



Country Living

Provided to you by the
OSU Extension Service Columbia County
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Office hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
The office will be closed Fridays from Noon to 1 p.m.
Website: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/>

December 2013

Programs for you . . .

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

- Dec. 3..... **Scappoose Bay Watershed Council**. 7 p.m., Scappoose Bay Watershed Council's office, Warren
- Dec. 4..... **Woodland Resource Fair**. 5:30-7 p.m., OSU Extension Classroom, St. Helens. Find out about various programs and sources of assistance available to small woodland owners, an informal open house format. Connect with local resource professionals, bring your questions and take home answers.
- Dec. 5..... **Master Gardener™ Board Meeting**. 3:30 p.m., OSU Extension Classroom, St. Helens
- Dec. 10..... **Lower Columbia Watershed Council**. 7 p.m., SWCD office-35285 Millard Rd., St. Helens
- Dec. 10 or 12 ... **Beef Industry Tour**. 10th @ The Dalles OR or 12th @ Corvallis OR, see page 10 for more details
- Dec. 18..... **Soil & Water Conservation District**. 7:30 p.m., SWCD office-35285 Millard Rd., St. Helens
- Jan. 11..... **Cascadia Grains Conference**. Tacoma WA. See inside for details.

Dec 25 & Jan 1 - OSU Columbia County Extension Service closed for Holidays.



Chip Bubl

Chip Bubl, OSU Extension Faculty, Agriculture

Agriculture, Family and Community Development, 4-H Youth, Forestry, 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

On-line food preservation course

Will your New Year's Resolutions include updating your food preservation skills? Do you want to learn how to safely can, dry or freeze your garden's bounty? Oregon State University

Extension Service invites you to enroll in Preserve@Home, an on-line food preservation class to teach individuals how to safely preserve a variety of food products. Participants learn how to produce high quality, preserved foods and the science behind food preservation and food safety.



The registration deadline is Monday, January 13, 2014 at noon. The first class of the 6-week course opens on-line on Thursday, January 16, 2014. Each lesson includes online text (that can be downloaded and printed), on-line bulletin board to facilitate participant discussion, and a real-time weekly chat to interact with classmates and instructors and weekly open book quizzes, as well as an open book final exam. The weekly on-line chat session for the first lesson will be on Thursday, January 23, 2014 from 1:00 to 1:45 PM.

Topics to be covered include: Foodborne Illness – causes and prevention, Spoilage and Canning Basics, Canning High Acid foods, Canning Specialty High Acid Foods – pickles, salsa, jams, jellies, etc., Canning Low Acid Foods, and Freezing and Drying. Supplemental materials this year will include materials on planting varieties for food preservation and one on cold storage and root cellaring. OSU

Extension Service of Columbia County will provide a hands-on lab experience for local participants. Students will practice pressure canning and water-bath canning recipes to take home. The optional hands-on lab will be held in St. Helens on Saturday, March 22, 2014 from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, location TBD.

Cost of the course is \$50 and includes the price of the hands-on lab. Many of the supplemental materials are available free, on-line. Class size is limited. This course has been developed and is offered collaboratively with University of Idaho Extension Service and eXtension. Call 503-842-3433 to reserve your space, and then get your registration

materials submitted by Monday, January 13, 2014 at noon. For more information and registration materials contact the OSU Extension Office in St. Helens at 503-397-3462 or at: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/>

Christmas gifts for gardeners

- ☐ Registration to the food preservation online class. See above. Outcome: Homemade food. What's not to like!
- ☐ Nice gardening gloves, especially those flexible kinds that rose thorns don't penetrate.
- ☐ Knee pads for gardeners.
- ☐ A well-made spading fork or shovel.
- ☐ Cast aluminum hand tools or specially designed "ergonomic" tools for less muscle strain.
- ☐ A greenhouse or a good cold frame (could be home-made).
- ☐ High quality loppers or hand pruners

More from the garden

The November cold snap and other weather topics

As this is being written, night temperatures are projected to drop into the low twenties with daytime highs reaching the upper 40s. Strange weather, at best.

Up to this time, in the Scappoose/St. Helens area, we had not experienced a hard frost. Trees and shrubs progress at a leisurely pace into deep dormancy. That process is

physiologically complex and is almost impossible to measure in a given plant. If a tree is not fully hardened off, these low temperatures can do damage. The effect won't show up until next year as plants start to grow again (or not, in some cases). If it stays dry, it wouldn't hurt to whitewash trunks of young trees with exterior white latex paint. That can reduce cold injury in the winter and sunburn in the summer. While you're at it, cover rose bushes with sawdust mulch above the graft union and up several inches beyond to insulate the plant from very cold weather.

You should figure out how to protect your container plants when the temperatures drop. Roots are not as hardy as tops. Plants that are hardy to 0° F in the ground can die at 15-20°F in containers. Best strategy is to put them out of the direct wind and as the weather turns frigid, wrap some insulation around the pots, keep the soil moist, and consider throwing a tarp or blanket over the top.



If dry weather continues, it would be a good time to start pruning, especially stone fruits which are less prone to disease from cuts made on dry days.

Plan your garden

This is an ideal time to make notes, resolutions, and plans for next year's garden. Mistakes of the past year (for me, too much zucchini, only one planting of corn, not enough winter greens, etc.) should be countered with a plan that both corrects the errors of the past and allows room for new experiments. The notes, resolutions, and plans don't have to be extensive. A garden notebook is very useful as a permanent record of your intentions, varieties planted (with dates), observations, and results.

New seed catalogs have already arrived and more will follow shortly. I

discovered that I really like *Cherokee* lettuce, a heat-tolerant reddish leaf lettuce with fairly, for lettuce, thick leaves.

Finally, many gardeners don't realize the potential for raising "small fruits" in the smaller garden. Gooseberries, currants, blueberries, lingonberries and the like produce lots of fruit in modest space. There are two great retail nurseries in the northwest that specialize in tree fruits, small fruits and all manner of exotic fruit. You should visit their web sites and/or get their catalogs.

One Green World

www.onegreenworld.com

Raintree Nursery

www.raintreenursery.com

More from the garden

LED lights for greenhouses

Efforts to raise greenhouse tomatoes west of the Cascades have not gone well. It isn't a matter of temperature since we are relatively warm and greenhouse heat isn't the deciding cost factor. Rather, it is our cloudy days that produce such low light intensities. Growers used sodium vapor lights to increase the available light but those lights are energy hogs. With the rollout of LED lighting technology, the cost of providing the extra light is cut by almost 70% according to a recent study from Purdue University. Tomato fruit quality and yield was equivalent to higher wattage sodium lamp towers. The authors speculate that this could make winter tomatoes competitive with those imported from Mexico while at the same time, lowering the carbon footprint with less transportation costs.

This has practical applications for the home gardener for starting plants inside and for the adventurous small-scale winter tomato (or pepper or cucumber) grower.

Soil nitrogen status key to yields

There has been a lot of research in the Midwest cornbelt to quantify plant nitrogen needs at various plant stages of growth. There was some hope that a quick cornstalk "sap nitrogen" field test could predict crop nitrogen status and need for any more fertilizer. It turns out that one of the assumptions of the test was wrong. It had been thought that corn can move nitrogen already in leaves and stems to the developing ears. This turns out not to be the case. Most of the N at late maturity comes

from root transport. If soil N was short at this time, so were yields. In addition, if insufficient soil N was available, other important minerals were not taken up as well, further reducing yield potential. This probably has application for other high-yielding vegetables like winter squash, green beans, and others. This is why farmers sidedress N during key mid growth stages.



Dormant sprays

Dormant sprays are most useful in managing plant diseases that infect buds or twigs in the winter. The two most common products are the fixed copper mixes and lime sulfur. The weather we have been having is ideal for these sprays (i.e. dry with day temperatures above forty degrees).

Candidates for these sprays are all the stone fruits (except hold the sulfur with apricots) to manage bacterial canker, peach leaf curl, and other twig/leaf fungal diseases.

Apples and pears benefit in the control of anthracnose and European canker though these treatments do not help much with scab (a spring after leaf-out disease).

Blueberries get their own bacterial canker so they should be sprayed with copper. Marion and Boysen berries get a cane spot that is best sprayed just before bud break in March but since you already have the sprayer out, give them a shot as well.

None of these sprays will help with insects. Dormant oil will help to control scale but that isn't a common problem here. Insects that actually infest fruit need to be controlled when they are laying their eggs, generally May onwards depending on the insect.

Weed of the month: Self-heal or Heal-all (*Prunella vulgaris*)

Heal-all is one of the most common forbs found in Columbia County. In most circumstances, it is not considered a weed. Heal-all is a semi-evergreen perennial plant native to both North America and Eurasia. It is in the mint family as seen by its square stems. It has no mint aroma, though. There are two leaf forms: roundly oval leaves thought to be the European subspecies and long pointed leaves thought to be the N. American subspecies (alternatively called *lanceolata* or *elongata*). There are also intergrading leaf-shape mixes of both types.

Heal-all is not a tall plant, rarely getting more than 14 inches tall at flowering. It reproduces by seed and a running stem which roots at the nodes. Many of the leaves are arrayed fairly close to the ground. Leaves are opposite. The plant is anchored in the soil by a fairly shallow taproot.

Heal all flowers in July through August. The floral stem terminates in a cluster of flowers of classic mint family design, i.e. somewhat tubular with an upper and lower lip. Each purplish flower produces four seeds that are flung from the flower when a raindrop hits the lower lip.

Heal-all can be found on a wide variety of sites. Generally it prefers full sun and deep soil but I have often found it as a major plant cover on old, gravel logging roads that are rather hard packed and in shade for a significant portion of the day.

It is a banquet for a huge variety of pollinators. The following is a list from Illinois: “long-tongued bees, short-tongued bees, small butterflies (primarily Whites and Sulfurs), and skippers. Bee visitors include bumblebees, Anthophorine bees, Little Carpenter bees, Eucerine Miner bees, and Green Metallic bees. These insects seek nectar, although the Green Metallic Bees also collect pollen. The caterpillars of the moth *Agriopodes teratophora* (Gray Marvel) occasionally feed on the foliage.”

Cattle and sheep will graze it when it is mixed with grass and sometimes in small quantities when it is the major plant in an area.

I get calls about this plant when it shows up in landscape beds and lawns. It can aggressively take

over some areas and when it gets into lawns, can be very difficult to eliminate. That said, there is some use of the plant as a low water ground cover, a job that it handles quite nicely. It has even been used on “living roof” gardens as the anchor plant. For more information on the horticultural potential see:

<http://www.sfgate.com/homeandgarden/pickoftheweek/article/Prunella-vulgaris-a-hardy-native-ground-cover-3601147.php>

As you might expect, the plant has a long history of medicinal uses in Europe and North America to heal wounds, cure colds, reduce asthma symptoms, and as a general tonic. It is generally taken as a tea but used externally on wounds. It is also eaten raw as a salad green.





That's the Way it Grows

Potato, Po-tah-toh, Some say Yam

As I sit here eating yet another plateful of Thanksgiving leftovers, I ponder on the homely, but delicious and very nutritious sweetpotato, *Ipomoea batatas* (which, according to an OSU article, is NOT to be confused with the potato, and therefore is spelled as one word). Each gnarled, fleshy root is packed with vitamins A and C, along with protein, calcium, magnesium, iron and carotene.

A member of morning glory family, they are classified in two types—the dry, white-fleshed variety, and my favorite, the moist, deep orange type. Some people call the latter yams, but true yams are native African plants grown in tropical climates, and vary greatly from sweetpotatoes, both botanically and in taste and texture.

Sweetpotatoes are grown worldwide from tropical areas to cooler northern climates, thanks to new varieties that tolerate the cooler temperatures and earlier harvest times.

The sweetpotato needs 90-170 frost free days to grow, most of them 80-85°F with high humidity, making it ideally suited to Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia, where it is a major commercial product. Roots can be harvested when as small as a finger, or up until the first frost. The longer they are in the ground, though, the higher the vitamin content and yield.

Many varieties are available, but if you want to try your hand at growing some sweetpotatoes, contact your extension agent and get a variety recommendation for this area, then purchase them from a reputable source, certified disease-free.

Sweetpotatoes vines have beautiful dark foliage that can be tied to trellises or allowed to ramble, but bush varieties are also available. The bush type I grew several years ago was still rather viney, so I suspect the vine types really roam. Sweetpotato vines also root, which is not desirable, since that steals the plant's energy away from the main crop.

In the cooler northwest, growing sweetpotatoes using a plastic mulch or tunnel to warm the soil is a

good idea. Soil really needs to be at least 70°F to plant the slips (starts), and planting should be well after last frost, as plants are highly susceptible to frost. Slips can be purchased, or grown from saved roots, but you want to know the variety and get a short-season type for this area. Disease and pest resistant varieties are available.

I grew my sweetpotatoes in a raised bed (for good drainage) with a black plastic mulch, applied early to raise the soil temperature. Then I cut the bottoms off milk jugs and secured these over the transplants with bamboo sticks through the neck of the jug.

I left the jugs on until the plants outgrew them, or the temperature was around 75-80°F. My crop, however, consisted of thin roots, and what I may have done wrong was to fertilize too much, thus encouraging lush top growth, but not much else.

Harvested sweetpotatoes need to be cured for storage, especially if they are dug after or during cold or wet weather. If frost blackens the vines, dig immediately. Otherwise, dig roots from dry soil on a sunny day, being careful to avoid nicking any, and allow them to dry in the sun for an hour or so, but not overnight. Don't wash the roots, either. Then cure for 10-14 days at 70-80°F and high humidity. They store well for a few months at around 55°F.

I prefer to steam my sweetpotatoes, rather than boil out all those great nutrients. I use a vegetable peeler to peel the tough skin, then slice them 1/2" thick and steam until soft. My new favorite recipe calls for pouring a spiced rum-raisin-brown sugar sauce over steamed, sliced sweetpotatoes, then baking. Mmm....

Try some sweetpotatoes. Delicious, nutritious, and interesting to grow. I'm always looking for a gardening challenge!

—Lisa M. Long

Columbia County Master Gardener™
Compost, rock and bark dust delivered; 397-2989



Ipomoea batatas
(sweetpotato)

DECEMBER 2013

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.

Maintenance and Clean Up

- Spread wood ashes evenly on vegetable garden. Use no more than 1.5 lb/100 sq ft/year. Don't use if the soil pH is greater than 7.0 or if potassium levels are excessive.
- Protect new landscape plants from wind. Use stakes, guy wires and/or windbreaks as needed.
- Yard sanitation: rake leaves, cut and remove withered stalks of perennial flowers, mulch flowerbeds, hoe or pull winter weeds.
- Turn the compost pile and protect from heavy rains, if necessary.
- During heavy rains, watch for drainage problems in the yard. Tilling, ditching, and French drains are possible short-term solutions. Consider rain gardens and bioswales as a longer-term solution.
- Check stored flower bulbs, fresh vegetables, fruits for rot and fungus problems. Discard any showing signs of rot.
- Tie limbs of columnar evergreens to prevent snow or ice breakage.
- Do not walk on lawns until frost has melted.
- Make sure that landscape plants in protected sites receive water regularly during the winter.

Planting/Propagation

- Good time of year to plant trees, landscape shrubs.

Pest Monitoring and Management

- Monitor landscape plants for problems. Don't treat unless a problem is identified.
- Check for rodent damage around bases of trees and large shrubs. Remove weeds to prevent rodents from using them as hiding places. Use traps and approved baits as necessary.
- Avoid mounding mulching materials around the bases of trees and shrubs. The mulch might provide cover for rodents.
- Monitor spruce trees for spruce aphids. Treat if present in large numbers. Read and follow pesticide label directions.

Houseplants and Indoor Gardening

- Protect poinsettias from cold, place in sunlight, don't let leaves touch cold windows; fertilize with houseplant fertilizer to maintain leaf color.
- Monitor houseplants for adequate water and fertilizer. Water and fertilizer requirements generally are less in winter.





The Grapevine
 News for Columbia County Master Gardeners™
www.columbiacountymastergardeners.org



December 2013

Deadline for THE GRAPEVINE - All materials will need to be into the OSU Extension office no later than the 20th of each month.

President's Corner

Leaves - Leaves - and more leaves. As we get close to the end of the year, we run smack dab into a job that doesn't seem to end. The leaves that we enjoyed all spring and summer are now covering the yard and flower beds.

I guess there is a price to be paid for all the enjoyment that we get from the various shades of green that highlight spring, the shade that we seek during the hot summer and finally the panorama of colors in the fall.

The problem is, they don't all fall at once so we could do one big cleanup and be done with the job. After spending the day cleaning up the downed leaves I'm lucky if I get to enjoy one day before the next layer is on the ground.

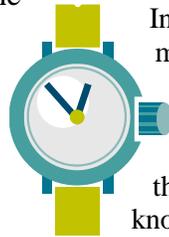
I guess I should look at the bright side. The leaves make great compost and we know how gardeners love good compost. In closing - I want to congratulate four of our own who have been members for twenty years - Ken and Carol Weiman, Bev Castor Darryl Boom and Kay Lockwood. Each were awarded certificates from OMGA. Congratulations! Happy leaf raking!
 --Dennis Snyder

Volunteer Payback

LOG YOUR HOURS, and turn them into Extension office. Hours worked by veteran as well as new Master Gardeners™ accumulate to justify continuance of our program through OSU.

To get a form off the web:
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/master-gardener-volunteer-program> choose Master Gardener™ Volunteer Log Sheet – word document or PDF.

Calendar: At-A-Glance	
DEC. 5	Board Meeting, 3:30 p.m. Extension office
.....	No demo garden meeting in December.



Notes from your Treasurer

In January it will be time to pay 2014 member dues - \$10.00. Please make checks payable to CCMGA and mail to me at 265 S.13th St., St. Helens, 97051, or turn them in at chapter meetings, or drop them off at the Extension Office. Remember to let me know of any changes in your contact information for the Roster that will be published in early April. **You must pay your dues by March 31 to be included in the 2014 Roster. -- Gail Martyn, Treasurer,**
CCMGA.Treasurer@comcast.net, 503-397-5537

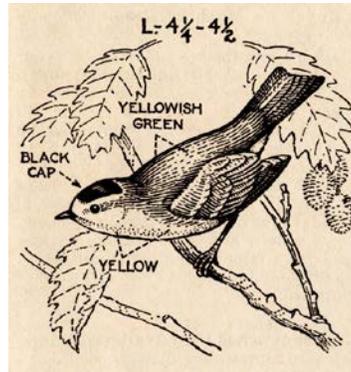
Master Gardeners Contacts	
Officers for 2013	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Name</u>
President	Dennis Snyder
Vice President.....	Chuck Petersen
Past President	LeRoy Schmidt
Secretary	Debbie Broberg
Treasurer.....	Gail Martyn
Historian	Zelda Anderson
OMGA Rep	Andy Thayer
OMGA Alt. Rep.	Kathy Johnson
Demo Garden	Dennis Snyder
Spring Fair.....	Kathy Johnson
CCMG website: www.columbiacountymastergardeners.org	
Webmaster	Larry Byrum
OSU Extension Service:	
Extension Faculty	Chip Bubl
Secretary.....	Vicki Krenz
Guide to Plant Disease Control:	
OSU	http://plant-disease.ippc.orst.edu

The natural history page

New Publication: *Shrubs to Know in Pacific Northwest Forests*

Authors: Edward C. Jensen, David Zahler;
New September 2013,
148 pages, \$12.00

This full-color, simple-to-use field guide features 100 of the most common shrubs that grow in and around Pacific Northwest forests—from southern British Columbia to northern California and from the Pacific Ocean to the northern Rockies. Includes an overview of shrub communities in the Pacific Northwest; more than 500 color photos; individual range maps and complete descriptions for each species; notes on range and habitat, response to disturbance, traditional and current uses, and origin of names; glossary of identification terms; and an easy-to-use, well-tested identification key. To purchase, go to <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/abstract.php?seriesno=EC+1640>



OSU/Oregon Master Naturalist program

The mission of the Oregon Master Naturalist Program is to develop a statewide corps of knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated volunteers who enrich their communities and enhance public awareness of Oregon's natural resources through conservation education, scientific inquiry, and stewardship activities.

The Oregon Master Naturalist Program provides an opportunity to learn about natural resources through the study of scientifically sound information: the ecology and natural history of plants,

animals, habitats, and geology, the history and processes of landscape change, as well as the most relevant topics in present-day sustainable natural resource management.

Coursework is generally conducted first through an online course covering general statewide topics, followed by in-person, field-based courses focusing on Oregon's 8 Ecoregions.

Participants who become full-fledged Oregon Master Naturalists volunteer for natural resources programs, agencies, organizations, and other groups in their communities. Volunteering can be through: 1) public education/interpretation programs, 2) land stewardship projects, 3) citizen science projects, or 4) program/agency support.

For more information, go to <http://oregonmasternaturalist.org>

The hornworm and the nicotiana

Nicotiana attenuata (coyote tobacco) evolved with the tomato hornworm as its pollinator. It flowers at night, matching the hornworm's far-flying pollinating routine. But the hornworm likes to lay her eggs on the plant. The plant likes being pollinated but not being eaten too much. Not good for the seeds. So it tries to deter feeding by producing chemicals in response to being munched that give the caterpillars indigestion. Scientists then discovered that feeding caterpillars also stimulate the plant

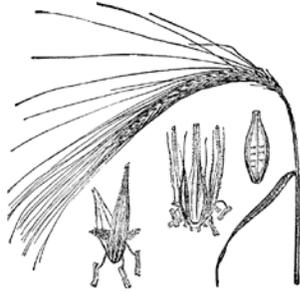


to bloom in the day, allowing it to be pollinated by hummingbirds (not the greatest pollinator in this case) and not attract more egg-laying moths. Species evolve and life goes on.

Farm and livestock notes

Cascadia Grains conference

THE CASCADIA GRAINS CONFERENCE brings together farmers, processors and end-users, as well as investors, brokers and local government officials to support rebuilding a grain economy west of the Cascade Mountains in Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia through three value-added enterprises – brewing and distilling, animal feed, as well as baking and other food uses. The 2nd Cascadia Grains Conference will be held Saturday, January 11, 2014 at the STAR Center in Tacoma, WA. This conference is presented by Washington State University in partnership with Oregon State University. It is proudly supported by Pierce County, Fremont Brewing Company, Bob's Red Mill, and the generosity of many individuals, businesses, and organizations. For information see <http://cascadiagrains.com/>



SAIF Ag Safety Seminars

Free, four-hour seminars are being given around the state by SAIF. These seminars are for farm owners, operators, supervisors, and/or foremen. They will be available at eighteen locations from now until March. Some of the sessions will be in Spanish. Employers with small agricultural businesses attending the seminar will meet one of the four requirements (the instructional requirement) that exempt small agricultural establishments from random OSHA inspections. For more information as to dates and locations and to register, go to www.saif.com/agseminar. Pre-registration is required and locations can fill up quickly.

Elk foot rot and livestock

Washington has been experiencing a severe outbreak of foot rot in its Roosevelt elk herds in much of western Washington. The Cowlitz population has been particularly hard-hit. The bacterial disease causes severe foot deformity and lameness. Affected animals lose condition and are more likely to be killed by hunters, cougars, other diseases, and/or harsh weather. The bacteria are shed from the foot into moist soil where it is picked up by other elk.

So far, there have been no confirmed reports of the disease being present in Oregon though there are some anecdotal comments that it is here. At present, there is no evidence that the disease can be spread to domestic livestock (sheep, goats, or cattle) based primarily on veterinarian reports from areas where infected elk and domestic livestock co-exist. It does not appear the hoof rot bacteria strains that infect domestic animals are the same as those infecting elk although they are very close.

This is the time of year that hoof rot flare up in sheep and cattle. Lameness will reduce food consumption by affected animals and can lead to a downward spiral in their overall health. Talk to your veterinarian about treatment options and take care to provide your herd with adequate feed and water to keep them in the best possible condition.

Beef seminar

There will be a beef seminar on cattle nutrition and management, energy and protein supplements, feeding fat, nutrition and forage management, and mineral supplements. The two locations closest to use are The Dalles on 12/10 1:00pm-4:30 at the Shilo Inn and Corvallis on 12/12 from 4:00-7:30pm at the Oldfield Teaching facility on the OSU campus. Visit their website <http://beefcattle.ans.oregonstate.edu>.

More farm/livestock news

Let them eat weeds!

Farmers have long used livestock to control weeds. Goats love blackberry vines. In Columbia County peppermint fields in the 1940's, sheep grazed out a variety of weeds (hold the mint jelly). Geese were also used in peppermint and other crops. Years ago, Dr. Steve Sharrow described an experiment where sheep were used to control weeds in a Douglas fir planting. In the first block, they ignored Queen Anne's lace until it was all that was left. When moved to the next block, it was what they ate first. Sheep, which are immune to tansy ragwort poisoning, have been used to effectively clear fields of that weed.



So livestock have potential for “conservation grazing”. But can they be trained to eat weeds? Some new work shows that it is possible. But it does take a little effort.

Some Montana ranchers decided that it would be great if cattle ate Canada and Bull thistle. Research on cattle feeding preferences has shown that if cattle are exposed to a variety of foods with varying textures, flavors, and protein and sugar contents, they will be more adventurous in their eating on the range.

They started the education by trough-feeding a group of 15 cows a rotation of familiar and unfamiliar foods. They had eaten alfalfa hay so on the first morning, they were fed alfalfa pellets – familiar food in a new form. That evening, they got half alfalfa pellets and half corn on the cob (half new and half familiar). The next morning, half cob with molasses and in the evening, rolled barley. Day three:

sugarbeet pellets (familiar form in the pellets but new food) in the morning and soybean flakes in the afternoon (new food in a new form). Day four: Three-inch hay cubes. Day five: chopped Canada thistle and hay sprayed with molasses water followed by Canada thistle alone in the afternoon without molasses. They went for them! Maybe the fact that thistle is relatively high in protein helped. Moreover, they started eating Canada and bull thistle in the pasture. Some untrained cows started eating thistle as well. Next year's calves from trained cows grew up eating thistle and gradually, the thistle problems on that range began to decrease.

Before embarking on training them any livestock to eat a specific weed, make sure that it isn't inherently toxic to them. It is somewhat of a myth that livestock know what they can and can't eat, toxicologically speaking. For more information, go to the website of Kathy Voth, one of the leading practitioners of this livestock training program: <http://www.livestockforlandscapes.com/cowmanagers.htm>

Cattle outlook

It's bullish to say the least. Cow numbers are way down due to the long southwestern drought and the loss of about 25,000 cows in South Dakota in the recent “flash” blizzard. Feeder calves are fetching good prices. Heifers are being held back for breeding, further reducing available calves. Feedlots are also doing swell with the drop in feed grain prices. They cheered the news that there will be less corn going into ethanol. The Federal government has lowered the required ethanol in fuel blends to avoid increasing the ethanol to more than 10%. We are driving less and using more fuel-efficient cars and the old mandate would have driven up the ethanol concentration in gas. Chicken prices are the big obstacle to even higher beef prices.

2014 OSU/Columbia Master Gardener™ Class Will Be Held in Vernonia

After twenty-one years of having the Master Gardener classes in St. Helens, Vernonia hosted the class in 2010. It was a wonderful class. After discussion with a number of people, we have decided to come back to Vernonia for the 2014 class. The classes will be held in Vernonia each Thursday from about 9:30 am – 3 p.m. starting March 6th 2014; there will be about 10 class days on successive weeks. Classes will start in March to avoid the worst weather and will go through early May. Cost of the class series will still be \$75. Gardeners from all parts of the county are welcome.

The classes will cover vegetable and fruit gardening, soils and fertilizers, insect and disease identification and management, weed identification and management, and lots of other topics of interest to gardeners.

Payback projects (an obligation for all Master Gardeners™) will be focused in the Vernonia area and nearby communities. If you are interested in the Vernonia OSU Master Gardener program, please call the Extension office 503 397-3462 to get more information and to get on the mailing mail list.



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