Country Living

Provided to you by the
OSU Extension Service Columbia County
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February 2023

Programs for you . . .

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

February 2nd ***Columbia County Beekeepers event:*** **Thursday, February 2nd at 6pm** the CCOB will meet at the OSU Extension office in St. Helens. The meeting will also be "Zoomed". February Speaker will be Paul Stromberg speaking about Honeybee Queen genetics. For more information and Zoom link email ColumbiaCountyOregonBeekeep-ers@gmail.com.

February 18th ***Annual Grafting Workshop*****, Saturday, February 18th from 9am-noon at the OSU Extension office in St. Helens.** Participants will receive instruction on grafting and have five rootstocks that they can graft any of a number of different apples onto their rootstocks in the workshop. Cost: $20. We can only accept 15 people since knives will be in use and we need space to keep everyone safe. You can pre-register by calling the office at 503-397-3462.

February 18th ***Learn How to Prune Fruit Trees & Grapes and Set Mole Traps, too.*** Saturday, **February 18th from 1pm to 3pm** at the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden at the Columbia County Fairgrounds. Bring your clippers.

February 21st ***Chat with Chip***. A roughly one-and-a-half-hour interactive Zoom program on garden and related topics with Chip Bubl. **Tuesday, February 21st from 6:30 – 8pm**. You are invited to attend! Reserve a place: https://beav.es/chat-with-chip

February 23rd ***Growing the Good Stuff*****: from sweet potatoes to bitter melons.** Columbia County Master Gardener Chapter meeting. Program, which is first, is open to the public. OSU Extension office, **Thursday, February 23rd at 6:30 pm**.

See more programs for you on last page

Oregon State University Extension Service Columbia County

Chip Bubl

Chip Bubl, OSU Extension Faculty, Agriculture

In the garden

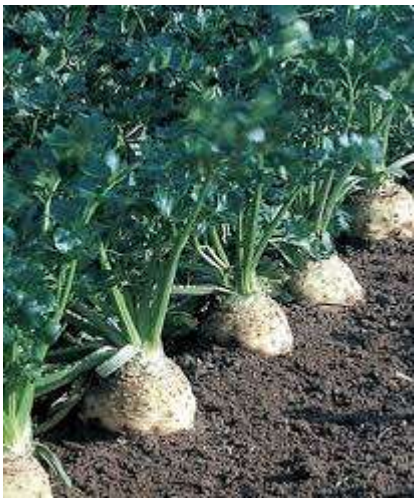
Does it make sense to grow celery?

I have never grown celery. But there usually is a bag of the mild –flavored celery that is grown in California, Arizona, or Mexico in our refrigerator. But I have eaten celery locally grown by gardener friends and was surprised and pleased at how densely flavored it can be.

But my gardener friends also were ambivalent about their celery experiments since the large stalks, often more than two feet tall, challenged their refrigerators. That said, it stores very well in refrigerators.

But some seasons produced very "stringy" celery stalks that were marginally edible and other years, stems that were quite succulent. Clearly a finicky crop.

"Our" celery originated in the Mediterranean region with early reports out of Egypt, Greece and Italy. It was a salt-marsh plant which thrived in deep, moist, and high-organic matter soils. It was wild-harvested for both its food and medicinal values. Celery came into cultivation in Greek times with seed selection and direct planting on early farms. Egyptians may also have played a role in its domestication. From the Mediterranean, it moved northwards into France (the most passionate eaters of celery) and more northern European countries. From England, it traveled to North America with the early colonizers.



Small amounts have been recently grown in Oregon for NORPAC, but with the demise of the food-processing cooperative, commercial celery may be history in the Willamette Valley. It was beautiful celery grown on peat soils.

Celery is a biennial in the carrot family of plants. If started in one summer and left in the garden over the winter, will send up floral stalks, flower, and set seed next spring or early summer. As it transitions to flowering, the floral stems can get quite bitter, just like overwintering carrots.

Celery is started from seed in flats, transplanted into bigger "cells" and then final transport to the garden when soils are near 55° F and the transplants are 4-6 inches tall. Since celery seeds are very slow to germinate and get going, you might want to start your seeds 8 weeks (!) before you plan to transplant. Celery needs consistent water (keep the moles out of the plot) and is considered a "heavy feeder" so soil fertilizing is important.

Celery will sometimes "bolt" to seed in the summer. This crashes its edibility. There has been a lot of debate whether it was irregular water or low temperatures that caused bolting. But the verdict is now clear that a cycle of 40-50 degree nights is the major bolt trigger. Row covers can be used to prevent this if there is any advance weather warning.

"Stringiness" seems to be mainly a variety issue, perhaps combined with erratic watering.

There aren't a lot of celery varieties available from the major seed companies. I checked several: Johnny's, Park, and Territorial Seed Companies. They each had separate choices.

One option to reduce the pressure in the refrigerator is to grow celeriac, a plant of the same genus and species as celery but a separate subspecies. It produces an enlarged, bulbous stem base that is strongly flavored but quite a bit easier to store. Again, not very many varieties.

Another option with celery is to dry the stems. Chop them into ¼ to 1 inch pieces, blanch the pieces briefly in boiling water to preserve the green color, and dehydrate them for later use in stews and soups. That seems well worth trying. Maybe, I will give celery and/or celeriac a chance. Pictures: Celery – Wiki-commons; Celeriac: Hirts Gardens.

Growing sweet potatoes in Columbia County

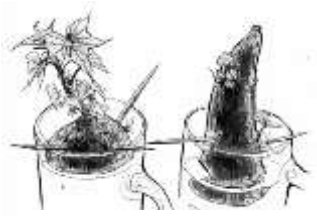
OSU Master Gardener™ Denny Snyder has harvested about a pound or more sweet potatoes per square foot in his Warren garden. Yields from their four by eight beds have ranged from thirty-four pounds to forty-five pounds per bed. He has gotten similar results in the OSU Master Gardeners Demonstration garden at the Fairgrounds. Other gardeners have learned from them and gotten equally good results (see picture of the late Yankton gardener Glen Werings' sweet potato).

Here is the Snyder method:

Sweet potatoes are grown from "slips" which are shoots that sprout from the sweet potato. Slips need to be started indoors in late January or early February. To get slips, the Snyder cuts sweet potatoes (from last year's harvest) in half width-wise. He puts the cut end down in a shallow container that holds water on some half-inch clean round rocks and fill the container to cover the tubers up to about a half inch. He starts the slips, at first, inside their house since sweet potatoes like warmth. He places the "slip" tray where it gets decent sun. He feels you need organic sweet potatoes to start with (they are more likely to sprout) but that not all tubers sprout consistently. Some tubers will rot before good slips are formed. Watch carefully and discard tubers that start to decay.

If all goes well, small slips start to grow. When the slips are 1 to 1.5 inches long, they cut or gouge them out of the sweet potato and place the base of the slips in a shallow vase in water until they root well. Once they get good roots, they pot them up into 2 inch by 2 inch containers in nice loose potting mix. After a little settling in, move the slip containers out to a greenhouse or cold frame in trays that hold water. He puts the tray on a heating mat to supply bottom heat. If the slips start to root out the bottom of the containers, he re-pots them into larger containers.

Sweet potatoes need loose soil. It is hard to overemphasize that requirement. If the soil isn't loose, the sweet potatoes tubers won't grow large. Denny prepares the four by eight-foot raised beds located in full sun when the soil is able to be worked easily, adding some fertilizer and lime at that time. He puts a soaker hose or drip tube that will water the sweet potatoes in the summer on the surface. Then he covers the beds tightly with black plastic. This warms the soil and keeps the weeds down.



Clip art: Edible Arizona

He starts to harden off the slips by giving them several hours per day outdoors in indirect sun several weeks before transplanting. Slips may lose leaves at transplanting (usually they re-sprout leaves).

When it comes time to plant (usually in early May), the Snyder method is to plant three slips per bed, evenly spaced down the center of the bed. They cut holes in the plastic to transplant the slips. One gardener (who learned from Denny) plants eight slips per bed. The planted beds are covered with row cover to provide extra heat and to reduce transplant shock. Row covers are removed in mid-June.

Consistent irrigation is necessary throughout the growing season. Vines will grow in a tangled jungle with some stems getting 10 feet long. Deer eat the foliage and field mice (voles) like the tubers. Be prepared.

The sweet potatoes are harvested in late September. You have to dig carefully and gently as sweet potatoes can be quite brittle when first dug. Dry them in a bin. Separate out any damaged tubers and eat them first. Sweet potatoes store best between 50-65 degrees. Don't let them freeze. Sweet potato pie and sweet potato hummus are several of Denny's favorite ways to use them.

Planning the vegetable garden

Both corn and beans need warm soil conditions to emerge quickly. The super-sweet varieties of corn are especially prone to poor germination in less than perfect conditions. There also seems to be a difference between the white and dark seeded bean varieties. The darker varieties seem to handle cooler soils better and may be the best choice for early season plantings.

It often helps to put a piece of clear plastic over the garden bed several days prior to planting. This will warm the soils up nicely, even on cloudy days. Remove the plastic to plant, though it is possible to put it back on for a few days if the day temperatures aren't going to be very high. Some gardeners dig a furrow and plant the corn or beans in the bottom of the furrow and then recover with the plastic. This makes a mini greenhouse and may give you a little more margin for error under the plastic. You want to avoid "cooking" the new seedlings, so be careful.

An alternative is to plant seeds of green beans inside and transplanting them outside when they are ready. I wouldn't start this process before April 15th. Same can be done with corn though you need more space for the number of corn plants you need compared to bean plants.

Many vegetables grow well vertically. Pole beans offer longer fruiting time in comparison to bush beans. Cucumbers grown on a trellis develop good length and appearance. In general, trellised vegetables have better air circulation that tends to reduce disease problems. Tomatoes in particular benefit from being trellised. Vertical growing can improve the amount of sun available to plants and improve the yield in small gardens.

A trellis can be made from wood and string for beans but need to be made from stronger materials for tomatoes and cucumbers. Many gardeners are buying the welded wire livestock panels. The panels are generally 60 inches tall and 16 feet long. Metal "T" posts driven into the ground can support them.

February Garden Calendar

Planning

- Tune up lawn mower and garden equipment before the busy season begins.
- Have soil test performed on garden plot to determine nutrient needs if you haven't done so in some time. Contact the Extension office for a list of testing laboratories or view https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em8677 online.
- Select and store healthy scion wood for grafting fruit and nut trees. Wrap in damp cloth or peat moss and place in plastic bag. Store in cool place.
- Plan an herb bed, for cooking and for interest in the landscape. Among the deer-proof choices are rosemary, sage, thyme, and lavender. Choose a sunny spot for the herb bed, and plant seeds or transplants after danger of frost has passed (late April-early May).
- Plan to add bee-friendly herbaceous perennial flowers to your landscape this spring. See: https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9289/html for good information.

Maintenance and Clean Up

- Repair winter damage to trees and shrubs.
- Make a cold frame or hotbed to start early vegetables or flowers.
- Fertilize rhubarb with manure or a complete fertilizer.
- Incorporate cover crops or other organic matter into soil.
- Prune and train grapes; make cuttings if you want more vines.
- Prune fruit trees and blueberries.
- Prune deciduous summer-blooming shrubs and trees.
- Prune and train trailing blackberries (if not done prior late August); prune black raspberries
- Prune fall-bearing raspberries (late in Feb. or early March)
- Prune clematis, Virginia creeper, and other vining ornamentals.

Planting/Propagation

- Plant windowsill container gardens of carrots, lettuce, or parsley.
- Good time to plant fruit trees and deciduous shrubs. Replace varieties of ornamental plants that are susceptible to disease with resistant cultivars.
- Plant asparagus if the ground is warm enough.
- Plant seed flats of cole crops (cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts), indoors or in greenhouse.
- Where soil is dry enough and workable, plant garden peas and sweet peas. Suggested varieties of garden peas include: Corvallis, Dark Green Perfection, Green Arrow, Oregon Sugar Pod, Snappy, Knight, Sugar Snap, Oregon Trail, Oregon Sugar Pod II.
- Good time to plant new roses.

Pest Monitoring and Management

- Monitor landscape plants for problems. Don't treat unless a problem is identified.
- Use delayed-dormant sprays of lime sulfur for fruit and deciduous trees and shrubs.
- Remove cankered limbs from fruit and nut trees for control of diseases such as apple anthracnose, bacterial canker of stone fruit and eastern filbert blight. Sterilize tools before each new cut.
- Control moles with traps.
- Monitor for European crane fly and treat lawns if damage has been verified.

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.

Beyond the garden and into the trees

Planting forests, big or small (and the justly famous Columbia County Small Woodlands Assn. tree sale)

Many landowners in Columbia County have a mix of forest and open ground. Often, there are small areas that need to be reforested. There are several ways to acquire the appropriate trees. You can order them from any of several nurseries. Generally, you have to order in bundles of 50-100 seedlings. Call us for contact information for these nurseries.

The Columbia County Small Woodlands Association has an annual tree sale in St. Helens. You can purchase a variety of trees in very small quantities. The sale this year will be on Saturday, March11th at the Lawrence Oil parking lot (845 N. Columbia River Highway) in St. Helens from 8:30 am- 1:30 pm. They sell both forest tree seedlings, some native shrubs, and some ornamental tree seedlings. Get there **early** for the best selection. It is very well attended.

It is possible to transplant wild seedlings. Sometimes you can find them on a road right-of-way. It is always a good idea to contact the County Road Department and the adjacent landowner to see that it is all right to remove the seedlings. Dig smaller trees that haven't been growing in deep shade. Trees should come from an elevation similar to the one in which they will be grown. It is best not to dig trees on a cold day or from frozen ground. Don't cause traffic problems or leave a mess.

Protect your seedlings from deer by either deer protecting tubes (best and also for sale at the CCSWA event noted above) or by a repellent spray like Deer Away™. Protect from field mice girdling by wrapping the base of them stem with aluminum foil.

Finally, trees should be transplanted as soon as possible after digging or purchasing them. If you can't, place them in a garden bed to grow one more year and transplant the following winter. Forest tree planting should be complete by the end of March.

OSU Extension/Clackamas County Tree School: Saturday, March 25, 2023

Tree School started in Clackamas County in 1991 as a mini-college program designed to attract a broad audience and offer a diverse array of educational topics to address the goals and challenges facing local forest landowners. They are held at Clackamas Community College.

Classes are typically around 90-minutes long, meaning you can participate in around four over the course of the event.

Tree School also offers other opportunities for learning and networking, including field sessions/tours, demonstrations, vendor tables and exhibits, round table discussions, and Q&A sessions.

Here a link to all the classes, cost, registration details, etc.: https://extension.oregonstate.edu/tree-school/tree-school-clackamas.

It will be worth your time!

Wild things like messy

Jane Hartline, an accomplished naturalist and founder of the Sauvie Island Habitat Partnership has some excellent advice for rural landowners wishing to improve the quality and diversity of habitats around their property:

Six totally effortless things Sauvie Islanders (and more upland neighbors) can do for wildlife

Here are six excuses to get out of doing your chores…..sometimes the best thing to do for wildlife is nothing at all!

1 Don't burn that brush pile on the back corner of your property. It will provide shelter and a place to hide for native quail, sparrows and other critters.

2 Leave big, dead trees standing to provide homes and "hunting grounds" for our woodpeckers (Pileated, downy and hairy woodpeckers and northern flickers.)


Pileated Woodpecker

3 Leave some rotting wood on the ground. It provides homes for salamanders and hosts insects that birds like to eat.

4 Leave an area of grass un-mown until after July 15th for birds that nest in tall grass. On the island, these include meadowlarks, yellowthroats, vesper sparrows and savannah sparrows.

5 Don't rake up all your fallen leaves. Frogs hide under them and birds forage in them.

6 Be a good sport when barn swallows choose to nest under your porch roof or in your outbuildings. If the droppings are a problem, put newspapers underneath them for the two or three weeks when they are feeding their young.

Eight more easy things you can do for wildlife

1 Put up birdhouses for tree swallows and violet-green swallows.

2 Plant some snowberries, native roses and other native shrubs to provide summer nesting areas and winter food for birds.

3 Plant some red-flowering currants to provide early food for hummingbirds.

4 Plant a hedgerow with several species of native shrubs and trees (cascaras, big leaf maples, native hawthorns, oceanspray, Douglas spirea, native roses, serviceberries, elderberries, snowberries, red twig dogwoods, etc.)

5 Plant some flowers that provide nectar for butterflies and moths.

6 Get rid of your blackberries, Reed canary grass, Japanese knotweed and other invasive plants! (OK, this one isn't so easy, but it's important.)

7 Put a small rock pile someplace on your property that will be used as shelter for garter snakes and frogs.

8 Plant some native trees—Oregon white oaks, cascaras, black cottonwoods, big-leaf maples, etc.

Farm and livestock notes

Cattle Feeding

I can't say enough about the importance of protein supplementation in winter beef feeding. We are often forced to cut our hay late in the grass maturity cycle. This can take hay protein levels down to 5% and really reduce the digestibility. Such hay simply is not a satisfactory feed by itself for a pregnant cow, a nursing cow, a growing heifer, or any animal needing to do something more than maintain itself. If you add in the impact of cold and wet conditions, the effect of an inadequate diet on livestock can be severe.

When we feed more protein, we increase the nutrients available to the rumen bacteria which in turn increase in number and do a better job of turning the hay into digestible energy and protein. Grain alone will not provide enough extra protein to jump-start those bacteria. Alfalfa hay mixed 50/50 with local hay or free-choice grass hay plus 3-4 pounds per head per day of a 16% dairy ration (a grain mix with boosted protein) will do the trick.

Where Do Grazing Livestock Fit?

Many speculate that diet of the future will have little meat and dairy protein and will instead be dominated by vegetables, grains, and beans. It is true that it now is relatively energy inefficient to produce beef. There is a lot of speculation that the next real run-up in energy prices will start to price red-meat protein out of the market. This underestimates the inventiveness of the farmer and misunderstands the role that beef and sheep have in the agricultural world.

The best use of grazing animals is on land that is not well suited for more intensive agricultural production. Most of the hill lands in Columbia County are either good timber ground or decent pasture land. As you look around the U.S., there is a lot of land that fits that description.

Much of it is not being used to its potential, in part due to the relatively low costs of feed grains. As energy costs rise, I believe there will be a transition to more intensively managed grasslands and less grain-fed finishing. Yet the ability of beef, sheep, and goats to convert "rough" forage into protein will ensure them a significant role in the diet of Americans well into the future.

Why Is It Best To Plant One Pasture Grass?

A mix of grasses is often selectively grazed, with the most palatable grass removed first. This can lead to a less productive pasture. The best advice from the people who know is to plant several clovers or other legumes and only one vigorous grass. For us, that is usually perennial ryegrass or orchard grass.

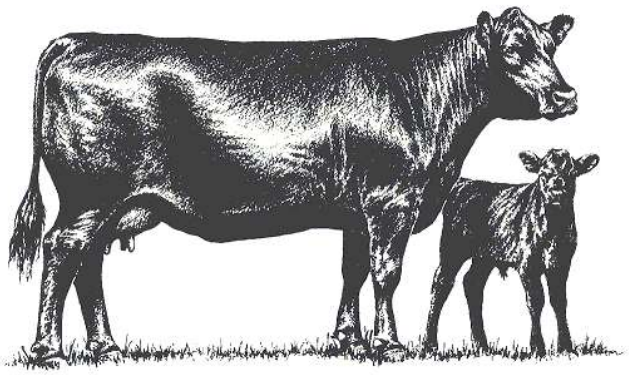
Coming out of winter thoughts

Are your livestock in good condition coming out of this winter? People who didn't feed their stock in the late summer probably have

seen some loss of condition, though the October rain did provide some renewed pasture growth. Evaluate your stock carefully and plan a feeding program with a realistic starting point.

Were you prepared for rain and mud? Rain and mud extract a significant toll in energy from our livestock. It simply takes more feed for them to live and grow in a muddy barnyard. In addition, mud increases disease and saps an animal's ability to fight off problems. If you gutter barns and direct the water away from feeding areas you will significantly improve animal performance. Feed yards that maintain a firm base are also very helpful. The best option is an indoor feeding area that can be cleaned periodically or deep bedded.

It is tough for shy, retiring types to compete at the feed trough. If you are not careful, timid ewes, cows, and calves will begin to lose weight. Carried to extreme, they can lose enough condition to put them at risk. Provide sufficient bunk space so that everyone gets enough. Partitions or stanchions can keep the bossy types occupied. If this isn't possible, consider splitting the herd and feeding at different times.



Winter brings livestock into close quarters. This often leads to problems with lice and coccidia. Lice are external parasites that spread easily from one animal to another. Symptoms include poor condition and a rough hair coat. This is not a surprise since the little blood-suckers are getting a significant portion of the feed you are offering. There are some great controls available. Use them.

Coccidia are internal parasites that aren't "worms" but are in another more primitive class. They scrape the intestinal walls to draw nourishment. Younger stock are the most affected and it is not uncommon that they lose condition so badly that they die. Bloody diarrhea may indicate coccidia but is not always evident. Older animals may be heavily infested and may be "shedding" (thus infecting other stock) but often don't show the same level of physical decline. The organism is easily picked up in a fecal test provided by your vet. Regular "wormers" won't catch coccidia but several products will clean things up.

Bill Zollinger's choice beef rule

Our retired beef specialist has a rule of thumb for determining the size at which offspring of a given cow and bull may be expected to reach the low choice slaughter grade. His formula is to average the combined weight of the cow and bull and multiply by 75%. For example, a 1000# cow mated to a 2,000# bull would give an average weight of 1,500#s. Multiply that number by 75% and you get 1,125 pounds. At that weight, the animal should grade low choice. A 1,125 pound steer or heifer with a dressing percentage of 63% yields a 709# carcass.

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Return Service Requested

To receive this newsletter by email
Contact: chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu
or call 503-397-3462. Thank you!

Programs for you continued…

February 18th ***Oregon State University Small Farms Conference***. Corvallis, Oregon. Many excellent programs. See the following for program details and registration: https://blogs.oregonstate.edu/smallfarmsconference/schedule/

March 1st and more **Columbia County Bee School 2023.** Columbia County Oregon Beekeepers will hold a class for beginning beekeepers. First, you need to become a member of the club ($25 individual or $30 family) and then Bee School is $25. It includes three two-hour online classes March 1, March 2, and March 6 from 6:30-8:30pm. Then an afternoon in the hive educational visit will be held on either April 8 (or 15 if the weather is bad on the 8) from 11am-4pm in the St Helens area address to be announced to participants. Contact Linda Zahl to register 503-799-7073.

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