



Country Living

Provided to you by the

OSU Extension Service Columbia County

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June 2023

Programs for you . . .

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

June 20th *Chat with Chip*. A roughly one-and-a-half-hour interactive Zoom program on garden and related topics with Chip Bubl. **Tuesday, June 20th from 6:30 – 8pm**. You are invited to attend! Reserve a place: <https://beav.es/STR>



Farmers Markets Opening!

Use the <https://www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org/in-person-markets> to find one near you!

Columbia County Fair is July 19 – 23, 2023



Oregon State University
Extension Service
Columbia County

Chip Bubl

Chip Bubl, OSU Extension Faculty, Agriculture

Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources, Family and Community Health, 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

Soils are really dry

During our water year from October 1 through September 30th, we normally get 43 inches of water. At the end of May according to the National Weather Service, we stand at 32 inches for the water year in Scappoose. In a normal year, June would add about 1.5 inches, with July at .6 inches, August with 1.1 inches, and September with 1.8 more inches. In a normal year, this would add 5 inches to our current May total of 32 inches giving us 37 inches total for the 22-23 water year. This is about 6 inches short of normal or about 80% of normal rainfall for the water year. These number should be proportional for other county locations. The forecasts aren't optimistic for reaching even those numbers. It is dry. Those of you on wells may find them run short or worse. Pay attention to keeping your most important plants watered and use mulches for water management. And start thinking about what your landscape should look like in the future if this continues.

Bolting cabbage family transplants

Another spring vegetable issue has been the short cycle of warm days, followed by very cold days, then warm to hot week. Many gardeners that transplanted early "starts" had them bolt to flower and seed without getting normal growth. You can still eat them but there isn't much there.

Purchased soil mixes for raised beds still causing problems

A most challenging issue has been the heavy amounts of organic matter in the mixes that is modestly (at best) composted. Plants grown in these mixtures show signs of nitrogen deficiency. The signs are poor growth and often

leaves that are yellow or very light green instead of the deep green of a plant that has access to enough N.

Poorly composted organic matter doesn't stop composting. Rather it slows way down, especially if it had been rain-saturated over the winter and into spring. Once temperatures rise and rain decreases, the composting pace picks up. But all the zillions of micro and mini organisms that do the composting have to be fed. So they grab the available nitrogen to feed themselves. Once composting is complete, this demand disappears.



But for your plants to thrive, you have to feed both the crop and the composting army of little creatures. My normal nitrogen recommendation for a vegetable garden is .3 pounds of actual nitrogen per 100 square feet. This is where it gets a little tricky. You have to calculate how much fertilizer you need by how much nitrogen is in that fertilizer.

Fertilizer bags list the percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) that is in the fertilizer. The first number is N, second is P and third is K.

To supply a normal garden with .3 pounds of actual N, you divide the requirement by the percentage on the bag. If the first number is "7", then the percent N is 7 percent or .07, the math looks like this $.3/.07 = 4.3$ pounds of this fertilizer in 100 square feet of garden area. If the percent was 16 on the bag, the math is $.3/.16 = 1.9$ pounds or about half as much per 100 square feet.

Since most raised beds are 4 feet by 8 feet which is 32 square feet per raised bed, you would divide the number you got for 100 square feet by 3.

For the first calculation, it would be $4.3/3 = 1.43$ or about 1.5 pounds of this fertilizer per raised bed.

For the second calculation, it would be $1.9/3 = .63$ or slightly more than a half a pound of fertilizer for the raised bed.

But for beds with these fresh, poorly composted mixes you have to double the amounts! So that would be about 3 pounds per raised bed for the first one and slightly more than one and a quarter pounds for the second.

How do you translate pounds to volume? It is easy since “a pint is a pound the world around”. So in the first example, you would need about 3 pints of the fertilizer per bed. For the second fertilizer, a pint and a quarter pints.

You could split the fertilizer applications with half now and the other half in about 45 days. Let me know if you have any questions and I can walk you through it.

Herbs for Columbia County

Culinary herbs should be part of a vegetable garden. Most are quite easy to grow and most are ignored by deer, so they can be planted anywhere there is decent sun. And sun is the key for most herbs. They need at least 6-7 hours of direct sun to do well. Most (though not all) are winter hardy.

What herbs don't like is soggy ground. Most herbs of European origin need well-drained

soil. They can exist under a south-facing eave with modest winter watering and protection from the sometimes brutal north winter winds.



The easiest to grow are the woody herbs, which include thyme, rosemary, sage, and bay laurel. Once established, they can live for

many years. We recently lost a rosemary plant (it had been declining for a bit), but it gave us ~35 years of great flavored leaves. An adjoining thyme plant is still going strong. I have noticed that the more flattened rosemary cultivars seem to be less winter hardy than the “classic” upright rosemary types.

European Bay can become a really big shrub, which you don't really want. There is both European Bay and the Coastal Bay Laurel that is also called Oregon myrtle wood. **The European bay is a better choice for the kitchen.** They can be pruned routinely to keep them in check.

These four plants all produce leaves chock full of essential oils. You can use them fresh or dried. Drying the leaves concentrates their oils. Lavender, which is both a cooking and fragrance herb, is more sensitive to cold winters.

All need pruning to hold them down a bit and, especially with sage, to encourage more vigorous growth. That can be done almost anytime except in mid to late fall and winter.

The herbaceous perennial herb tarragon dies back in the fall but will over-winter and re-emerge next spring if given some cold protection and not too soggy a soil. Tarragon flavor is largely lost in drying. It is best used fresh and to flavor vinegar for salads. The method

we use is to save some nice wine bottles, cut a good bunch of tarragon, push it into the bottle, and pour the vinegar of your choosing, warmed to near boiling, into the bottles. Cap with a cork and let them sit. The bottles are ready for use in several weeks and the flavor holds for a long time. See this publication for more details: <https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/foodnut/09340.pdf>

Oregano is a lot like tarragon, though its leaves hold their flavor much better when dried.

Some other herbaceous perennials can be a garden challenge, especially any of the mint family. They want to rule any garden they inhabit. They must be contained to keep them from becoming a serious pest. Mint leaves can be dried and maintain their flavor very well.

Some annual herbs, like basil, don't hold their flavor well when dried. But frozen basil-infused pesto "ice-tray" cubes made in the summer are a joy in the winter. Dill and fennel are harvested for their seed and leaves. Their foliage holds its flavor moderately well if frozen, less well if dried. The seeds hold their flavor very well when dried. Parsley is great fresh and parsley, in mild winters, will hold their leaves until they bolt to seed the following spring. However, as bolting starts, the flavor of the leaves begin to get a mildly bitter after-taste.

Catnip does grow well here. You can grow it for your cats and/or neighbor cats, who will find it. That can create some drama....or not. Depends on the cats.

Herbs don't have to be grown together. They can be planted with other landscape plants as long as they get their share of sun and reasonably well-drained soil.

Herbs are generally pollinator magnets, bringing hummingbirds, both honey and bumble bees and other much smaller native bees to your garden. They also support some important predatory insects that help keep your free of aphids and some of the young very hungry caterpillars. *Photo credit: Wikipedia*

Yellow jacket and hornet update

Yellow jackets don't like wet springs either. Colonies start new each year from pregnant queens that have over-wintered wherever they can find shelter. I often find the fat queens in firewood piles. In drier springs, they are often active in April and have built good size paper nests with

lots of workers by this time. This year, I have seen a number of queens that are just getting started. That means that it take considerably longer to build up colony size to truly annoying proportions.



The yellow jacket group are virtually hairless and thus are easy to distinguish from honeybees and bumble bees. It is worth noting that all of the yellow jacket species (we have several) and the bald-faced hornet (in the same Vespidae family) are predators on insects in varying degrees. My rule of thumb has been not to kill them if the effort could put you at risk (like a bald-faced hornet nest 30 feet off the ground under an eave) or if they pose little or no risk to your family or livestock. The colony dies each year and the nest is not re-occupied. Only the pregnant queens flee the nest and survive.

The yellow jackets that nest in the ground can be very difficult to live with. Often you discover them in the course of doing something else, like baleing hay (personal experience), cutting ivy (personal experience), walking the dog (personal experience), or off-loading firewood (personal experience). In fact, I seem to have up close and personal encounters with these insects almost every year. To control either ground nests or aerial nests, you need to buy one of the aerosol hornet and wasp insecticides. Locate the opening to the nest, either at the bottom of the aerial nest or where they are going into the ground. Wait until dusk to get them all back into the hive and then spray the aerosol into the hole. Most of the canisters will spray accurately about 8-10 feet. Then get the heck out of there. Be very careful on ladders and always follow the instructions on the label. Look the next day or two to see how you have done. Ground nests are more difficult to treat since the tunnel might bend to the cavity where the paper nest under the ground is constructed. The insecticide has a hard time making that bend.

Don't ever plug up an exterior hole to a yellow jacket nest that is in a wall void. They can chew through sheetrock and come pouring into your home. This is not a good solution. One other note, the German yellow jacket (*Vespula germanica*) is now well established in Columbia County. It builds huge paper nests plastered against walls and rafters inside houses. I have seen several that were 2-4 feet wide and about 2 feet long. They were exiting through a hole in a basement or attic wall to feed outside. These nests need to be dealt with by a pest control company.

A mouse (or more) in the house

There are two different mice that share our houses in Columbia County. The native deer

mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) is by far the most common. In the more urbanized parts of the county, the European house mouse (*Mus musculus*) may be a significant species, but rarely the most abundant. They are easy to tell apart. The deer mouse has white feet, a white underbelly, and white under its softly hairy tail. The European house mouse has no pure white coloration and it has smaller ears, a chunkier, more compact body, and a shorter, hairless tail in comparison to the deer mouse. The upper color of the deer mouse can be gray (when immature) and red/brown to dark brown when mature. Both of these species are very different from the field mice (voles) that inhabit our pastures and landscapes (and aren't interested in houses at all) and have mostly very short tails.



The deer mouse is very common in our forests and areas with mixed shrubs, trees, and grass. They are omnivorous, dining on insects, fungi, plants, seeds, and whatever else they can find with their sensitive noses. In turn, they are a meal for bobcats, house cats,

sometimes dogs, coyotes, fox, weasels, skunks, owls, and snakes.

They are incredibly agile climbers and can get in through very small holes in structures. In the absence of human structures, deer mice nest in tree cavities and stumps, under rocks and logs, and in other protected spaces. The nests look like mouse nests and the droppings are similar to European house mice as well. Moss is a preferred nest material but insulation is fine as well. They are very social and generally are active at night. They don't really hibernate, especially in heated houses, but

they can slow way down in extremes of heat or cold.

Deer mice breed rather promiscuously and a female can give birth to a litter with several males' genetics. They generally breed two or more times a year with litters of 1 to 9. The young are independent after three weeks and can breed at six weeks.

The perception is that deer mice are more common this year in houses and other structures. Rodent populations, in general, fluctuate in response to feed quality and quantity and sometimes disease. It is thought that Douglas fir and big leaf maple seeds could impact breeding since they are both preferred food sources. I think it was a good year for maple seeds but not sure about fir cones. In addition, the cold winter may have driven more to look for heated shelter.

Either way, it isn't good to have them as house guests. They can damage wiring, causing serious fires. This isn't all that uncommon with mice, rats, and squirrels.

Deer mice are also the only vector in Oregon for the hanta virus. This virus has to be inhaled to cause the disease. The respiratory disease is very serious since ~40% of the people diagnosed, perish. Fortunately, hanta virus incidence in Oregon is low and most cases have been east of the Cascades. There has been about 1 case a year for the past 20 years in Oregon. Recently, there was an unusual cluster of the disease near Seattle. Human exposure to the disease comes from cleaning up mouse debris with a vacuum and/or a broom. The broom or vacuum aerosolize the virus making it easy to inhale. While a standard

surgical mask is better protection than nothing, it isn't perfect. The CDC suggests spraying mouse infested quarters with a 10% bleach solution and letting it sit for 10-20 minutes and then wet-mopping the space.

Deer mice (and European house mice) are easily trapped. They invested (in their evolutionary path) heavily on reproduction rather than brains. They will visit traps baited with peanut butter and seeing a trapped mouse doesn't stop others and they get trapped. In fact, I am convinced that trapping the first mouse is the hardest and that the smell brings the others in rapid succession.

Closing off as many openings in the outer "shell" of the house is the best preventive approach. Deer mice don't gnaw like rats. Look

for openings around pipes that go from outside in. Plug the gaps with steel wool. Same for any other cracks you can find.

Baits are the last choice only be-

cause there are concerns with direct toxicity if a domestic animals eat the bait directly. Since mice are known to cache bait, it may have been safe where you put it but not where they moved it. Bait stations help to reduce non-target poisoning but are not perfect. Finally, poisoned mice often die in the walls or under the house and do stink for a time. But their odor curve isn't near that of a dead rat. Still, since they are so easy to trap, that management approach combined with house tightening should be your primary control measures. For more information see

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PEST-NOTES/pn74161.html> . Photo courtesy of the Center for Disease Control



Garden Hints from OSU Extension

Planning

- Construct trellises for tomatoes, cucumbers, pole beans, and vining ornamentals.

Maintenance and Clean Up

- Prune lilacs, forsythia, rhododendrons, and azaleas, and other early flowering shrubs after blooming.
- Fertilize vegetable garden 1 month after plants emerge by side dressing nitrogen alongside rows.
- Harvest “thinnings” from new plantings of lettuce, onion, and chard.
- Pick ripe strawberries regularly to avoid fruit-rotting diseases.
- Use organic mulches to conserve soil moisture in ornamental beds. An inch or two of sawdust, barkdust, or composted leaves will minimize loss of water through evaporation.
- Blossoms on squash and cucumbers begin to drop: this is nothing to worry about. Cherries may also drop fruit: this is not a major concern.
- After normal fruit drop of apples, pears and peaches in June, consider thinning the remainder to produce a crop of larger fruit and reduce limb breakage.
- Make sure raised beds receive enough water for plants to avoid drought stress. If a green lawn is desired, make sure lawn areas are receiving adequate water (approximately 0.5 to 1.5 inches per week from June through August). Deep watering less often is more effective than frequent shallow watering. Measure your water use by placing an empty tuna can where your irrigation water lands.
- **(Mid-June):** If green lawns are being maintained through the summer, apply 1 lb. nitrogen per 1,000 sq.ft. to lawns.

Pest Monitoring and Management

Continue monitoring blueberry, strawberry, cherry and other plants that produce soft fruits and berries for Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD). If SWD

are present, use an integrated and least toxic approach to manage the pests. <https://agsci.oregonstate.edu/spotted-wing-drosophila/growers/monitoring-information-spotted-wing-drosophila>.

- First week: spray cherry trees for cherry fruit fly, as necessary, if fruit is ripening.
- First week: spray for codling moth in apple and pear trees, as necessary. Continue use of pheromone traps for insect pest detection.
- Learn to identify beneficial insects and plant some insectary plants (e.g. Alyssum, Phacelia, coriander, candytuft, sunflower, yarrow, dill) to attract them to your garden. Check with local nurseries for best selections. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9289> for more information.
- Control garden weeds by pulling, hoeing, or mulching.
- Control aphids on vegetables as needed by hosing off with water or by using insecticidal soap or a registered insecticide.
- Watch for 12-spotted beetles on beans and lettuce and cabbage worms or flea beetles in cole crops (cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts). Remove the pests by hand or treat with registered pesticides.
- Spray peas as first pods form, if necessary, to control weevils.
- Birch trees dripping a sticky fluid from their leaves means that aphids are present. Control as needed.
- Use yellow sticky traps to monitor for cherry fruit fly. About 1 week after the first fly is caught, spray cherries at appropriate intervals.
- Last week: second spray for codling moth in apple and pear trees, as necessary.

Houseplants and Indoor Gardening

Move houseplants outdoors for cleaning, grooming, repotting and summer growth.

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.

In wild spaces

Reptile of the month: The Rubber Boa

Columbia County has no rattlesnakes and few, if any, gopher or “bull” snakes. We do have quite an array of garter snakes three species and some sub-species. And we have rubber boas.

The rubber boa can be a fearsome looking and smelling snake. If confronted, it may coil and, while hiding its head, shake and “strike” with its blunt tail which resembles a head. If really agitated, it will release an awful odor. But, in general it is quite calm. On author described it as the perfect “training” snake to cure someone of snake phobia.

I have seen rubber boas mostly in the areas along the Columbia River and in the basalt rock areas. I get calls about them well into the foothills and beyond. The distribution maps show them in all of Columbia County. This picture was taken just off the Crown Z trail near Chapman.

They have very tiny scales, which makes them look more like rubber, hence the name. Coloration can range from brown/orange to very dark brown above with a light tan to yellow underside. Most I have seen have been 2



feet or much smaller but there are reliable reports of them being 3 feet or perhaps even longer.

They are more cold tolerant than other snakes so aren't seen basking in the sun as much as garter snakes do. They hibernate over winter, breed in March /April and the female gives birth to live young in late summer/early fall. There are from 2-8 in a litter. Females will aggregate together for warmth.

Rubber boas prefer areas with lots of cover and places to disappear into. Under logs and rotting stumps are where they “chill” in the forest. Rocky areas with areas to sneak under are favored in less forested spaces. The largest rubber boa I know of was seen in a drainage district in some very tall grass. They will occupy tunnels made by other animals in some situations. Rubber boas generally don't move very fast.

They do most of their hunting and gadding about at night. Rubber boas eat primarily field mice (voles) but will eat frogs, salamanders, birds if they find a ground nest, bird eggs, and other snakes. If they find a nest of mice, they eat them all, constricting them until the prey die from no oxygen.

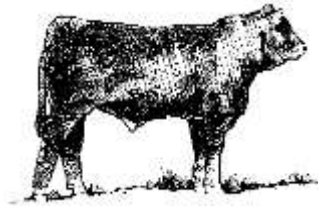
They can't fight much so they fall prey to coyotes, cats, raccoons and raptors. They try to confuse predators with the tail that looks like a head. It doesn't really work that well. Hiding is their best defense.

For more information, see *Reptiles of Washington and Oregon* by Storm et al. It is a great reference.

Farm and livestock notes

Beef topics

- ❖ **Time to castrate:** There has been a lot of discussion about the best time to castrate bull calves. Some have argued that extra weight gains for a bull calf that is “intact” longer is free money and castration should be delayed until weaning in the fall. But most studies have shown a great benefit to getting the job done while the calf is younger and still nursing, independent of which technique



you use. They recover faster from the procedure. They may weigh slightly less than bull calf at six months but the slow gains of the bull calf after castration at six months leaves the earlier castrated animals ahead by the end of the year.

- ❖ **Vaccinations:** Stay current on your vaccination schedule for both cows and calves. Good weather and generally decent pastures should have your animals in good condition. Vaccinations are always more effective when the herd isn't stressed. Talk to your vet about a program that will work for you. Also set up a worming and anti-biotic plan for emergencies. Antibiotic use has gotten very complicated. Inform yourself about the new rules.
- ❖ **A study of the nutritional value of a number of weeds in southwest Oregon pastures:** With the increasing use of meat goats (especially) or other livestock for intensive weed control, the need for more precise nutritional information on these plants was clear. They looked at a number of weeds we don't yet have (yellow star thistle, Portuguese broom, and gorse) and others that are common in Columbia County (Himalayan/Armenian blackberry,

Canada and bull thistle, and bog rush, also known as tussock). Weed samples collected from the spring through the fall were analyzed and the lab results for crude protein, energy (TDN) and mineral composition were compared to the established nutrient needs of sheep, cattle, and goats over the same time period.

There were some stellar performers. Himalayan blackberry averaged about 15% crude protein with a TDN of about 63%. This compares with SW Oregon hay with 8% CP and a TDN of 57%. The impressive blackberry analysis was consistent from spring through fall.

The authors note that there are a number of other factors like thorns or off-flavors that can restrict intake of a number of the weeds. They also note that palatability of these plants can change over the season. It is up to the manager to supplement feed as necessary and to target grazing when the weeds are most attractive to the stock.

Bracken fern: Bracken ferns are quite visible now. It has compounds that destroy thiamine in ruminants (cattle, sheep, and goats) and horses. When that happens, neurological symptoms develop in horses. Beef may also show neurological problems and, in addition, bleeding from all openings. **The toxin is not destroyed in hay.** For cattle, the good news is that it takes a lot of bracken to do serious damage since ruminants make thiamine in their rumens (thank those gut bacteria). Horses don't have that margin of safety and can go down suddenly after a period of consistent bracken grazing. Treatment in affected animals involves vitamin B3 shots and supportive therapy. If caught early, it is generally reversible. Bracken can be controlled by several herbicides in pastures. Call our office for more information.



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Publications of interest:

Grow Your Own Peppers: Peppers come in a great variety of sizes, shapes, colors and tastes. They produce a large yield in a small amount of space. Learn the secrets to growing great peppers in Oregon. See it at: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/pub/ec-1227>

Two-aged to Multi-aged Stand Management in the Coast Range: This publication is part of the [Alternative Forest Management series](#). It describes a case study on shelterwood harvest and using active management to convert a mature, even-aged stand to a multi-aged stand in the Oregon Coast Range. The landowner's core management philosophy is to create forests that are both ecologically complex and economically viable. See it at: <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/em9082.pdf>

Choosing the right irrigation system for your small farm on the Oregon Coast: See it at: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/water/irrigation/choosing-right-irrigation-system-your-small-farm-oregon-coast>