

Cultivating

HEALTHY FARMS, FORESTS, FOOD,
AND FAMILIES IN POLK COUNTY

SMALL FARMS CARVE
SIZABLE NICHE IN OREGON
AGRICULTURE | **PG. 6**

WHO WE ARE



Oregon State University Extension Service Polk County

The Polk County Office of the Oregon State University Extension Service provides research-based educational information and programs in Agriculture, Forestry, 4-H/Youth and Family and Community Development for the citizens of Polk County.

OSU Extension's mission is to convey research-based knowledge in a way that is useful for people to improve their lives, their homes, and their communities.

OFFICE LOCATION & HOURS

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Due to COVID-19, OSU Extension is operating under modified office hours. Please call the office at to hear our current office hours.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The OSU Extension office is currently closed to the public due to the governor's latest freeze order. Our offices and staff WILL be available by appointment. People may contact us to schedule an appointment for seed certifications, pressure gauge testers, specific program related needs, drop off plant samples, etc. **Just call the Polk County Extension office phone @ 503-623-8395.** Please call ahead before visiting the office.

DECEMBER

ONGOING - OSU Extension - Preserve at Home Oregon - register online through January 11, 2021.

ONGOING - Polk SWCD - All December and January - Winter On-line Native Plant Sale - @ www.polkswcd.com/NativePlantSale

15 - OSU Extension - Tree School - Managing Your Forest with Fire in Mind - register online

15 - Polk SWCD - Living with Your Water Well and Septic System - 6-8 p.m. ZOOM registration required

23-25 - OSU Extension - office closed

25 - Polk SWCD - Federal Holiday - office closed

31 - OSU Extension - Deadline to register - 4-H Winter Garden Series - register online

31-JAN 1 - OSU Extension - office closed

JANUARY

1 - Polk SWCD - Federal Holiday - office closed

2-18 - OSU Extension - Grow Your Own Microgreens - register online

ONGOING - Polk SWCD - All January - Winter On-line Native Plant Sale - @ www.polkswcd.com/NativePlantSale

7 - Polk SWCD - Finance Committee

13 - Polk SWCD - Board Meeting

18 - OSU Extension - MLK Jr. Day - office closed

29 - Polk SWCD - NRCS Local Working Group Meeting - ZOOM

FEBRUARY

4 - Polk SWCD - Finance Committee

9-10 - OSU Extension - National Symposium on Hemp - register online

10 - Polk SWCD - Annual and Board Meeting

11-13 - Polk SWCD - Native Plant Sale Pick up days

MARCH

4 - Polk SWCD - Finance Committee

10 - Polk SWCD - Board Meeting

WHO WE ARE



POLK SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Nearly 3,000 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) across the United States are helping local people conserve land, water, forest, wildlife, and related natural resources. SWCDs are charged with directing programs to protect local renewable natural resources.

Polk SWCD was formed in April 1966, and promotes erosion control, reduction of invasive species, improvements to farms and forests, control of animal waste, as well as improving wildlife habitat and water quality/quantity issues in Polk County. The Polk SWCD is administered by 7 locally elected volunteer directors representing 5 zones and 2 at-large positions within the county. The Polk SWCD is a source of information and education on natural resources.

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CULTIVATING is a quarterly publication of Oregon State University Polk County Extension Service and Polk Soil And Water Conservation District. Included in these pages, readers can find practical information on farm and forest management, on home and lifestyle choices, and on the many programs and services available through the Service and the District.



Ellen Zenuhin, with Lenka's Family Farm in Woodburn, right, is growing strawberries on benchtops to reduce stooping at harvest. Zenuhin is pictured with OSU Small Farms Program Assistant Professor Javier Fernandez-Salvador, center, and OSU research technician Cora Bobo-Shishler, left.

Small Farms Carve Sizable Niche in Oregon Agriculture

By Mitch Lies
Cultivating Editor

Rickreall farmers Bill and Karen Farmer found that cultivating pinot noir grapes, even just the handful of vines they were thinking of growing, was more than they were ready to take on.

“They take an awful lot of fussing with,” Karen said.

Now table grapes, that was another story. The couple decided to pull out their wine grapes in favor of table grapes several years back and expanded their operation until they were producing 2,000 pounds of grapes annually on a half-acre and selling the fruit to a variety of local outlets.

Until just recently, the Farmers, who have retired, were among a class of farmers that

today account for the vast majority of farms in Oregon. According to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture, there are roughly 25,000 farms of less than 50 acres in Oregon, accounting for 67.1 percent of Oregon’s 37,200 farms.

The Farmers’ business model was similar to many small farmers in the Willamette Valley: They sold their fruit to co-op grocery stores in Portland, to LifeSource Natural Foods in Salem and to a local farmer for the farm’s community supported agriculture project. Many small farms also sell to restaurants, which increasingly are looking to local farms to fill their menus. And many operate booths at farmers’ markets.

“There are many opportunities for small farmers to do well,” said Javier Fernandez-Salvador, an assistance professor in the Small Farms Program for Oregon State University. “And often the businesses that do the best are

the ones that diversify. They aren’t just selling at a farmers’ market or to a wholesaler, they have agritourism, field days and farm stands. Some work with chefs and make their own value-added products.

“But those kinds of opportunities aren’t for everyone,” he said. “Some growers might not like that aspect of marketing, so we get a mixture of what works.”

Small farmers come from all walks of life, Fernandez-Salvador said, and often need training. Starting small, he said, often is critical to an operation’s success.

“It is important to start small, get the training you need to see how things go, and then scale up,” he said. “Don’t try to scale up right away. Find out what you are good at, and then get efficient at it.

“I had a person that was new to farming recently contact me because he had just bought

a 14-acre farm that included 10 acres of blueberries and he wanted me to help him,” Fernandez-Salvador said. “I thought, ‘Oh my gosh. You probably should have started with 1 acre of blueberries.’”

Included in the many challenges faced by small farmers are finding equipment that fits their scale of operation and filling labor needs.

“Scale is a bit of a problem,” said Karen Farmer. “We didn’t want the big tractors and big equipment. But then we discovered that our riding lawn mower was fine for pulling this small sprayer between our rows.

“You have to be creative if you are small scale,” she said.

Bryan Brown and Barbara Porter own and operate an 18-acre farm in Dallas that includes a wholesale Christmas tree operation, a Christmas tree seed operation and an olive tree nursery. They found getting labor a challenge.

“It is a challenge to get labor at times, or to get certain processing done,” Porter said. “To get our batch of (Christmas tree) seeds processed, for example, we have to sneak them in between larger operations.”

Operating a small farm also brings with it a considerable time commitment.

“When you start farming, you go from doing one day job to doing three nonstop jobs, so that can be a big challenge,” Fernandez-Salvador said. “If you don’t water your plants, your plants die. If you don’t take care of your animals daily, they can get sick. Then you have to do your marketing. You have to be up on the latest information for controlling pests and diseases. You have to work on a Saturday morning at the farmers’ market. It doesn’t slow down much and requires mastery of multiple skills.

“It can be a shock figuring out everything that it entails to be a success,” he said.

“It is every day,” Porter said of the work involved in running a small farm. “There is just so much to do. But it is rewarding. And since COVID came along, it has been great to have a place to go that has fresh air, and there is always something to do out there.”

Like many beginning farmers, Brown and Porter say they are learning as they go, and finding rewards in the process.

“Our approach is everything is an experiment,” Porter said. “There are so many variables. There is the weather, your soil. We’ve introduced irrigation out of our pond two years ago, so some of the Christmas trees are



Olive grower Imad Ahmad displays olives harvested in late October during an informal hands-on workshop at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora.

irrigated now to try and speed up production, which is a new thing. And we are expanding our irrigation to other patches now.

“That experiment is going well, which is rewarding,” she added. “When you do something, especially when you have invested a bit of money into it, to see it working is rewarding.”

One benefit afforded Oregon small farmers is a robust opportunity to learn about the myriad of issues they face through OSU’s nationally known Small Farms Program.

Educational opportunities available through the program include, Growing Farms, a six-part online series that covers the basics of managing a farm business, and Living on the Land, a five-part workshop series tailored for small acreage landowners and those new to managing land.

The OSU Small Farms Program also puts on an annual conference that is among the nation’s best. Although canceled in 2021 due to the COVID pandemic, it typically includes presentations from nationally known speakers, as well as OSU Extension personnel.

Fernandez-Salvador also encouraged small farmers to stay abreast of the program’s many research projects, all of which are designed to assist small farmers in the production of food and fiber.

“The OSU Small Farms Program is very helpful,” Porter said. “Bryan and I have attended several OSU-sponsored meetings about growing olive trees in Oregon and learned about research projects regarding cold hardiness and up-potting trials. And we attended the last two Small Farms Conferences held at OSU.”

Beginning farmers also shouldn’t be shy about seeking advice from other small farmers, Fernandez-Salvador said. “Small farmers have a good network,” he said. “They collaborate really well with one another. Especially when a new farmer is starting, they really want to share.”

For more information on the program, go to <https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/>



UNIQUE AWARDS PROGRAM ENJOYED BY ALL

By Susan Busler,
OSU Extension, 4-H Youth Development

November in 4-H means awards season. The challenge this year was figuring out how to do an awards program in light of the COVID-19 regulations with limits on attendance, face mask requirements, contact tracing and more. The planning committee was challenged to “think outside the box” and that they did.

This year’s event was a “Drive-In Car Rally Awards Celebration” for Polk County 4-H. This allowed us to present awards to our outstanding 4-H members and honor our leaders and our special “Friends of 4-H” community supporters.

We were able to do a UGO’s fundraiser. Families were able to order pizzas ahead of time and have them delivered to their cars to eat dinner. We held the event in the parking lot at the Polk County Fairgrounds. The awards presentation was announced using a PA system as well as broadcast across the web using ZOOM with a Power Point Presentation and awards narrative for each winner. Applause included the regular handclapping along with flashing lights and honking horns. One parent was overheard saying, “The last time I had this much fun honking my horn and flashing my lights, I got pulled over.”

Our Polk County 4-H Ambassadors took the lead organizing and presenting the awards to each winner in their car. We had

fifteen 4-H members who received special recognition for their hard-work on their 4-H Records. We honored several volunteer 4-H club-based leaders with ten in attendance. In addition, special recognition went to our New Leader Award winner and our Distinguished Service Award winner. Other recognition was presented to our special “Friends of 4-H” community supporters.

The evening included lots of waves, smiles and air hugs along with recognizing some very special Polk County 4-H participants.

COUNTY AWARDS RECOGNITION FOR 4-H MEMBERS:

- First Year Junior – Dashell McNett
- Junior – Caden Foley
- Intermediate – Beatrix Salmi Klotz
- Senior – Rachael Herkamp
- Record Book – Abigail Cape
- Achievement – Jillian Layton
- Leadership – Faith Sanchez
- Community Service – Lillian Duchateau
- Citizenship – Amber Stewart
- Public Speaking – Jackson Kent
- Fiber Arts – Jack Sparks
- Cavy – Kinden Brotherton
- Poultry – Kalina Brotherton
- Rabbit – Caiden Collman
- Judging – Virginia Anderson

THE MARGIA EASH MEMORIAL AWARD WINNERS FOR THE YEAR:

- Virginia Anderson
- Caden Foley

ADULT VOLUNTEER LEADERS WERE RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR YEARS OF SERVICE. THOSE IN ATTENDANCE INCLUDED:

- Wendy Sparks – 1st year
- Trish Collman – 2nd year
- Kristina Salmi Klotz – 2nd year
- Marita Barth – 3rd year
- Stacy Eash Tarver – 11 years
- Chuck Sekafetz – 15 years
- Anne Walton – 17 years
- Andi Foley – 22 years
- Carol Harris – 23 years
- Diane Ostrom – 33 years

In addition, special recognition went to our New Leader Award winner which was Trish Coleman for all her work with our 4-H STEP program, Cloverbuds and Rabbit Superintendent. The Distinguished Service Award went to Charles Sekafetz for his years as a resource leader, judge, clinician and Visionary Advisory Committee member. Other recognition was presented to our special “Friends of 4-H” community supporters including Joe Lawless with Dutch Bros in Monmouth/Dallas for selecting 4-H to benefit from their annual “Bucks for Kids” event. We also honored Claude White of White’s Trucking and Hauling for all the years they’ve taken care of the huge pile of shavings we use for bedding during the fair.

We hope to be able to go back to our Awards Banquet in the future, but for this year, it was a great way to have some fun and recognize our wonderful Polk County 4-H family of members, leaders and 4-H supporters.

OSU Fire Program Grows

By Brad Withrow-Robinson

OSU Forestry &
Natural Resources Extension

As many readers are aware, Oregon State University Extension Service has implemented a new statewide fire program to help create a better understanding of fire through education and outreach efforts.

The Oregon Legislature funded the program two years ago. It is part of the OSU Forestry & Natural Resources Extension Program and the College of Forestry.

When fully staffed, the Fire Program will have a program manager, a state fire specialist, and six regional fire specialists posted around the state. The regional specialists will work with partners to help facilitate large-scale, cross-boundary management practices.

Four regional fire specialists were hired over the summer, and came on board in the last two months. They join the team led by Carrie Berger, the Fire Program Manager, and



Rau

will work closely with Dan Leavell, Statewide Extension Fire Specialist. We hope to hire two additional team members for the Oregon Coast Range and Northeast Oregon regions soon, as budgets allow.

Amanda Rau is the specialist for the Willamette Valley and Cascades fire service area, which includes much of Linn, Benton and Polk Counties.

Amanda is based in the Lane County Extension office in Eugene. She joins us from The Nature Conservancy where she worked for the past five years as the Fire Manager in both Oregon and Washington. She has robust experience in fire-adapted ecosystem restoration and conservation; prescribed fire and fuels treatment planning and implementation; and training, outreach, communications, and engagement. Amanda is a passionate and effective leader of collaborative projects and partnerships and has worked endlessly for social license for responsible

management of fire for public safety and resource management. Amanda earned a Masters of Natural Resources in Fire Ecology and Management from the University of Idaho. Amanda brings great skills to our area. Welcome Amanda!

Chris Adlam is serving the Southwest fire service area, based at the Southern Oregon Research & Extension Center in Central Point.

Ariel Cowan is serving the Central fire service area, housed at the Deschutes County Extension office in Redmond.

Katherine Wollstein is serving the Southeast fire service area with an emphasis on range issues, housed at the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center in Burns.

Welcome to them all! Our new Fire Program has been very active in response to the Labor Day fires of 2020, and will be working with local OSU Forestry & Natural Resources Extension agents and partners to help improve fire preparedness and resilience in communities across Oregon in coming months and years.



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Shop at the
source on the

Great Oaks Food Trail

By Audrey Comerford

OSU Extension, Agritourism

The Great Oaks Food Trail is always a great way to experience and shop local greater Polk County area products. If you are looking for items for your holiday table, the food trail is a great way to discover different options and classic products.

Meats and seasonal produce are the staples for many holiday meals and places like Bare Farms are an excellent stop where you can get meat, eggs, honey, and produce right from the source. It is also important to showcase local drinks for your meal and to give them as gifts. The thought you put into pairing your dinner with the perfect beverage will not be lost on your family. Rogue Farms has a great selection of Oregon brewed beer and distilled

spirits using locally grown ingredients. For the cider lovers, Salt Creek Cider House is a must-have. They are making cider on the farm from their apples and selling it by the bottle or growler to customers. And of course, the plethora of award-winning Oregon wine cannot be forgotten this holiday season. Vineyards open for bottle sales on the Great Oaks Food Trail include Brooks Wine, Keeler Estate Vineyard Winery, Bjornson Vineyard, Bryn Mawr Vineyards, Left Coast Estate, Benedetto Vineyards, Eola Hills Wine Cellars, Illahe Vineyards, Crush Wine Bar, Redgate Vineyards, and Ankeny Vineyard. Bottles of wine from these locations make thoughtful gifts and many will handle the shipping for you.

No celebration would be complete without delicious baked goods from places using local products. On the food trail, you can find tasty treats from places like Blue Raeven Farmstand, Karma Coffee Bar & Bakery or Ovenbird Bakery. And since we are talking about

desserts, handmade chocolates make the perfect gift or accent to your holiday table. These delightful artisan products can be found at Brigittine Monks Gourmet Confections and Melting Pot Candy, both have shipping options as well.

Even if a farm or business is not open right now, check to see if they have gift cards that can be used at a later date. Gift cards are a great way to give the gift of local while supporting the small businesses that are so important to our community. For the complete list of food trail businesses and more information on them, visit greatoaksfoodtrail.com.

Whether you are looking for ingredients for a great holiday meal or wanting to find new businesses to support this winter, the Polk County area has a wonderful selection to choose from. And when it comes to finding that perfect present think about giving a local gift, not only this holiday season but year-round as well.

Some U-cut Christmas tree farms closed but *supply adequate*



By Kym Pokorny
OSU Extension

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the landscape of Christmas tree sales in Oregon this year, according to Oregon State University Extension's Christmas tree specialist.

Supply should still be adequate — even better than the last few years — but some U-cut farms will bow out this year, said Chal Landgren, a professor in OSU's College of Forestry at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora.

"There will be some U-cut farms that don't open," Landgren said. "Some U-cuts will go by reservation. But there should be plenty of trees for the holidays."

Oregon leads the nation in Christmas tree production. But in recent years, drought and a shortage of seedlings caused a situation where demand outstripped supply, Landgren said. Because of the pandemic, however,

tree farms have had to change the way they work.

Although it's a seasonal item, Christmas tree production is a year-round operation. As late as March, tree farms had multiple workers traveling together in a single vehicle. That ended with pandemic restrictions and protocols that slowed down the work.

Landgren points to the NW Christmas Trees site, which features an extensive list of U-cut farms and contact information so that visitors can call ahead to see if they are open.

Landgren offers some tips for those who will be buying a natural tree this year.

- To tell if a tree is fresh, look at the base to see if the needles are firmly attached.
- Run your hand over a branch to see if needles are dry and break off easily.
- Branches should be flexible. Shake a branch to see if it moves easily. Check the smallest branches, which dry out first.
- If it's been more than a few hours since you cut the tree, cut a little slice off the base.

If it will be a few days since you brought the tree home, slice off the base and keep it in a bucket of water.

- Use a tree stand that's appropriate for the size of the tree.
- It's very important to keep your tree watered, Landgren said. Don't let it dry out or it will start to lose needles. Don't add anything to the water.
- Some trees will last longer than others. Nordmann, Turkish and Noble can last all of December if kept watered. Douglas-fir, which are less expensive and have a distinctive Christmas scent, don't last as long.
- Don't put the tree near any heat source.

About the OSU Extension Service: The Oregon State University Extension Service shares research-based knowledge with people and communities in Oregon's 36 counties. OSU Extension addresses issues that matter to urban and rural Oregonians. OSU Extension's partnerships and programs contribute to a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for Oregon.



TAKE ONE MORE GO AT THE GARDEN Before Retiring For Winter

By Kym Pokorny
OSU Extension

We're running right into the holidays, daylight is in short supply and rain comes down days at a time, but if you can get out in the garden or at least the garage, you'll be happier come spring.

A perennial question is whether to cut down plants now or in spring. The answer is not clear cut, said Jeff Choate, a former horticulturist with Oregon State University Extension Service. When it comes to vegetable gardens, everything should come out. Annuals, too, can be uprooted. With perennials, it depends.

"With vegetable gardens, removing spent plants is essential because of the risk of disease; soilborne diseases can remain viable for years," he said. "For herbaceous perennials, it's more of a choice. Some people like to tidy up the garden; others leave it until spring."

You'll recognize some perennials that are good choices to clean up now because they die to the ground anyway. Clear up the debris and throw it into the compost pile or yard debris bin. Avoid the compost pile for plants plagued by disease.

There are perennials – like ornamental grasses, coneflower, Joe-Pye weed, sedum and black-eyed Susan – that provide birds with much-needed seeds and insects with places to spend the winter. These are good candidates to leave standing. Choate noted that it's also a good idea to design your garden with shrubs and trees that produce berries, which will help out the birds, as well.

To spread leaves around the garden or rake them up is another oft-asked question. Yes, place them on vegetable beds, where they'll

protect the soil from compaction from the rain, suppress weeds, increase soil fertility and help open up soil structure to keep it draining well. Spreading leaves around shrubs is also a good idea. But once again, perennials beg the question. Those rascally slugs love to lay their eggs under garden debris, but that can be mitigated with a low-toxicity slug bait.

"It's a tough one, I admit," Choate said. "There's a good side and a bad side. The good side is that the leaves break down and feed the worms and other beneficial organisms. The bad side is slugs. But the benefits of leaving leaves down around ornamentals outweighs the disadvantages."

One chore you can take off your plate is pruning. Choate recommends waiting until the latter part of February to prune shrubs and trees.

It is a good idea, though, to keep leaves – and bark dust, for that matter – away from slug favorites like hostas.

If you act quickly, it's still an OK time to add lime to vegetable beds and lawns. Choate recommends buying a simple pH test kit at the garden center or home improvement store. For the vegetable garden, if it reads below 6, apply lime at a rate of 5 pounds of lime per 100 square feet.

One chore you can take off your plate is pruning. Choate recommends waiting until the latter part of February to prune shrubs and trees.

Be sure to know what your plants' needs are, he noted. Spring-blooming plants like rhododendrons, azaleas, lilacs, and forsythia shouldn't be trimmed until after they bloom.

One more thing before moving into the relative warmth of the garage: Gather fruit hanging in trees or rotting on the ground and get it out of there to minimize diseases and pests such as apple scab and codling moth next year.

Onward to the garage where tools and lawn mowers await your attention. Choate advises cleaning your tools as you go. He keeps WD-40 and a rag in his garden bucket to use as needed. But if you don't get to it every time, be sure to clean them now so they don't sit dirty and rusting during winter. Wash and dry them, sharpen, oil any moving parts and rub linseed oil on wooden handles to keep them from drying out and cracking.

Smooth edged tools can be sharpened at home, but other types – think pruning saws, chainsaws and the like – should be taken to a professional to avoid damage to the tool or injury to yourself.

Lawn mowers need attention now, too. The single most important task is to empty them of gas. Turn on the motor and let it warm up for 30 seconds, then shut it off and siphon the gas. Restart the engine and run until it quits.

"The number one issue for small gas engines is bad gas," Choate said. "That stems from the fact that gas has 10 percent ethanol, which will absorb water from the atmosphere. Having water in your lawn mower is not a good thing."

Also, take the time to change the oil, spark plugs and air filter. When replacing the spark plugs, make sure you're using the right one. Your owner's manual (sometimes you can find it online if you don't have the paper version) should indicate the correct one. Make sure the gaps are correct by using an inexpensive gap tool.

Now all you have to do is wait for spring.

New Coordinator at Home on Small Farms

By Mitch Lies
Cultivating Editor

Raised on one of Oregon's thousands of small farms, Hayley White is now serving them.

White started Dec. 7 as Agriculture Outreach Program Coordinator serving the Small Farms Program in Polk and Marion counties.

A 2016 graduate of Montana State University, White majored in agriculture relations, a program tailored for grooming Extension agents. She most recently worked as an agriculture investigator for the Idaho Department of Agriculture, and when interviewed by Cultivating in November said she was in the final stages of obtaining a master's degree.

She said she is excited to be back in Oregon and working with small farms.



White

"I have a soft spot for small farmers and for people who are trying new things and want to get involved in agriculture," White said. "And I am thrilled to get back to Oregon and immerse myself in this great diversity of agriculture in the Willamette Valley.

"I love to teach, and I am really passionate about agriculture. I feel like this job is going to combine those interests, and what better place to do that than the Willamette Valley," she said.

White is working for both Oregon State University Extension and the Polk Soil & Water Conservation District in a unique collaboration forged to bring on a new small farms program agent in Polk and Marion counties with more of an outreach focus.

"We joined forces because the two counties

share many of the same concerns among the agricultural community when it comes to best management practices for soil and water conservation, as well as ways to promote small farms," said Karin Stutzman, manager of Polk SWCD. "Knowing this, we can reach more producers with the same information at one time. Plus, there are things Haley can do individually for each district."

White said her first order of business is to try and get to know the farmers in the area and get up to speed on some of their concerns and issues.

"It is going to be really interesting," White said. "I expect I'll be learning something new every day, especially with the wide variety of crops produced in the Willamette Valley and the many different small-farm types. And I hope to provide educational opportunities for experienced and new small farmers.

"I can't wait," she said.

EXTENSION DECEMBER GARDEN CALENDAR

Timely advice on garden chores, fertilizing, pest control, and more from OSU Extension.

These tips are not necessarily applicable to all areas of Oregon. For more information, contact your local Extension office.

Oregon State University Extension Service encourages sustainable gardening practices.

Practice preventive pest management rather than reactive pest control. Identify and monitor problems before acting, and opt for the least toxic approach. Conserve biological control agents such as predators and the parasitoids that feed on insect pests.

MAINTENANCE AND CLEANUP

- **Western Oregon:** Do not walk on lawns until frost has melted.
- Spread wood ashes evenly on your vegetable garden. Use no more than 1.5 pounds per 100 square feet per year. Don't use if the soil pH is greater than 7.0 or if potassium levels are excessive.
- Protect new landscape plants from wind. Use stakes, guy wires or wind-breaks as needed.
- **Yard sanitation:** rake leaves, cut and remove withered stalks of perennial flowers, mulch flowerbeds, and hoe or pull winter weeds.

- Turn the compost pile and protect from heavy rains, if necessary.
- During heavy rains, watch for drainage problems in the yard. Tilling, ditching, and French drains are possible short-term solutions. Consider rain gardens and bioswales as a longer-term solution.
- Check stored flower bulbs, fresh vegetables, and fruits for rot and fungus problems. Discard any showing signs of rot.
- Tie limbs of columnar evergreens to prevent snow or ice breakage.
- Central/eastern Oregon: Water your plants every six to eight weeks with a deep soaking to keep them from drying out.
- **Western Oregon:** Make sure that landscape plants in protected sites receive water regularly during the winter.

PEST MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT

Use chemical controls only when necessary and only after thoroughly reading the pesticide label. First consider cultural, then physical and biological controls. Choose the least-toxic options, and use them judiciously. Some examples include insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, botanical insecticides, and organic and synthetic pesticides.

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

PLANTING AND PROPAGATION

- **Western Oregon:** This is a good time to plant trees and landscape shrubs.

INDOOR GARDENING

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



Rain, Erosion, and Riparian Buffers

By **Jackson Morgan**

Polk Soil & Water Conservation District

2020 has been a year that looks different for all of us, but one thing that is a constant is the rains arriving in the winter months here in Oregon. While the rain hasn't been entirely constant thus far, we have had periods of intense downpours, with several inches of rain falling in short periods of time.

Thankfully, these storms have led to increased snow pack, far exceeding what is normal for this time in several key basins, which is likely to positively influence summer flow levels. But these storms and rain events have also highlighted many common problems that we deal with in agricultural lands here in the Willamette Valley. Producers, growers, and those who generally spend a great deal of time on their land are undoubtedly familiar with the erosion, run-off,

and potential flooding that can be induced by great quantities of rain. These concerns can be exasperated, especially if the rainfall occurs in a relatively short period of time; streams and water bodies that may be dry for a large portion of the year can turn into compliance flash points that can bring headaches to all of those who ultimately may be involved. While I believe that one would be hard pressed to find any producer who is willfully creating situations or purposefully creating areas of erosion, run-off or flooding hazards, this is the time of the year during which the SWCD receives the highest number of complains, questions, and concerned phone calls regarding these issues, and I figured, why not discuss them here?

By now, most everyone is likely aware that the Agriculture Water quality rules that govern a given area can be found in that area's respective area management plan. For those of us in Polk County, we are working under the rules stipulated in the Yamhill Area Management Plan, or the Mid-Willamette

Area Plan, both of which can be found on the Polk SWCD's and Oregon Department of Agriculture's website. A committee of local landowners, farmers and other interested stakeholders, meet biennially to discuss and review the rules set forth in these documents. The committee sets prevention and control measures for eight issues: erosion and sediment; irrigation; waste; nutrients, pesticides; chemigated irrigation water; roads-staging areas-farmsteads; and stream side areas. While all of these are impacted by winter rains, the most common issues that tend to get the SWCD/ODA involved with a compliance case, are erosion and sediment (visible gullies, rills, and excess sediment leaving fields) and stream side areas (or rather, lack thereof).

In terms of erosion and sediment inputs, most producers are already doing everything they can to preserve their most valuable asset, by implementing practices such as contour farming, cover cropping, no-till drilling, etc. But these can only do so much

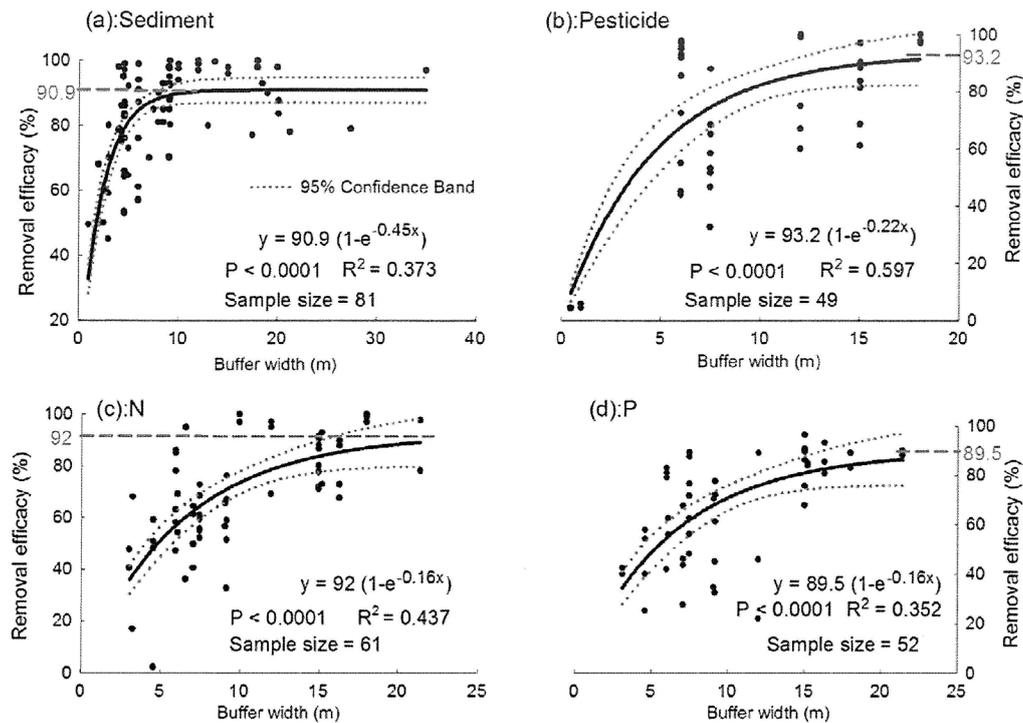


Fig. 3. Pollutant removal efficacy vs. buffer width for each pollutant. Black dots are data and lines are model predictions. Dotted red lines indicate 95% confidence band. The limiting value of K is shown in pink with a dotted line. Details of the model are given in each figure for (a) sediment, (b) pesticides, (c) N, and (d) P.

in terms of mitigating soil loss that is also impacted by slope, rainfall totals, soil type, etc. But of the two, implementing healthy stream side/riparian area management can alleviate a majority of the issues a producer might face, or be reported for, and is the one that could use improvement, in regards to quantity, throughout the county. What makes the riparian management aspect difficult, is that frankly, there isn't one value or rule that explicitly states what is expected of the landowner. Per the Yamhill Area Rules "Landowners can determine the appropriate width of a stream side area through one of several methods. Some examples of how to determine the appropriate width include:

- An area extending 25 feet horizontally from the top of a stream bank on each side of the stream, or
- An area two times the height from the summer low flow level to the bank full level, plus ten feet (2h + 10') on each side of the stream, OR
- The width specified in the Conservation Practice Standards for Riparian Forest Buffer or Filter

STRIP, LISTED IN THE NRCS - FIELD OFFICE TECHNICAL GUIDE (FOTG).

"And these rules are similar for the Mid-Willamette as well, but nowhere in either document will you find "you need xx feet of riparian vegetation." All that is required of landowners legally, according to OAR 603-095-0540 is "Landowners or occupiers shall manage stream side areas to allow the establishment, growth, and/or maintenance of vegetation appropriate to the site. Vegetation must be sufficient to provide shade and to protect the stream side area such that it maintains its integrity during high stream flow events such as those events that are reasonably expected to occur as a result of a 25 year, 24-hour storm event." Which, with even the best interpretation, is ambiguous.

With all of this being said, here is what I've boiled it down to: Both perennial and intermittent streams are covered by these rules: perennial streams have a shade requirement, whereas shade isn't necessarily required for intermittent streams, but that doesn't mean anyone should remove site

capable trees if they're present. When it comes to width, anything is better than nothing, and the more diverse the makeup of the buffer, the better its overall function. And while no number is "technically" the rule, the majority of inputs can be reduced with buffer widths of 35 feet (see infographic attached). These are complex issues that require dynamic solutions, which can lead to the betterment of soil health, water quality, and wildlife, so if you're facing any of these concerns, please reach out to the SWCD, we will be happy to help how we can!

But of the two, implementing healthy streamside/riparian area management can alleviate a majority of the issues a producer might face, or be reported for, and is the one that could use improvement, in regards to quantity, throughout the county.



RIPARIAN LANDS TAX INCENTIVE PROGRAM

By Marc Bell

Polk Soil & Water Conservation District

Across Oregon there is a tax incentive program that often goes under-utilized: Oregon Fish and Wildlife's Riparian Lands Tax Incentive Program. This program offers a property tax exemption for riparian lands, those areas immediately buffering a stream bank, up to 100ft from the edge of the bank. If your property has even moderate lengths of a stream, this could add up quickly to quite a lot of land eligible. To qualify, property must be outside adopted urban growth boundaries, and zoned for forest or agricultural use. On a case-by-case basis, participating cities allow this program to apply within the growth boundary as well, so urban dwellers with streams may qualify as well.

The Riparian Lands Tax Incentive Program (RLTIP) was created under the 1981 Oregon Legislative Assembly: "It is in the best interest of the state to maintain, preserve, conserve and rehabilitate riparian lands to assure the protection of the soil, water, fish and wildlife resources of the state for the economic and social well-being of the state and its citizens." — ORS 308A.35. The goal of the program is the improvement and maintenance of wildlife

habitat within the riparian buffer in exchange for a property tax incentive. Landowners file a Riparian Management Plan with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the relevant county offices, to receive a complete property tax exception for the qualifying riparian lands on the property. The landowner must show within this Riparian Management Plan what measures are, and will be, applied to protect, conserve and restore those riparian lands to the benefit of wildlife.

Landowners interested in this program should become more familiar with flowing water and riparian area habitat management. The Oregon Conservation Strategy, ODFW's overarching conservation plan, includes a section on flowing water and riparian habitats identifying common limited resources and common approaches to correct them, all published online. In most cases, riparian area management involves replacing established invasive species with native plant species that better hold the bank from eroding and provide higher quality shelter and food for wildlife. Landowners should research Oregon State Extension Service's publication "A Guide to Riparian Tree and Shrub Planting in the Willamette Valley: Steps to Success" (EM 9040) to start with as well.

If you decide you are interested in the

RLTIP program and the land is considered eligible, the application and management plan template are available on ODFW's webpage along with a sample management plan at: https://www.dfw.state.or.us/lands/tax_overview.asp. ODFW staff, your local NRCS, or SWCD staff can help assist with the elements of the plan development. The Polk SWCD's staff can help you determine what your riparian area management needs are for maintaining existing quality habitat or approaches to help facilitate enhancement with a site visit and discussion. The RLTIP program can be enrolled in alongside other riparian enhancement and management programs offered by USDA like the Conservation Reserve Program (CREP) which the Polk SWCD staff also helps facilitate for Polk County. A completed plan is sent to ODFW and your county tax assessor offices and ODFW will review edibility and the merits of the plan until it meets all requirements. ODFW is required to monitor the property to ensure the plan is being followed and if any adaptations to the plan are necessary over time.

If you have additional questions or interest in this program, please contact Joy Vaughan at ODFW, 503 947 6089



Hellebores x hybridus



Hellebores argutifolius hybridus

Winter-flowering Hellebores *brighten gray days*

By Neil Bell

OSU Extension, Community Horticulture

Although the days are now pretty short and cold and the holiday season looms, there's still time to think about ways to brighten the days after the New Year with some easy and reliable additions to the garden. Although January and February are two of the coldest months of the years, in the Willamette Valley it's still mild enough that you have plenty of options for including some cheerful color in your garden.

There are plenty of shrubs that bloom in the winter, but even if space is limited, there are plenty of perennials and bulbs that flower in January and February before the "traditional" spring-flowering shrubs and bulbs like Forsythia, Flowering Currant and daffodils appear. Because the weather is so cool this time of year, the flowers on these plants tend to be long-lasting.

Among the perennials perhaps the best-known plants these days are Hellebores (Helleborus spp.). There are several species

and hybrids which originate in Europe, especially southern Europe, which flower over a long period of time in winter. Hellebores are mostly slow-growing but long-lived evergreen plants which although particularly valuable for semi-shady conditions, are surprisingly adaptable to both light conditions and in some cases their tolerance of summer drought. These have become increasingly popular in the last few years, as breeding efforts has expanded the range of available flower colors from green and white to include purples and reds and even near-black.

One of the longest cultivated of the Hellebores is the Christmas Rose (H. niger) which as the name suggests is supposed to produce its white flowers at Christmas, although in the Willamette Valley it's more commonly seen blooming throughout January and February, even into March. Corsican Hellebore (H. argutifolius) grows to about 18" tall and 2' across and produces clusters of green flowers above its leathery evergreen leaves in January through February. Stinking Hellebore (H. foetidus), is in some ways similar to Corsican Hellebore, in that green flowers are produced over the same long period, but

this species has leaves divided into narrow leaflets, given it a different textural look. Both Corsican and Stinking Hellebore can be grown in full sun or partial shade and exhibit good drought tolerance. Deadheading after bloom improves appearance and prevents seed production, which can be prolific.

Of them all though, probably the best know and the subject of much of the breeding work is the hybrid H. x hybridus. This work has resulted in a wide range of available colors and the proliferation of double-flowered forms, making it the most diverse in floral appearance. Cultivation of these is straightforward as they are best placed in some late afternoon shade where they can get some summer irrigation. The foliage tends to be prone to aphids and leaf spots, so for best display of the flowers, cut off the foliage in early January. The flowers will stand alone and last through early March. They can then also be cut off, unless seedlings are desired, which will otherwise be produced in abundance. But for this small amount of work you will be rewarded with two months of color in the depths of our winter.



Hellebores foetidus



Hellebores niger

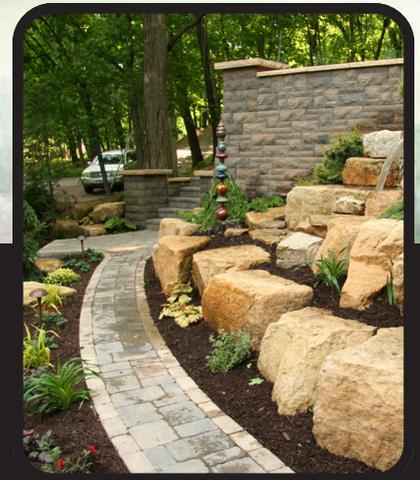
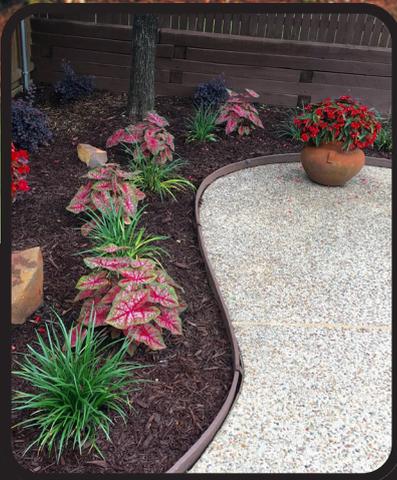


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