Avoid Tree Topping  Lynn E. Long, OSU Extension Horticulturist

According to John Rosenow, President of the National Arbor Day Foundation “Tree topping is the senseless brutalizing of older trees. It brings about the uglification of America’s urban forest, striking some communities like a plague.”

Unfortunately, The Dalles is one of those communities. A quick tour of the city this time of year quickly shows the extent to which we have been plagued by this destructive practice. In the last two weeks I have seen numerous trees succumb to this procedure. Unfortunately, once a tree is topped, it is ruined forever.

Also known as stubbing, heading-back, dehorning or pollarding, topping involves cutting back large branches so that unprotected stubs are left. The more we learn about the long-term effects of tree topping the more we realize how senseless this practice really is. One arborist stated, “Topping is the absolute worst thing you can do for the health of your tree.”

Why is topping so bad? Following are just a few of the reasons this practice should be avoided.

Tree health: The large stubs of a topped tree are unable to properly callus, leaving the tree open to invasion from insects and diseases. In addition, if decay is already present in the branches, topping will help to spread that disease to previously healthy wood.

Rampant growth: Generally the purpose of topping is to reduce tree size, however, the practice usually has the opposite effect. Scores of water sprouts may grow from a single cut. These rapidly growing suckers will grow back to the original height of the tree in just a few years, entirely defeating the original purpose of topping the tree.

Weak limbs: New branches arising from the region of the cut are weakly attached to the tree. As these suckers grow taller and taller they become very top heavy and can be easily blown out of the tree in the high winds common to our area. Falling branches can damage houses, cars or injure people.

Aesthetics: A topped tree is a deformed tree. Even after the tree regrows, it remains an eyesore and never regains its stature and beauty.

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President’s Corner: Barbara Bailey

Welcome to the Wasco County Master Gardeners program! You are about ready to launch into the Dos and Taboos of gardening.

You will be learning about trees, flowers, vegetables – and worms.

The state of Master Gardeners:
· We are about 57 members strong.
· The demographics are men and women from The Dalles, White Salmon, Maupin and Mosier.
· Our numbers include musicians, photographers, speakers, doctors, nurses, farmers, business people, moms, dads, and a champion tomato grower, Artists, rose enthusiasts, wine connoisseurs and a dancer.
· But – no competitive pumpkin growers yet!

The language of gardening has infiltrated human civilization since the beginning; prune, perennial, row, sow, and reap.

Barbara Bailey

Wasco County Master Gardener Executive Board Meeting – Therese Leon

Feb 16, 2010  Minutes

Present: Cheri Austin, Sheri Esquivias, Candy Armstrong, Charlotte Link, Lynn Long, Barbara Bailey, Lana Tepfer, Lee Bryant, and Therese Leon.

Treasurer’s Report: The Year End Report has been filed with the state. Ending balance for 2009 was $9,400.53. January ending balance report was $10,168.93.

By-Law Committee: Candy Armstrong reported that the By-laws, as rewritten, were approved by the Association at the January Association meeting.

Minutes, cont.

Bulb Sale and Plant Clinic: Cheri Austin reports that the Plant Clinic officially opens March 30, 2010.

Spring Faire: S. Esquivias and C. Austin could use more help in the seedling and plants at NORCOR

Agent report: Lynn Long reported KIHR has requested WCMGA participation on the Mid Columbia Today show the 4th Friday of every month starting this Feb 26th. Cheri Austin volunteered to shepherd the program.

Avoid Tree Topping, cont. from pg 1

Cost: Topping is easier and quicker and, therefore, is generally cheaper in the short run than properly pruning a tree. However, topping trees has many hidden costs including reduced property value, the expense of removing and replacing the tree if it dies, the risk of increased liability from falling branches and increased future maintenance.

Trees are often topped because they interfere with power lines, obstruct the view or merely worry the homeowner due to their size. All of these situations, however, can usually be handled by a technique known as drop-crotching without all the risks associated with topping. With drop-crotching, large branches at the top of the tree are completely removed back to the trunk or the junction with shorter, large diameter side branches. In this way the integrity of the tree can be maintained while reducing the top of the tree by several feet.

Initially, drop-crotching is a more expensive way to prune trees but it will avoid the hazards associated with topping. In addition, it may be more difficult to find a qualified tree maintenance professional that understands the concept of proper tree pruning but the results will be well worth the effort and expense.
The Dalles Imagination Garden

Is it here yet? Of course, I am speaking about Spring! Although the East Coast is shivering under 20 plus inches of snow, here in The Dalles the sun is out and everyone is working in their garden!

A huge “Thank you” to Marcia Strader for mentioning the “free clay flower pots” on www.gorge.net/classifieds. Barbara Pashek, (the owner of the clay pots) donated approximately 608 clay flower pots of various sizes to use as we wish. Does anyone know how to make flower pot people? After the pots are cleaned, they should be ready for plants or projects. Plant Sale?

Last week, the Seventh Day Adventist School students welcomed three Master Gardeners to their classroom. Marian Rohde, new MG Ned Kice, and Charlotte Link provided an abbreviated “Seeds and Soils” class for the six students attending the school. The students (grades 2 through 8) planted Scarlet Runner beans, Dragon Tongue beans, and Rattlesnake beans seeds. The plants will be transplanted by the students at The DIG later this spring. Our next visit to the school will be March 11th at 1:00 pm.

Please contact Charlotte Link at terralink@gorge.net or 541 298 5045 if you would like to participate in the school program. Thank you, Marian and Ned. It was a lot of fun for the students.

Please mark your calendar for the next DIG meeting. Meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month at 1:00 pm in the Extension Service conference room. Everyone is welcome to participate. Remember, the meeting will count as part of your payback hours.

Charlotte Link
**Spring Faire and Plant Sale**

The NORCOR Greenhouse is up and running full steam. We have just finished replanting all the tomatoes into 6 inch pots so by Fair time they will be close to fruiting if not already. Our lavenders and basils have really taken off and the chives and onions are looking good... We have so much everyone will just have to come to the Fair to see for themselves.

The NORCOR plants are to be proud of also. The kids we have helping us at this time really get to see the fruit of their labors. They have so many questions that Lee Bryant is currently working on some handouts for the kids to use in class time. These will turn our teachable moments into pen and paper and really make it into a lesson.

The Monday before classes began we had 7 Master Gardeners and at least that many students. Boy, did we get things done!!! Cheri had them transplanting and Lee Bryant had the students moving trays from one table to the next. Peggy Petersen had another group doing the same. Marlene Long lent a strong arm in the moving of dozens of trays; Candy Barnard-Davidson filled in another spot. Some of us got to play with the hose and water the plants. We even had the employees that help with the students lending a hand (they don’t know it yet but we are slowing turning some of them into better gardeners).

As time moves on and the plants get bigger the students seem to be better about volunteering to go to the greenhouse. Each student has to earn the privilege to be able to go to the greenhouse.

Okay, I lost my place talking about the Spring Faire. I get to talking about the plants and the students, well, we have all been there...I think they call it a senior moment. Thank goodness it doesn’t happen often or I would never get anywhere.

The Spring Faire is coming together slowly but surely. Around every corner there is a new surprise and it always seems to be in our favor. Positive thinking pays off!! Our Master Gardeners have great ideas for new booths and our vendors from last year will be there for this year. Right now we are getting the paper work completed and then the sky’s the limit.

So for all you new Master Gardeners (doesn't that sound important?) we are inviting you to come and take part in growing the plants and getting them ready for the Faire. If this sounds like something you would like to do please talk to Cheri Austin at the next class and she can get you an application for a background check. We need these in order to work with the students in a classroom setting at NORCOR.

Again, a BIG thank you to all those who came and helped that day. Even though it was 85 degrees plus in the greenhouse we had a good time. Becky, I didn’t forget you were there, too. Till next time ...

*Sheri Esquivias, Spring Faire Chair*
This is the third and final part of the “Highlights from the 2009 Wasco County Community Food Assessment” report. The first two parts were Growing Food: Farms, Ranches and Local Markets for Local Produce and Accessing Food: Food Security, Emergency Food and Shopping. You can read them in the January & February issues of the newsletter.

**Food Skills: Cooking, Nutrition and Gardening**

On the whole, Wasco County families report having some food skills: 78.9 percent cook most or all meals at home, 64.8 percent cultivate at least a few fruits and vegetables, and 70.2 percent eat fresh fruits and vegetables at least once a day. Just more than half of respondents (55.5 percent) report that at least half of their food purchases are fresh fruits and vegetables.

Families with gardens eat more fruits and vegetables, at least once a day (79.8 percent), and only 5.8 percent ever have to skip a meal because food is scarce. 81.6 percent of gardeners share excess produce with friends and neighbors, thus increasing the food security of their community.

Most residents (69.2 percent) already freeze, dry, can or smoke food to preserve it; another 9.0 percent want to learn how. Limited cooking and preserving education is offered through the Oregon State University Extension, and for low-income households through government food assistance programs, but there is a need for greater awareness of these programs and resources to expand outreach to those most vulnerable to hunger. More than 71.6 percent of respondents answered “yes” or “maybe” when asked if they would be interested in cooking classes featuring fresh food and time-saving tips. The biggest barrier for families to cook at home is time (45.3 percent).

School gardens are starting to appear in the county: three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school have gardens. All of the gardens need volunteers, resources and better coordination. School garden efforts could also be partnered with nutrition efforts in the county targeted towards youth. Eighth and 11th graders in The Dalles reported very low fruit and vegetable consumption (24.5 percent and 26.1 percent eating fruits and vegetables once or more a day).

Community garden efforts in Wasco County are fairly new. Although very few residents (4.5 percent) report having a community garden plot, residents have interest in cultivating one (12.5 percent). There are currently four community gardens in The Dalles, with varying levels of participation and organization. All gardens could benefit from additional volunteer, infrastructure and resource support. There is potential for working with both local churches and county government to find and develop land for additional community garden space.

The faith community in The Dalles has limited participation in food efforts, with only one church community garden. There is interest among other churches in becoming more active, but they need assistance organizing. Churches in South Wasco County organize and run informal emergency food efforts on a volunteer basis. In general, faith-based organizations could benefit from a more centralized and coordinated effort to become partners in improving food security in the county.

**Recommendations:**

- Expand local availability of cooking and nutrition classes
- Improve and integrate food skills, nutrition and self-sufficiency help
- Expand and coordinate local gardening resources for home gardeners
- Work with school gardens to coordinate efforts, share resources and expand programs
- Centralize and coordinate food and faith efforts among churches
Feature of the Month – Carolyn Wright

This is a new column and others are welcome to submit their suggestions for a monthly feature. Garden plants, weeds, insects, birds or anything else that is prominent in a given month would be appropriate.

March is a great month to get out and start checking on our prolific wildflowers. Grass widows put on an early show, sometimes appearing as early as January, but they are most abundant in March. They occur in open areas which are wet in the spring but dry out by summer, which is nearly everywhere around here that hasn’t been plowed or bladed! Grass widows can carpet large areas with their colorful purple flowers. Catherine Creek & Tom McCall Preserve are two great places to see them now.

Varying in color from the occasional albino and pale pink flowers to deep magenta-purple, these members of the Iris family are usually 6-12 inches tall. In most floras they are referred to as Sisyrinchium douglasii, but recent taxonomic treatment has placed them in the genus Olsynium which distinguishes them from the closely related blue-eyed grasses. The species was first described from plants collected by David Douglas in 1826 in the vicinity of Celilo Falls. There are currently two varieties recognized: var. douglasii and var. inflatum.