Country Living
Provided to you by the
OSU Extension Service Columbia County
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January 2019

Programs for you . . .

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

Jan. 1..........Office Closed – Happy New Year!  Enjoy your holiday!
Jan. 3..........Master Gardener™ Board Meeting  Project Planning @ 10am; Board Mtg @ 10:30
Jan. 8..........Lower Columbia River Watershed Council  7:00 p.m. Clatskanie PUD, 495 Hwy 30
Jan. 8..........Scappoose Bay Watershed Council  7:00 p.m. 57420 Old Portland Rd in Warren.
Jan. 24........Upper Nehalem Watershed Council  5:30 p.m. 1201 Texas Ave in Vernonia
Jan. 24........Master Gardener™ Chapter Meeting 6:30 p.m. Extension Office. Public welcome!
Jan. 26........Beginning Beekeepers Workshop 9am-3pm $35 includes resources - Call to register

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

New Year’s Garden Resolutions

Gardens are all about change. Plants that you once loved have grown too big for their space and/or are self-seeding their offspring everywhere. Fruit trees that fail to set fruit (or die on their own) need to be removed. New vegetables come along that demand space where space is limited. What won’t you plant to make way for them? Compost, shovels, loppers, chain saws, and our energy and imagination will create the 2019 version of our gardens. Garden resolutions should be attainable. Here are some for you to consider:

Weed early and often.
Weeds compete directly with our garden plants for light. When you prepare a new bed, control all perennial weeds. This can be done by covering the bed in the fall or winter with a heavy mulch of leaves or compost and black plastic, which you will later remove. Adding more compost and some quarter-ten gravel in herbaceous perennial beds (the “Joy Creek technique”) will get your new spaces off to a good start. For vegetables, focus your weeding efforts on the first four weeks after you seed or transplant. That will get your vegetables growing. Winter weeding never hurts and can reduce the volume of bedstraw and bittercress (“popweed”) in the spring.

Grow flowers amongst your vegetables. This will improve predatory insect activity and furnish pollen and nectar for pollinators of all types. Best advice is to plant groups of the same flowers (3-4 feet wide) at scattered locations within your gardening areas.

Here is a source for information on pollinators: https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/plant-lists/pollinator-plants-maritime-northwest-region/

And here is a great one on predators: http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/EM067E/EM067E.pdf

Build a cold frame for spring seed starting and fall and spring vegetable greens. This is a good project for someone with even modest carpentry skills. It might also be a good reason to order your seeds soon.

Take better care of tools. That includes keeping the sharp ones sharpened and the wooden handles periodically oiled with linseed. Running your power equipment a few times in the winter will keep them ready.

Grow a wider variety of vegetables. Sweet potatoes grow here. The Demonstration garden at the Fairgrounds produced 60+ pounds of sweet potatoes in 32 square feet. Winter vegetables started by early August can be eaten over the winter months.

Figure out the best ways to manage slugs and moles. Slugs are a big problem here and attention must be paid to them in the vegetable garden. As with weeds, focus on them early and often. The slugs that eat our lettuce are not native to North America so feel no guilt. I hate to kill moles but they can be a real pain under the roots of tomatoes, peppers and all manner of shallow-rooted annual plants. Build them out if planning new hard-sided raised beds. Trap them where building them out isn’t practical.

Donate to the Food Bank: Produce and/or money are greatly appreciated and really needed.

Preserve and store more of your own produce and learn how to cook with it. Learning how to preserve is fun, creative, and money saving.
Teach someone to vegetable garden. Start out with a small plot (10 x 10) with “easy” vegetables. This effort will enrich their diet and both of your lives.

Resolve to never forget why you chose to garden in the first place: Have fun, relax, and enjoy the beautiful and calming energy of a living landscape.

Speaking of slugs

The moderate winter has “our” slugs more active than normal. Commercial grain and grass seed plantings are at risk as are other overwintering crops and gardens. The slug research program at OSU is pushing for better bio-controls and less-toxic chemistry. There are several internal parasites being looked at. One nematode has been used in England for years and is quite effective. But it hadn’t yet been found this side of the Atlantic. A recent report suggests not only is that nematode present but other internal nematodes of slugs are also here. But getting nematodes registered to kill slugs would need proof that it wasn’t toxic to native species of slugs and snails. That won’t be easy.

Rory McDonnell of OSU is looking into the use of essential oils, mainly thyme and spearmint, mixed with water at a very low rate (a quarter of 1%) by volume. What emulsifier would allow the oil to mix evenly in water is not clear but that should be fairly easy to resolve. The mix might need to be sprayed directly on the slug, so we would need to buy our headlamps for some night work. There is one other concern. Our local mint grower, Mike Seeley, says his slugs love spearmint even more than peppermint. Perhaps, for slugs, mint oil is an acquired (evolved) taste.

Protected peas

Edible peas and the flowering kinds can be planted this month. Don’t confuse the two types since flowering peas are poisonous.

Peas are best planted in a well-drained location. They should be given some cold protection. Some gardeners bend clear, corrugated fiberglass greenhouse sheets in a hoop between two rows of stakes over the seeded rows. Other gardeners use PVC pipe or 10-gauge wire hoops and clear plastic. Open ends for ventilation on sunny days.

Once the peas outgrow the fiberglass tunnel, cover them with floating row cover. Eventually, the taller types of peas will need a trellis of some sort. At that point, they should be able to stand whatever cool weather still remains.

Inoculate seeds so they will return nitrogen to your garden. Plant them about 2 inches apart. Rows should be 36-40 inches apart. Deer and slugs adore garden peas.

The complexity of biocontrol

It is an article of faith that it is good to increase predators. A scientist reported in a study of squash production that carabid beetles (those large black ones) controlled some squash bugs and increased yield. However, when wolf spiders were also present, the spiders ate predators of the squash bug canceling out the effect of the beetles. In alfalfa, the beetles ate aphids when the plants were short but as the alfalfa grew, they couldn’t reach the aphids so they ate aphid predators.
Spotlight on Volunteers: Columbia County Master Gardeners

Nearly 70 active OSU Master Gardeners make up a dedicated volunteer force of individuals who work diligently to provide informal gardening education to their neighbors, friends and youth throughout Columbia County.

You may have seen them at a local plant sale, at the fairgrounds, in your kids’ school, at the library, in community gardens, or in your farmers market. Perhaps, have you had a gardening question answered or an insect identified?

Maybe you were inspired to try your own hand at growing vegetables, herbs, or flowers after a conversation with one of these knowledgeable and experienced folks! Did you know that they join the ranks of over 23,000 volunteers who bring OSU programs to their communities?

In 1988, Columbia County welcomed their first class of Master Gardener students, and the extension service has held annual trainings throughout the county for 30 years! Have you thought about becoming a trained Master Gardener Volunteer? Read more about the benefits and commitment of this remarkable program online here.

This year, the class will be offered at the Extension Service office in St. Helens at a new time to accommodate those who work during the week. Consider joining us for the 10-week program on Monday evenings and Saturday mornings from Feb. 4th – April 13th, 2019.

Applications are being accepted online: https://tinyurl.com/ColumbiaMG2019

2018 Master Gardener Volunteer Highlights:

- They held 5 Seed to Supper trainings with 60 participants and gave instructional support on growing backyard produce
- Presented to youth & adult audiences on insects and pollinator encouragement (even traveling to 4-H summer camp!)
- Staffed clinic tables at the local farmers markets, plant sales & garden fairs
  - Provided “farm ecology” education to youth at a Metro-supported outreach program
  - They held pruning demonstrations and a tree fruit grafting clinic
  - Provided tours of the demonstration garden at the Fairgrounds during the county fair week
  - Developed a backyard beekeeper workshop & meeting series
  - Maintained a series of publically available programs with guest speakers as part of their monthly chapter meetings
- Our longest serving MG continued to engineer and record a weekly radio show co-hosted with Chip Bubl
- Aided with greenhouse propagation of native plants at the SBWC greenhouse
- Master Gardeners assisted in “Food Bank & Educational” gardens, managed the Fairgrounds Demonstration Garden and, with some fresh fruits & vegetables from their own gardens, donated over 8,000# of produce to the Food Bank! Come join the Master Gardeners! ~ Sonia Reagan
OSU Extension Service - Columbia County

2019 OSU Master Gardener™ Class

extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia

Feb. 4th - April 13th  10-week course  $100
Mondays 6-9pm & Saturdays 9-noon

The OSU Master Gardener™ class will be offered in St. Helens at the Extension Service Classroom (505 N. Columbia River Hwy) for 10 weeks beginning February 4th. Class will meet every Monday from 6-9pm and Saturday mornings 9am-noon (View schedule for exceptions - schedule subject to change.)

Topics to be covered will include vegetable gardening, insect identification, botany for gardeners, plant problem diagnosis, growing fruits and berries, lawn management, weed identification and management, pesticides safety, and plant propagation. There will also be hands-on projects offered.

Students completing the class will be expected to pay back a minimum of 60 hrs. of volunteer horticultural projects.

Registration is online at: https://tinyurl.com/ColumbiaMG2019

For questions about the program, please call the OSU Extension office in St. Helens at (503) 397-3462 or email either Chip (Chip.Bubl@oregonstate.edu) or Sonia (Sonia.Reagan@oregonstate.edu).

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OSU Extension Service encourages sustainable gardening practices. Preventative pest management is emphasized over reactive pest control. Identify and monitor problems before acting, and opt for the least toxic approach that will remedy the problem. First consider cultural, and then physical controls. The conservation of biological control agents (predators, parasitoids) should be favored over the purchase and release of biological controls. Use chemical controls only when necessary, only after identifying a pest problem, and only after thoroughly reading the pesticide label. Least-toxic choices include insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, botanical insecticides, organic and synthetic pesticides — when used judiciously. Recommendations in this calendar are not necessarily applicable to all areas of Oregon. For more information, contact your local OSU Extension Service office.

Planning

- Keep a garden journal. Consult your journal in the winter, so that you can better plan for the growing season.
- Check with local retail garden or nursery stores for seeds and seed catalogs, and begin planning this year's vegetable garden.
- Have soil test performed on garden plot to determine nutrient needs. Contact your local Extension office for a list of laboratories or view EM 8677 online.
- Take hardwood cuttings of deciduous ornamental shrubs and trees for propagation.
- Plan to replace varieties of ornamental plants that are susceptible to disease with resistant cultivars in February.

Maintenance and Clean Up

- Clean pruners and other small garden tools with rubbing alcohol.
- Reapply or redistribute mulches that have blown or washed away during winter.
- Place windbreaks to protect sensitive landscape evergreens against cold, drying winds.
- Do not walk on lawns until frost has melted.
- Water landscape plants underneath wide eaves and in other sites shielded from rain.

Pest Monitoring and Management

- Monitor landscape plants for problems. Don’t treat unless a problem is identified.
- Scout cherry trees for signs and symptoms of bacterial canker. Remove infected branches with a clean pruner or saw. Sterilize tools before each new cut. Burn or send to landfill before bloom. See FC 631, Controlling Diseases and Insects in Home Orchards.
- Watch for field mice damage on lower trunks of trees and shrubs. Eliminate hiding places by removing weeds. Use traps and approved baits as necessary.
- Use dormant sprays of lime sulfur or copper fungicide on roses for general disease control, or, plan to replace susceptible varieties with resistant cultivars in February.
- Moss in lawn may mean too much shade or poor drainage. Modify site conditions if moss is bothersome.
- Mid-January: Spray peach trees with approved fungicides to combat peach leaf curl and shothole. Or plant curl-resistant cultivars such as Frost, Q1-8 or Creswell.

Houseplants and Indoor Gardening

- Monitor houseplants for correct water and fertilizer; guard against insect infestations; clean dust from leaves.
- Protect sensitive plants such as weeping figs from cold drafts in the house.
- Propagate split-leaf philodendrons and other leggy indoor plants by air-layering or vegetative cuttings.
- Plant dwarf annual flowers inside for houseplants: coleus, impatiens, seedling geraniums.
- Gather branches of quince, forsythia, and flowering cherries; bring indoors to force early bloom.
Beginning Beekeeping Workshop

Presented by: The Columbia County Beekeepers

Topics to include Honeybee and Beekeeping History, Bee Biology, Equipment, What to Know in the First Year, and Diseases. Resources provided.

Instructors, Steve Gomes and Linda Zahl are in the Oregon Master Beekeeping Program and Oregon Bee Atlas. DeeAnn Herschbach, Paul Vincent, and Ron McLaughlin all live locally and have completed their first year of beekeeping, bringing with them the wisdom of knowing what the "beginner" needs to know to be successful.

Sat. JANUARY 26, 2019 9am-3pm

Extension Service Conference Room, 505 North Columbia River Hwy, St. Helens, OR 97051

Space is limited, please call 503-397-3462 to register. $35, cash or check, payable at the door

Accommodations for disabilities may be made by contacting Sonia at 503-397-3462 or Sonia.Reagan@oregonstate.edu

extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia
Plant of the month: Stinging nettle

Useful or awful? Native or non-native? Nettles are a mixed blessing. French author Victor Hugo said, “I like the spider, I love the nettle, because they are hated!” I, personally, come down on the side of a positive net value for nettles (and spiders), with some obvious reservations.

For a long time, it was thought that nettles in the Pacific Northwest were introduced from Europe but that now seems not the entire story. But the taxonomy is confusing. The large world nettle family are mostly *Urtica dioica* with a ton of subspecies on various continents. The most common nettle in Columbia County is *U. dioica ssp. gracilis*, also known as the American nettle but the nettle populations haven’t been looked at too closely. There is good reason to believe that there are European nettles here as well. All have stinging hairs.

Nettles are herbaceous perennial flowering plants with running root systems that spread vigorously on favorable sites. They are often part of the understory of lower elevation riparian communities, found under scattered alder and sometimes maple. They prefer some shade and lots of soil moisture. Shoots emerge early in spring and die back in the fall. Stinging hairs make the leaves unattractive to deer or livestock. Clumps enlarge like Canada thistle, pushing up new shoots from the edge of the existing clump into new ground.

The somewhat square-stemmed shoots grow 3-10 feet tall and are topped by drooping clusters of small, green flowers. European nettle plant clumps have either male or female flowers, a classic dioecious plant like holly. The “female” plant stems are generally a bit taller. The American nettle has flowers with both male and female parts, a monoeocious plant. The flowers bloom from May through early July and are wind pollinated. Lots of seeds with an unknown life span are produced.

Nettles are vigorous colonizers of fertile ground and once they occupy a space, few other plants can get started. There are a number of butterflies and moth larva that use nettles as their primary food. Nettles can be good cover for some birds, amphibians, and small mammals.

European gardeners love nettles for the superior soil/compost they produce. Classic “Biodynamic” gardening techniques relied on nettle-stimulated compost. There is a classic French concoction of fermented nettle leaves and stems in water that is used to this day as a fungicide and general plant tonic. But beware, it becomes quite pungent as it ferments for the necessary 3-4 weeks before use.

Here is one description from the Irish Times:

“Left to stew for several weeks with just the occasional vigorous stir (hold your nose while doing so), this soupy mix [of nettle leaves] will gradually transform itself into an oh-so-stinky but impressively effective, nutrient-rich, liquid plant feed. Last summer I gave it, diluted at a ratio of roughly one part feed to 10 parts water, to some invalid dahlias with remarkable results. Within a week the plants looked bigger, stronger and more vigorous, while it also dramatically helped their ability to resist slugs and other garden pests. As to the exact proportions of freshly harvested leaves to water, I’m never too strict about it, but aim for a rough ratio of one bucket [editorial note: bucket size undisclosed] of chopped leaves to 15-20 litres (= 16-21 quarts) of water.”
If you try this, let me know what you find out. I don’t recommend using this home remedy on plant parts, like leafy greens, that you eat without cooking.

There is a lot of literature on the nutritive and pharmaceutical uses of nettles. Nettle leaves and roots are very high in protein, vitamins, a great selection of amino acids, and lots of minerals. Leaves are widely consumed after a brief immersion in boiling water which gets rid of the sting. Roots take more effort to make them chewable/edible. But for many European countries, nettles are the go-to spring tonic. There are lots of recipes for nettle beer and nettle cordials.

West coast indigenous populations ate nettles and used the stems to make rope. They considered it a tonic. Europeans also use nettle stems to make rope, fabric, and paper.

There are many medical conditions that nettles are thought to improve. For more detailed information, see the link: http://pennstatehershey.adam.com/content.aspx?productId=107&pid=33&gid=000275

But please, consult with your physician before using nettles for medicinal purposes.

Finally, the sting! The stinging hairs are on the upper surface of the leaf and on the stems. If you can grab leaves on the underside and bend them over, you can pick without gloves, if you dare. A hair, when brushed, loses its tiny cap and irritating compounds like histamines pour out, under considerable pressure, and pierce the skin causing the burn. So use elbow length gloves. Oddly, nettle clumps exposed to direct heavy winds apparently can’t sting for five days afterwards. If you do get stung, reach for dock leaves and rub them on the affected parts. From personal experience, it works with nettle and bee stings.

The English have a nettle eating competition. Contestants are given fresh, leaf-laden 24-inch stems and have to strip off the leaves and eat them raw. Whoever eats the most in a fixed period of time is the winner. To quote the New Yorker magazine, “there will always be an England”.

There are two nettle-like plants that don’t sting and are in different families, one a mint (Cooley’s hedge nettle: *Stachys cooleyea*) and a figwort (California figwort: *Scrophularia californica*).

### Climate change

Atmospheric carbon dioxide has reached 400 ppm this year. This is far more than it has been for over one million years (based on Antarctic ice cores).

The hottest temperature on the globe in recorded history is now 124 degrees F.

The record for the highest overall world temperature will soon exceed projections that go back 120,000 years.

We need to reduce energy use, sequester more carbon, and develop new, non-damaging energy sources.

Farmers can help by increasing organic matter in soils (this captures carbon).

Forestry can help by extending tree rotation cycles, also sequestering carbon to 60+ years.

We could all drive vehicles that get 25 plus mpg. That would change the market and our future. We need to be smart. We need to care.
Farm and livestock notes

Small farm survey

Sonia Reagan from our office and I are planning a survey of small farmers relative to your education and resource information needs. The survey will help guide future OSU Extension programming to best assist you in reaching your farm’s short and long-term goals. So watch for the survey in late January or early February. If you have ideas for survey questions or directions, please contact us as soon as possible.

Why pastures decline

Overgrazing. Grass has to have periods of rest to develop enough leafiness to efficiently capture sunlight. Contrary to popular opinion, very little of the grass plant comes from minerals in the ground. If you took a load of hay (10-14% moisture) and burned it to ash, the ash weight is what came from the ground. Grass is mainly carbohydrates and that is photosynthesis. Whoever gets to the light, wins! Without enough leaf area to capture sunlight, you will have a declining root system and a declining crown and eventually a missing plant. Let grass grow to six plus inches several times a year. In addition, if you let livestock eat what they like, you will get, after a time, only plants they don’t like. Rotation grazing forces livestock to eat it all and when removed, everything comes back. Manage your pastures to support the forage species you value.

Undergrazing. Ironically, pastures that are only hayed, particularly if they are hayed late (late June onwards), will tend to thin out as well. Grass evolved being grazed by animals. Grass needs periodic grazing followed by periods of rest. Hay fields should either be cut as close to the first of June as you can or grazed in mid-April for several weeks and then allowed to recover before haying.

Little or no fertilizing. Removing hay without adding nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, calcium and sulfur back will lead to pasture decline. Nitrogen can be supplied by a healthy stand of legumes like clover or lotus (trefoil) but the other minerals have to come from somewhere else. If you buy feed for your livestock, you are essentially importing fertilizer. Make sure you get their barn manure spread on your fields.

Grazing in the winter. Besides removing leaves when the pasture needs to recover from fall grazing, winter grazing on our wet soils inevitably leads to soil compaction. Compacted soils are starved for oxygen and grass and legume pastures need good aeration. The best advice: Raise sheep, which don’t tend to cause compaction, or don’t have your animals on pasture from November through March. The English use deep-bedding systems to barn-feed cattle during their similar winters. Horse owners make well-drained exercise yards to allow activity without grazing. If you have lots of acres (say 5 acres per cow or horse) that you are willing to use for winter grazing, you may get away with winter grazing (if you manage carefully). Additionally, some very well-drained soils are more resilient to hoof compaction. In the end, the quality of your grass in March will tell you how well you, as the manager of the grass, did. Grass that has been overgrazed will be very slow to respond to the longer and warmer days of spring.

Did you know? Our pastures produce 60% of the grass they will produce all year between April 1st and June 30th.
Heat lamps in the barn

Heat lamps are important farm tools for warming young poultry and chilled new lambs, piglets, and calves. But they have been the cause of numerous barn fires. Often, heat lamps are knocked into dry bedding where fires quickly ignite. Barn animals, rats, raccoons, and even coyotes have been implicated in the fires. Often the lamp placement was less secure or tight than it should have been.

Heat lamps can be set too close to the bedding itself and directly heat the bedding to ignition.

But a third source of fire is the very quality of the fixtures, wiring, and bulbs. Many of the readily available heat lamp fixtures and bulbs from hardware stores or even farm stores are not as safe as you would want. Look for quality in the gauge of electrical wire used, the safety record of the fixture as best as you can ascertain it, how well it can be attached and hung, and the thickness of the bulb glass to reduce the shatter potential.

Other possible heat lamp safety improvements might be to:

- Let hens incubate eggs and chicks. Use heat mats for piglets and lambs. Move calving and lambing seasons to April. Skip heat lamps altogether.
- Upgrade breaker panels – talk to an electrician.
- Isolate heated spaces from the main barn to reduce fire issues.

This material is summarized from an excellent piece written by Michael Glos in the Cornell Small Farms Quarterly. Read the whole article. It can be found online at:

http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/2014/04/07/managing-risk-using-heat-lamps-on-the-farm/

Internal and external parasites

Here are some issues to think about:

Coccidia and lice problems flare in the winter during confined situations. Watch for signs. Call your vet for options.

Use all dewormers wisely, in the right dosages and given correctly. A lot of resistance is developing with these tools so don’t overuse them. Don’t rotate wormers in a given grazing season but use combinations. Manage pasture grazing to reduce problems. There isn’t much evidence of value in “organic” wormers yet. Use worm resistance as part of your herd selection strategy (this may involve individual fecal count evaluations).

Do you really want to cowboy?

Cows that are too wild and rambunctious are hard on themselves, hard on other animals, hard on equipment, and hard on the people that work with them.

One veterinarian believes that the nastier cattle are more susceptible to some diseases and ailments. There is little doubt that they don’t convert feed as efficiently as more mellow cattle. There is some evidence that the “dark-cutters” may be behavior problem cattle.

Disposition is heritable, though none of the breed associations rank that characteristic. Many farmers do eliminate calves from misbehaving cows when selecting herd replacements.
2019 OSU Master Gardener ™ Class Open Enrollment!

The OSU Master Gardener™ class will be offered in St. Helens again this next year, and we will host our first hybrid schedule with classes Monday evenings AND Saturday mornings, beginning February 4th and meeting for 10 weeks (two 3-hour classes weekly). The programs will be held at the OSU Extension Service class room in St. Helens, with a few hand-on classes in other nearby locations. Topics to be covered will include vegetable gardening, insect identification, botany for gardeners, plant problem diagnosis, growing fruits and berries, lawn management, weed identification and management, pesticides safety, and plant propagation. Students completing the class will be expected to pay back about 60 hours on community horticultural projects. Cost of the class is $100; there are scholarships available. Register online: https://tinyurl.com/ColumbiaMG2019. For questions about the program, please call the OSU Extension office in St. Helens at 503 397-3462 or email Chip.Bubl@oregonstate.edu or Sonia.Reagan@oregonstate.edu.

Oregon Bee Atlas Training in St. Helens, Saturday, January 19th

Now is your chance to become an Oregon Bee Atlas Volunteer. Training for Columbia County citizen scientist volunteers is set for Saturday, January 19th, 2019 at the Extension Service office. You must register online for this free training at: https://www.oregonbeeproject.org/rsvp-form-2019-atlas-basic-training. Space is limited - don’t delay! As a volunteer, you will learn how to collect and identify bees, keep a record of the bees and plants where they are feeding and pin the bees for storage. The training and all supplies are provided. Learn more: https://www.oregonbeeproject.org/

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