar tends to make imported goods ranging from gas to foreign-made cars and electronics cheaper.



But for farmers, it is a very mixed blessing. Soft white wheat (the predominant wheat grown in Oregon) is almost all exported. A strong dollar makes our wheat more expensive compared to wheat from Australian and Canadian farmers. So the price to our farmers drops, partly due to the worldwide supply of this type of wheat and partly in response to the strong dollar.

I knew of a bulb farmer in the Pacific Northwest that was profoundly affected many years ago by a strong dollar. He marketed his bulbs domestically and a strong dollar over several years made bulbs coming in from Holland cheaper. He sold a

lot of bulbs at less than his cost of production until the exchange rate got more favorable for his business.

The sectors of agriculture that benefit most from a strong dollar are the livestock feeders who buy a lot of grain and farmers working large tracts of land who benefit from cheap fuel.

Matching livestock to your forage

I was told early on in my Extension career in Columbia County that any fool can raise livestock from April to October but it takes a genius to raise them from October to April. I have found that to be true. Grass growth basically stops in the winter, mud accumulates in the barnyard, pastures can easily be overgrazed, cold rain creates hypothermia in unsheltered livestock, and it costs a bunch to keep them fed and healthy.

If your pastures respond to spring with renewed vigor and your animals look good, you are on the right track. The most successful beef operations in western Oregon tend to favor

smaller beef breeds like Angus and Herefords. One of the main reasons is that it costs less to feed a 1150 pound cow over the winter than a 1500 pound, larger frame cow. How much less? Based on a 150 day winter feeding period and a daily hay ration of 3% of the cow's body weight per day, the figures are

1150# cow	34.5# hay/day	5175 #
1500# "	45.0# "	6750 "
1800# "	54.0# "	8100 "

Good hay at \$125/ton would have an increased winter feeding cost of ~\$100 per head for the 1500 pound cow and ~\$182 per

head for the 1800# cow. Usually, there isn't enough extra value in the calf from the larger cows to compensate for the higher winter feed costs.

De-skunking the dog

Back by popular demand is the following recipe for removing skunk stink from the pooch:

Mix 1 quart of 3% hydrogen peroxide, 1/4 cup baking soda, and 1 teaspoon liquid soap. Work the soapy solution into the dog's fur, taking care to avoid getting it in eyes, and rinse thoroughly. A large dog might need multiple quarts of the mixture.

Spring morels

The morel is a mushroom to build meals around. Those whose tastes run to such delicacies know that this is the month to look for them. They appear in the better



stores and, more importantly, underfoot. Columbia County has two distinct locales that may produce morels. Columbia River edges that are filled with cottonwoods can be very productive most

years. A sharp eye is needed, for the morels are disguised in leaves, limbs, and even patches of dappled shade. But once you get the hang of it, if they are fruiting, you will be amazed by their abundance. Clearcuts aren't slash-burned much anymore, but burned slash piles are still used and can sometimes yield good caches of morels. There are two distinct morel types, the black morels (*Morchella elata* and *M.*

augusticeps) and the "true" morel, *Morchella esculenta*. There are also some false morels. The take-home message is that false morels can be very dangerous, causing severe stomach distress or worse. False morels aren't hard to identify if you do a little research. Get a good mushroom book that is west coast focused. Some people are allergic to regular morels, so consume them at first with a bit of caution.

Native plants for pollinators

Red flowering currant: February-April

Indian plum: late February- March

Salmonberry: March-June

Willows: March – May

Oregon Grape: April-June

Maples: March-May

Serviceberry: March-June

Bitter cherry: April-June

Elderberry: April-June

Crab apple: April-June

Twinberry: Late April-June

Roses: June-August

Oceanspray: June-August

Douglas spirea: June-August

Bloom times can be slowed by elevation or cool springs.



Joy Creek Nursery Seminars

We are fortunate to have such an exceptional nursery like Joy Creek in our county. They have an outstanding series of seminars twice a month (Sundays) throughout the summer. You can visit their website www.joycreek.com for a complete list and description. The seminars (which begin at 1:00 pm and are free unless otherwise indicated) are as follows: **May 8** - *Troughs the Easy Way* - with Christine Ebrahimi - The fee for this class is \$20 which includes materials. Registration opens on April 1. To register please call us at 503-543-7474; **May 22** - *The Principals of Color, Texture and Form: A Practicum for Creative Plant Selection*, Lucy Hardiman - this is a two-part workshop with a 15 minute break. The fee for the class is \$25. Registration opens on April 1. To register please call us at 503-543-7474.

OSU Master Gardener's Spring Garden Fair: Saturday, April 30th

The OSU/Columbia County Master Gardener's™ Spring Garden Fair at St. Helens High School Commons, 2375 Gable Rd St Helens, OR, will be held on April 30th from 9:00AM – 3:00 PM. The OSU Master Gardeners™ will sell roughly 5,000 tomatoes in more than 30 varieties for only \$1.50 per plant, provide tomato and general gardening information, offer raffle tickets with hourly prize drawings, and have a number of educational displays. There will also be dozens of local vendors offering garden plants and other garden related products. Please carpool when possible.

Vernonia Spring Garden Fair on Saturday, May 7th!

The Vernonia Community Garden Group will be putting on the third annual Spring Garden Fair at the Vernonia High School Commons on Saturday, May 7th from 9am -3pm. There will be certified organic tomato plants for sale as well as other garden plants and garden related items from local and regional vendors. There will be an information table staffed with Master Gardeners to answer your garden questions.

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