2000

Grow a nutritious gift for your garden: compost

By Kathleen Alaks
of the Daily Courier

Compost is one of the best gifts you can give your garden.

"Compost adds tilth and drainage and all the good things a garden needs," says Master Gardener Don Ness, who has been making and using the stuff in his own yard for the past 40 years.

Composting is the process of breaking down organic materials until they can be used as a natural soil in the garden. Making compost is relatively easy, even on a small scale.

First, you need someplace to store it. You can make compost in a free-standing pile protected by a tarp, or you can build a container. Make a crude compost bin from scrap lumber, concrete blocks and bricks, fencing material or chicken wire, or use a garbage can punched with holes, or buy a commercially made compost bin. Just be sure that there's a way for water to get out and air to get in.

Whether the pile is contained or out in the open, composting goes fastest if the pile is about a cubic yard — 3-by-3-by-3 feet — and no taller than five feet; any higher and the extra weight may squeeze air out and slow decomposition.

Ness uses a three-bin system. He puts his compost material — table scraps, grass clippings, leaves — into the first bin, then moves the partially decomposed material to the second bin for more aging, and then runs the further decomposed material through a half-inch screen into the last bin. That's the stuff that's ready to put in the garden.

One of the keys to making good compost is to keep the pile well-fed.

"A compost pile is not a dead thing," says Ness. "It's got a lot of living organisms in it and, they need food, air and water, just like you and I do."

Food includes any organic material that will break down. "Anything that grew in the ground or grew on something that grew in the ground" is fodder for the compost pile, says Ness.

When making compost, Ness recommends to "think green and brown." Green material, such as grass clippings, kitchen wastes and fresh plant cuttings, adds nitrogen. Brown material, such as leaves, shredded paper and corn stalks, adds carbon.

The ratio of brown to green, or carbon to nitrogen, affects the speed of composting.

If the pile is too woody (more carbon than nitrogen or more brown than green) it will decompose more slowly. But it's not necessary to carry a pocket calculator to figure out the right amounts; Ness recommends just using about two parts green stuff to one part brown stuff for the right mix.

Air circulation is also important to keep the pile working. Regular stirring gets oxygen to the organisms and keeps the heat evenly distributed. Mix the pile well every three or four days with a shovel or spade fork.

"Around my house, happiness is a turned compost pile," Ness says.

Keeping the pile moist is also crucial. It should be damp but not soaking wet, like a sponge when it's wrung out. In winter especially, keep the pile covered with a lid or plastic tarp to keep it from getting too soggy.

Small pieces compost faster than large ones. Run large branches through a shredder or chipper before adding them to the compost pile.

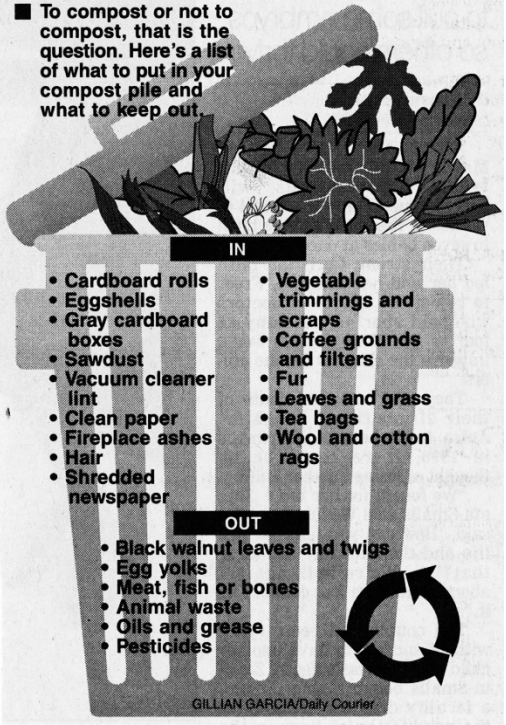
A compost pile shouldn't smell bad, says Ness. "When it's going right, there's no smell," he says. "Or it should smell like the woods."

If the pile starts to stink like ammonia it means there is too much nitrogen, or green material, in the mix, he says. In that case, add more leaves and stir the pile well to get more air into it. If the pile gives off a rotten egg odor, that means it's too wet. Stir it well and get it covered up.

Usually four to 12 weeks are necessary for full composting. When it's ready, compost should be a uniform dark brown with a crumbly texture. Let it cool off for a few days before adding to your soil.

In and out

■ **To compost or not to compost, that is the question. Here's a list of what to put in your compost pile and what to keep out.**



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Master Gardener Don Ness, who has been making and using compost for 40 years, uses a three-bin system to create his product.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
1/27/00

Register now for Regional Garden Seminar

Registration is under way for this year's Regional Garden Seminar sponsored by the Josephine County Master Gardener Association.

The daylong session of 15 classes and workshops will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 11 on the Redwood campus of Rogue Community College in Grants Pass.

Each class meets for 1½ hours and costs $5 each, except for the pruning class, which is three hours long and costs $10.

Classes include:

- Roses, taught by Greg Krout
- Irrigation Systems in Lawns and Gardens, taught by Tim Logsdon
- Training and pruning Fruit Trees, taught by Terry Helfrich
- Design and Build a Home Greenhouse, taught by Joe White
- Growing in Your Home Greenhouse, taught by various master gardeners
- Landscaping with Bamboo, taught by Galyn and Rosemary Carlile
- Bonsai Demonstration, by Don and Roy Hauser
- How to Create a Bird Habitat, taught by Elaine Wood
- Grapes for the Home Garden, taught by Max Cain
- Growing Great Vegetables, taught by Don Ness
- The Good, The Bad and the Buggy, taught by Karen Denman
- Beautiful Rock Gardens, taught by Rita Spencer
- Gardeners' View of Water Quality, taught by Hud Minshew
- Wreaths for Every Day, taught by Cora Lee
- Gourds for Growing and For Decoration, taught by Mike Howell

Classes are limited to 40 students each; registration is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Register by mail, by sending payment to: Josephine County Master Gardeners, 215 Ringuette St., Grants Pass, OR, 97527. Or call 476-6613.

Class registration forms also are available at many local nurseries.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
2/17/00

Grape pruning to be explained

Master Gardener Max Cain will lead a free workshop and hands-on grape-pruning demonstration this weekend.

The class will meet at 2 p.m. Saturday in the Oregon State University Extension Service auditorium at 215 Ringuette St. in Grants Pass.

Cain, a local table-grape expert who has been a master gardener for 14 years, will explain various techniques for pruning grapevines and answer questions about growing and pruning grapes. He also will lead a hands-on demonstration of pruning techniques, using the grape arbor on the Extension Service grounds.

Students should bring their own pruning shears. Free grape cuttings will be available to those who attend the workshop.

For more information, contact Mile Anzalone at 955-9547.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
2/18/00

Grants Pass Daily Courier
3/2/00

Gardening seminars offered

Registration is under way for this year's Regional Garden Seminar sponsored by the Josephine County Master Gardener Association.

The day-long session of 15 classes and workshops will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 11 on the Redwood campus of Rogue Community College in Grants Pass.

Each class meets for 1½ hours and costs $5 each, except for the pruning class, which is three hours long and costs $10. Classes are:

- Roses, taught by Greg Krout
- Irrigation Systems in Lawns and Gardens, taught by Tim Logsdon
- Training and pruning Fruit Trees, taught by Terry Helfrich
- Design and Build a Home Greenhouse, taught by Joe White
- Growing in Your Home Greenhouse, taught by various master gardeners
- Landscaping with Bamboo, taught by Galyn and Rosemary Carlile
- Bonsai Demonstration, by Don and Roy Hauser
- How to Create a Bird Habitat, taught by Elaine Wood
- Grapes for the Home Garden, taught by Max Cain
- Growing Great Vegetables, taught by Don Ness
- The Good, The Bad and the Buggy, taught by Karen Denman
- Beautiful Rock Gardens, taught by Rita Spencer
- Gardeners' View of Water Quality, taught by Hud Minshew
- Wreaths for Every Day, taught by Cora Lee
- Gourds for Growing and For Decoration, taught by Mike Howell

Classes are limited to 40 students each; registration is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Register by mail, by sending payment to: Josephine County Master Gardeners, 215 Ringuette St., Grants Pass, OR, 97527. Or call 476-6613.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
3/16/00

Getting your beds made

Your flower beds that is — Master Gardener has the basic ideas

By Barbara Baily
of the Daily Courier

Jeanne Stafford is itching to get out in the garden.

Gloomy weather and a mending back injury can't dampen this avid gardener's enthusiasm for her favorite pastime. Stafford's eyes light up when she talks about preparing garden beds for a new growing season.

The soft-spoken, white-haired president of the Grants Pass Garden Club and the Accredited Siskiyou Judges Council, past president of the Rogue Valley Rose Society, member of the Rogue River Garden Club, and former Master Gardener volunteer is planning to make a raised bed from bales of hay.

"I want to put one of these in this spring," Stafford, 79, says as she points to a recent gardening article. "The bales last for two to three years, and after that, you just till them in the soil. After you fence in an area with the bales, you fill the middle with straw, soil and compost, and sprinkle sulfate of ammonia on the bales to keep them from leeching too much nitrogen from the beds."

To prepare planting beds for spring, the first thing a gardener should do, she says, is a soil analysis.

"Even small pieces of property can have clay pockets and many different kinds of soil," Stafford says. "The best thing is to test soil in areas where you've had difficulty raising plants in the past, and amend it. So many people pop things in the ground, water them, and that's it. It's better to put a $1 plant in a $10 hole than the other way around."

Although gardening centers sell at-home soil testing kits, Stafford prefers to test soil at the Oregon State University Extension Service.

"I don't see any point in using the kits," she says, "because it's cheaper to do the testing at the Extension Service, and they'll also tell you what soil amendments to use."

The Josephine County Master Gardeners recommend that gardeners stop by the OSU Extension Office weekdays between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to pick up an instructional brochure on gathering accurate soil samples. The office is adjacent to the Josephine County Fairgrounds at 215 Ringuette St., Grants Pass.

A gardener dropping off a soil sample will also submit a form indicating what plants they intend to grow in the soil. Test results will be mailed in about two weeks and include a breakdown of the soil's acid, nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium levels, and recommended soil additives based on the planting list. The testing fee is $10.

Stafford prefers to use seed-free fertilizers, because they don't contribute to the summer weed crop.

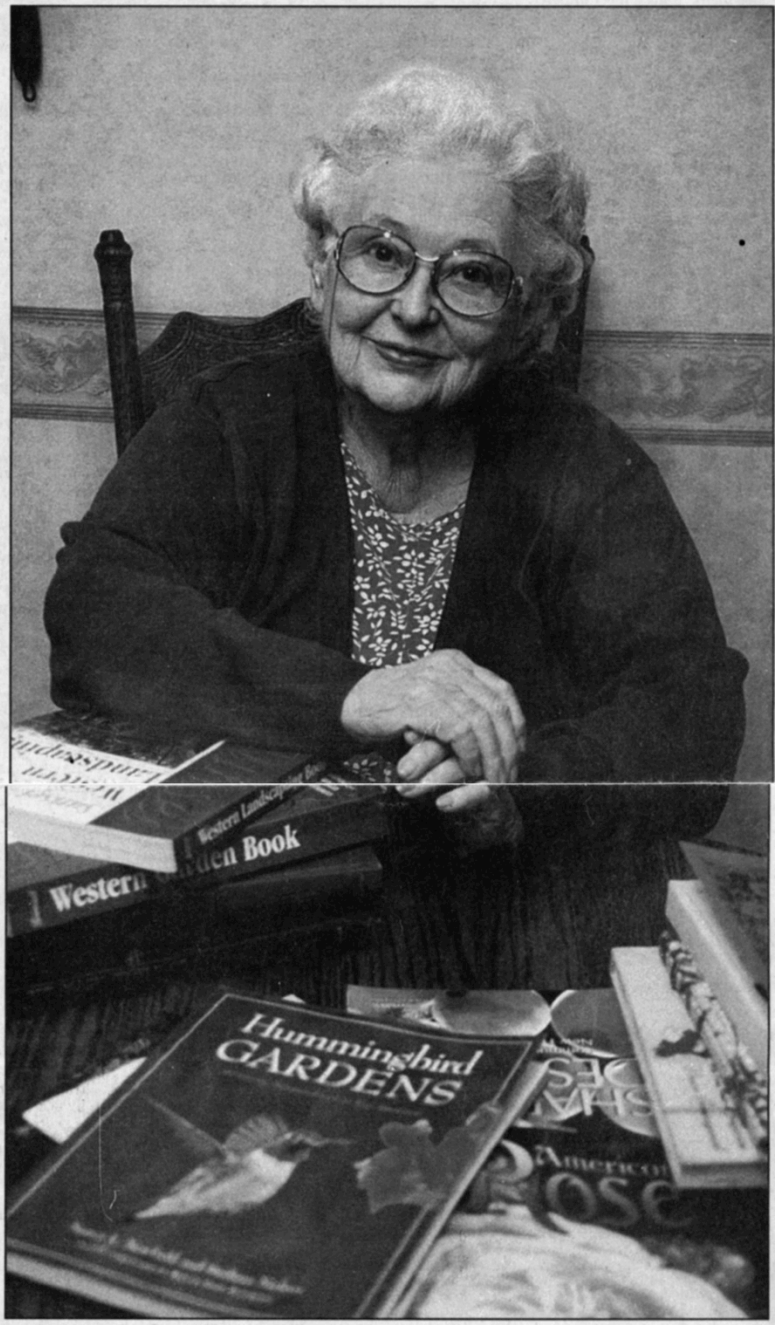
"Rabbit manure is good," she says, "because rabbits are fed alfalfa, so there are no seeds. Steer manure, fish fertilizer and time-released fertilizers are wonderful. I like rose systemics. If you use them on roses for 20 years you can kill the soil, but most people don't do that. I really like Triple 16 for roses. Jo-Gro is fine for flowers, but it's not recommended for vegetables. Pre-emergent herbicides are great because they prevent weeds from growing in the first place."

What about Miracle-Gro, the best friend of many gardeners? "I think it's good. It keeps annuals fresh and blooming longer, and it also work for acid-loving plants," she says, "but you have to get plants wet before you use it so the Miracle-Gro doesn't burn them."

She also recommends pruning perennials to encourage new growth, and thinning out dense plants such as lavender to remove dead wood and increase air circulation.

When it comes to planning a garden layout, Stafford says it's imperative to put plants with similar light, soil and water requirements together, or gardener's will be setting themselves up for failure.

"People also have a habit of planting what they want to wherever they like," she says, "but that just doesn't work."



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Jeanne Stafford, 79, is also president of the Grants Pass Garden Club.

Get growing

A few preliminary chores will help flower beds get off to a great start this spring. Barb Fick, horticulturist for the Oregon State University Extension Service, suggests the following:

- Remove winter mulch from perennial beds and roses after night temperatures stay above 30 degrees.
- Cut back any dead, winter-killed canes and branches.
- Rake up leaves and debris, and recycle woody debris.
- Fertilize established perennials, bulbs and shrubs with compost, bonemeal, 5-10-5 or another balanced synthetic fertilizer. Apply it to the surface of the soil between plants and carefully scratch it into the earth.
- If they seem crowded, divide late-spring and summer perennials, including daylilies, lilies and early chrysanthemums. Dig up the root clumps and remove the old, dead or woody central part. Replant the young, healthy sections in loose, fertile soil.
- Check, repair and repaint arbors, trellises and other plant support structures.
- Sharpen pruning shears and other cutting tools if they've lost their edge.
- Check local nurseries for new perennials and annuals that might fit a special niche in your garden. Match the specific needs of the plant to the characteristics of the site to be planted.
- Replace or relocate plants that didn't perform well last year.

Solving your plant problems

A simple soil test can tell gardeners what nutrients they should be providing

By Edith Decker
of the Daily Courier

If your rhodies are rotten or your cauliflower is cruddy, you may want to get the dirt on your soil.

Max Cain, a Master Gardener who does soil tests for Josephine County's branch of the OSU Extension Service, may have an answer for your problems.

"If everything's growing right, then don't bother with a soil test," Cain says. "Whatever you're doing, you're doing it right."

But those having trouble with their veggies, shrubs or flowers, should start at the root of the problem — or more precisely, with what the roots are in.

Plants draw their nutrients from the soil they're stuck in — unlike a hungry person, they can't drive from one restaurant to another to find what they want. So growers have to provide it for them in the soil. If they don't provide the right fertilizer, the plants may not produce, or even die.

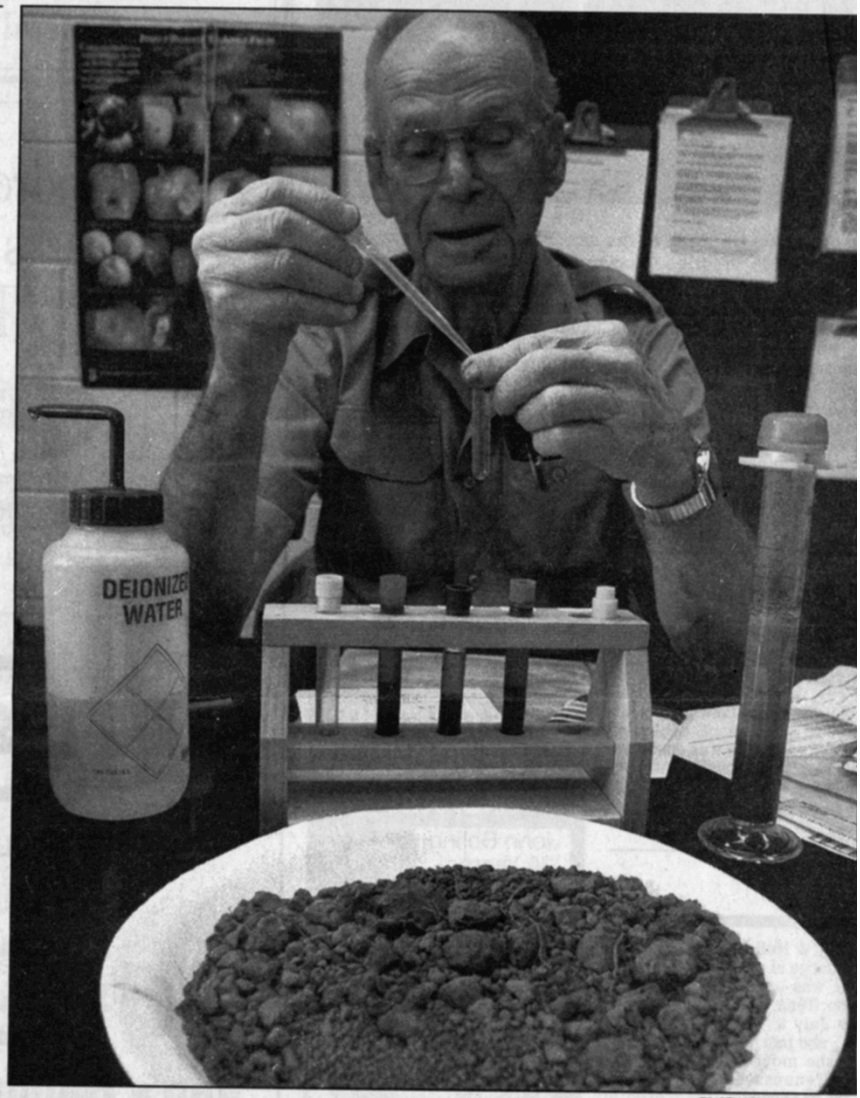
Originally, OSU's agriculture department did the soil tests, but then decided to stop.

"So we got the idea that we could do it," Cain says. He and five other Master Gardeners went for training at OSU, which donated a Ph monitor to the group.

While the other five people were highly qualified "I drove the car," Cain says. But since the others have all passed away, "I'm the only one left."

He's now training two other people to do testing because word of mouth has brought in more and more soil samples each year.

The first year they did nine, then 17, then 30. "Last year we did 62 and so far this year we've done 42."



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Max Cain performs soil tests for the county's branch of the OSU Extension Service.

The two main tests are for the soil's Ph. level and for the soil's macro nutrients — nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus. There are tests for micro nutrients, too, like boron, copper, calcium and so on, but he doesn't typically do those. People are mostly looking for what basics they might add (or sometimes subtract) from their soil to make it better for growing.

After over 150 tests, the trends Cain says he sees are soils being low in potassium. Typically, Josephine County soils have good Ph. balance, but a few have been high and a few have been low.

Here's how he does the tests:

A client brings in a soil sample that's (hopefully) been taken according to directions on the kit that's been picked up at the Extension Service office.

The soil must be air dried — which Cain does on a marked paper plate. He uses a mortar and pestle to break up the clods, then sifts it.

For the Ph. test, he adds soil and distilled water in correct measurements and waits — sometimes days — for the soil to settle out in a special test tube. After it settles, he can measure to see what percentage of the soil is sand, silt and clay.

"The ideal soil is 40 percent sand, 40 percent silt and 20 percent clay," he notes.

"From there we take the Ph. test with this thing here," he notes, pointing to the Ph. monitor, an expensive bit of equipment that he guards with his life. "Ph. is probably the most important thing we test."

The scale runs from 1 to 14 with 7 being neutral, 1 through 6 being acid and 8 through 14 being alkaline.

Most plants prefer a Ph. in the 6 to 7 range. The exceptions include camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons who like a 5.5 to 6 acid soil. Some grasses like an alkaline soil up to an 8 and mushrooms like alkaline soil up to a 10.

The Ph. tells Cain the availability of the nutrients in the soil for the plant to take in.

Next Cain gets out his set of test tubes and chemicals for the NPK test. The N stands for nitrogen, the P for phosphorus and the K for potassium. They're also the numbers you see on fertilizer — say a 20-0-20 fertilizer, which has a high ratio of nitrogen and potassium, but no phosphorus.

Cain adds soil and chemicals to the tubes, then lets the magic happen. The liquid on top of the soil will turn a color: blue-green, reddish or yellow-orange in the various test tubes.

Cain then uses a color chart to compare colors and determine the ratio of each mineral in the soil.

The soil he's testing at the moment is low in everything, but especially potassium.

Once the results are complete, he writes up a report about the tests and further suggesting what fertilizers can be added to the soil to amend it.

If the grower prefers organic solutions, he'll consult his charts and offer those ideas also.

Part of the kit he gives clients is a form to fill out so people can note what plants they're having problems with, what fertilizer they've tried and so on.

"If people tell us what they want to grow, we can help them with ideas for that specific thing."

The office receives samples for testing year-round, Cain says. But he suggests tests in the fall because some of the fertilizers he recommends most often can take 6 months to work. However, a lot of people bring samples in the spring, before planting.

Testing ... testing

The Master Gardeners charge $10 for the test and report in order to cover the cost of supplies.

You can pick up a kit at the Extension Service's front desk, 215 Ringuette St. The hours are 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

The office loans a soil sampling tool out and requires a $20 deposit on it that's returned when the tool comes back.

The Master Gardeners can answer questions at their plant clinics, which will be at various nurseries this spring and at the Growers' Market each Saturday. Or call the Master Gardeners' office, which will be staffed at least four days a week beginning April 1, 476-6613.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
3/30/00

Grants Pass Daily Courier
4/27/00

So you have a small yard?

Trellises, arbors can help you turn it into a lush hideaway

By Edith Decker
of the Daily Courier

Jim Smith, an 11-year veteran of the Master Gardener program, has used various trellises and arbors to make the most of his small yard.

First, he's created an enormous trellis with 2-by-4s ripped lengthwise into 2-by-2s, tall metal fence posts and twine.

It's being quickly overgrown by several honeysuckles he planted below.

The trellis covers one entire end of his mobile home in Rogue River, giving it shade.

Further on, an 18-year-old wisteria drapes its blooms over an arbor gate into his backyard.

There a visitor can find a classic fan trellis, entwined with clematis that he says "just goes ape" over his storage shed.

At the back of the property, he's started grapes on two post-and-twine creations of his own.

When Smith moved to the property 20 years ago, he started from scratch, "although the pine trees volunteered," he says.

Now the small property is a combination of lush hideaway and fruit-providing oasis.

As for the vines, he's pretty much growing the classics.

Wisteria is a fast grower that's favored for its beautiful pale-purple flowers.

Clematis is a flowering vine that comes in scores of varieties, most of which do well in our climate.

Honeysuckle is appreciated most for its scent.

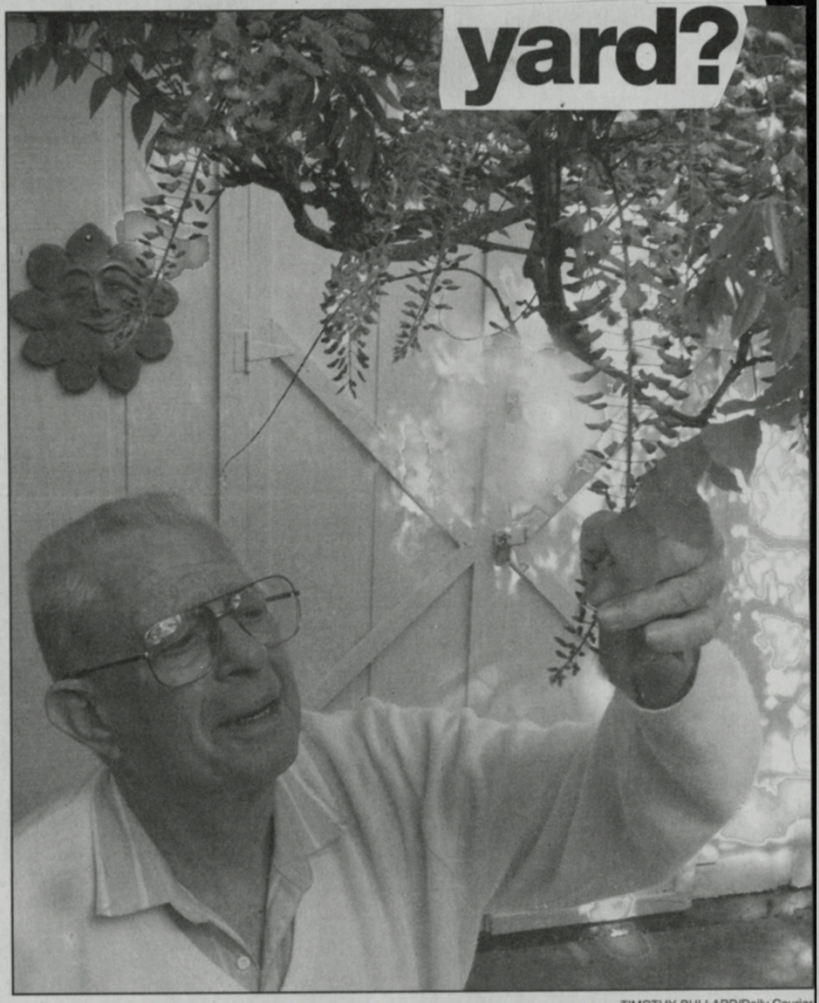
And Smith hasn't overlooked the practical arbors that grow his grapes.

Vines that grow up and around things have long been a staple of landscaping.

They can add color, scent, shade, cover an ugly fence or hide a wall when a trellis is placed in front of it.

Trellises and arbors can be made fairly simply in the desired size and shape, usually with lathe or wire mesh.

Some nails, twine, paint, a pot or window box for the plants, and you're set.



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Veteran Master Gardener Jim Smith checks a wisteria blooming on an arbor gate that leads to the back yard of his mobile home in Rogue River.

OVER

'Welcome' ivy trellis project

This small ivy trellis is perfect for an entrance indoors in winter and on the front porch in summer.

You need:

1 large pot, color optional

1 tall trellis that fits inside pot and matches in color (white looks best with ivy)

3 ivy plants (mix and match foliage)

1 potted Caladium plant, gallon size

1 bag light weight potting mix

1 small welcome sign (from a craft store, or use scrap of wood and some paint and stencil)

Directions: Set the trellis in place. Fill pot halfway with potting mix and adjust trellis if necessary. Make sure it doesn't move around.

Set ivy plants in front of trellis, add caladium and more mix.

Tamp lightly. Hang your sign from the trellis and water the plants. As the ivy grows (which it will do quickly), wrap it around the trellis. The caladium will fill the space at the bottom of the trellis and eventually hang over the pot.

(This project is from www.gardentree.com.)

Time to climb

"The Pacific Northwest Gardener's Book of Lists" includes this list of Pacific Northwest gardeners' favorite vines that are suited to our climate:

- Actinidia *(Actinidia kolomikta)*
- Five-leaf akebia *(Akebia quinata)*
- Trumpet vine *(Campsis radicans)*
- Jackman clematis *(Clematis jackmanii)*
- Anemone clematis *(Clematis montana)*
- Sweet autumn clematis *(Clematis paniculata)*
- Golden hop (*Humulus lupulus* 'Aureus')
- Honeysuckle (various varieties)
- Ivy
- Winter jasmine *(Jasminum nudiflorum)*
- Climbing hydrangea *(Hydrangea anomala)*
- Silver lace vine *(Polygonum aubertii)*
- Climbing roses (various varieties)
- Wisteria

It's important to check the growing conditions for all of these vines to be sure you place them in soil, water and light conditions in which they'll flourish.

Smith suggests using pressure-treated wood when possible — especially for the posts that will be in the dirt. He also doubles up with metal posts so that if (or when, in damp Oregon) the wood posts rot at the base, the metal posts will still steady the trellis.

He suggests trimming vines back in season.

His wisteria in particular needs regular attacks with the shears.

"It's chopped and chopped and chopped to keep it back that far," he says of the sprawling vine. "Everything needs to be pruned."

Matching a vine with the soil type and sunlight available is another important consideration.

Once his grapes were where the honeysuckle is now at the front of his home. But when trees brought too much shade there, he moved the sun-loving grapes and started the honeysuckles, which don't mind partial shade.

Be sure to check the tag on the plant or ask the nursery personnel what might be best for each vine.

Galice Garden Fair scheduled for this weekend

Plants, garden accessories and gardening tips will be part of the Galice Garden Fair this weekend.

A fund-raiser for the Galice Community Association, the fair will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the Galice Community Hall, 10821A Galice Road.

Among the green and growing things, there will be perennial flowers, trees and shrubs, ground covers, water plants, fruits, heirloom plants and deer-resistant plants. Garden accessories crafted by local artisans will include outdoor furniture, arbors, birdhouses and feeders and stepping stones.

Master gardeners will give ongoing demonstrations of making hanging baskets, and the Bureau of Land Management is donating a variety of cedar and pine seedlings to be given away free.

Admission is free.

Call 476-3875 for more information.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
4/13/00

Master Gardeners fair this weekend

Spring into gardening season at the Josephine County Master Gardeners spring garden fair.

Open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at the Oregon State University Extension Office, 215 Ringuette St., the fair will feature a plant sale with more than 100 varieties of plants, garden products, gardening information, a free plant clinic, bonsai and hanging basket demonstrations, free water testing for nitrates, soil testing information, children's activities and refreshments. There also will be a 4-H fair on Saturday only. Admission is free. A free shuttle will be available from the Josephine County Fairgrounds.

Call 476-6613 for more information.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
5/11/00

■ **GARDENER CLINIC CHANGING ITS HOURS.** The Grants Pass Master Gardener Clinic is changing its hours beginning next week. Starting Tuesday, the clinic will be open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays only. The office is located at the Oregon State University Extension Office, 215 Ringuette St. in Grants Pass. The Master Gardeners also host a plant clinic Saturdays at the Growers' Market at Fourth and F streets. Call 476-6613 for more information.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
9/28/00

Enroll now to be Master Gardener

Signups are under way for the 2001 Master Gardener program offered through the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Classes are being offered in both Josephine and Jackson counties, with sessions beginning in early January.

"The Master Gardener Program is intended to provide home gardeners with basic instruction in horticulture and then to use the trainees to help Extension staff members answer gardening questions from the public," says George Tiger, OSU Extension home gardening agent.

The course includes study in vegetable garden management; landscaping; plant disease; insects; management of soil and water; lawn and turf maintenance; fruit, nut and berry cultivation; growing herbs and other related topics.

Classes will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. one day per week for 12 successive weeks. In Jackson County, classes will meet on Wednesdays at the Extension Auditorium at 569 Hanley Road in Central Point.

In Josephine County, classes will meet Thursdays at the Extension Auditorium at 215 Ringuette St. in Grants Pass.

Except for a $60 materials fee, there is no charge for the training, which is provided in exchange for volunteer educational activities. Each participant agrees to spend a pre-determined number of hours staffing plant clinics, where the public may bring questions and plant specimens for plant problem diagnosis.

In addition to plant clinic hours, volunteers may pay back their training time by planning and caring for a demonstration garden, organizing and leading 4-H clubs, talking to garden clubs and schools, or helping with a spring garden fair.

For more information on how to enroll in the Master Gardener training, call the Josephine County Extension office at 476-6613 or the Jackson County Extension office at (541) 776-7371.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
11/16/00

Master Gardeners: extension's growing fraternity

Class draws together the company of plants and compatible people

By Howard Huntington
of the Daily Courier

In the unforgiving climate of Alaska, Jackie Dwyer was confined to growing plants in pots. That was before she moved to Josephine County and took a Master Gardener course last year.

"Everything was new to me," she says. "Everything was a surprise," and the course, offered annually by the Oregon State University Extension Service, "has just been the most fun I've ever had."

It also was a great help to Dwyer in starting her first real garden, and in making new friends. Long after putting in the community service that was part of their tuition, she and others from the Class of '99 are still donating their time to teach future Master Gardeners.

"There are just tons and tons of things to learn through the Master Gardener program," she testifies. Her husband, Nick Merrill, also took the course last year.

So did they get any results with their own garden in Grants Pass? "We couldn't believe how well we did," she says. They couldn't hope to eat everything they raised, and gave some of it away.

Ed Weitzel, who completed the course just last month, recommends it to anyone who has the time. Gardening had always interested the former biology science teacher — more so when he wanted the yard of his Cave Junction home to blossom for his daughter's wedding last year.

The 12-week course is offered just once a year, beginning in mid-January. Classes are held on Thursdays and run for seven hours. The instructors are Extension agents, experts and other specialists.

You'll do some reading, too, but also have a chance to get your hands dirty learning all about plants — more specifically, managing soil, growing flowers, fruits and vegetables, identifying pests and diseases.

You must pass a final open-book, written exam — which is educational in itself — to earn a Master Gardener certificate, and perform at least 60 hours of community service, or reimburse Extension $5 for each hour of class attended.

If you choose service, it may include answering questions about gardening on the phone, speaking at schools or helping at plant clinics, shopping centers and other places. The group hopes to add a clinic in Cave Junction this year.

Some of this year's Master Gardener graduates will participate in the group's annual Spring Garden Fair on May 13 and 14 at the Extension, 215 Ringuette St. in Grants Pass. Admission is free.

Master Gardeners grew 6,000 plants for last year's fair and sold almost everything, plowing the money back into their program.

Garden-supply companies also will be on hand again to tempt you with their products at this first Spring Fair of the 21st Century. Demonstrations promise to include the fine art of bonsai — dwarfing and shaping trees. Chili, hot dogs and other foods will be sold.

Rain or shine, fair hours will be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 13, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 14. The event coincides with Mother's Day, May 14, and the Home Show next-door at the fairgrounds. Free shuttles will be available. The fair attracted some 2,000 people last year.

Master Gardeners who wish to continue participating in group activities after graduation may enroll for $12 annually. Some 800 people have completed the course over the years, and about 120 are still active.

"Master Gardeners is about having fun," says Joe White of Grants Pass, a five-year member and now president. "We have a lot of potlucks and get-togethers, picnics and so forth in the summertime."

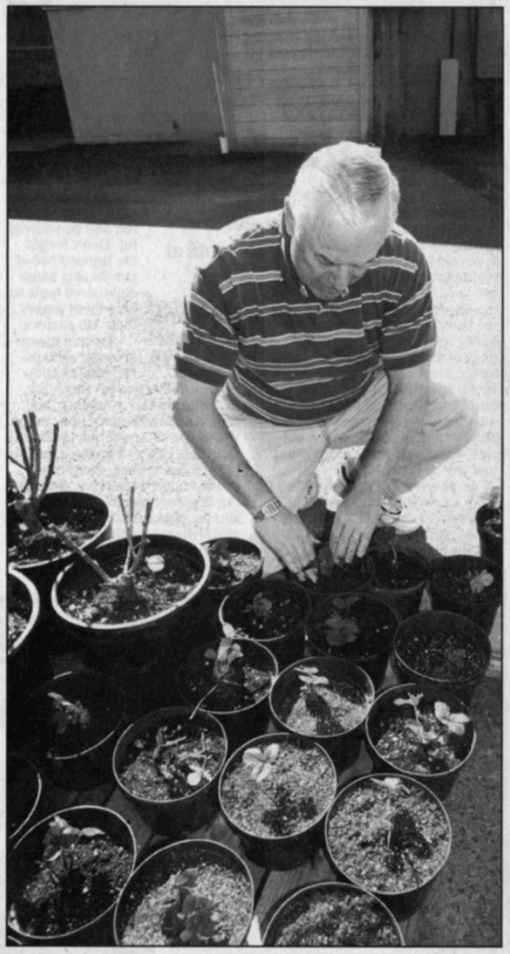
Along with all the other public services they provide, the Master Gardeners sponsor "Plant a Row for the Hungry," a program that asks all gardeners to raise an extra row of vegetables, fruits or herbs for donation to food banks. Carrots, onions, squash and other good-keepers are suggested.

For a longer listing of foods and the locations of food banks from Grants Pass to the Illinois Valley, call the extension, 476-6613; or Food Share, 474-5440.

More than 24 other counties also have active Master Gardener programs, including Jackson and Douglas counties. For more information, call Extension at (541) 776-7131 in Jackson County or (541) 672-4461 in Douglas County.

❑ ❑ ❑

For more details about taking next year's Master Gardener course, call 476-6613 or visit the Extension Office. Office hours are 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays. Students pay a small fee, probably $55 for 2001.



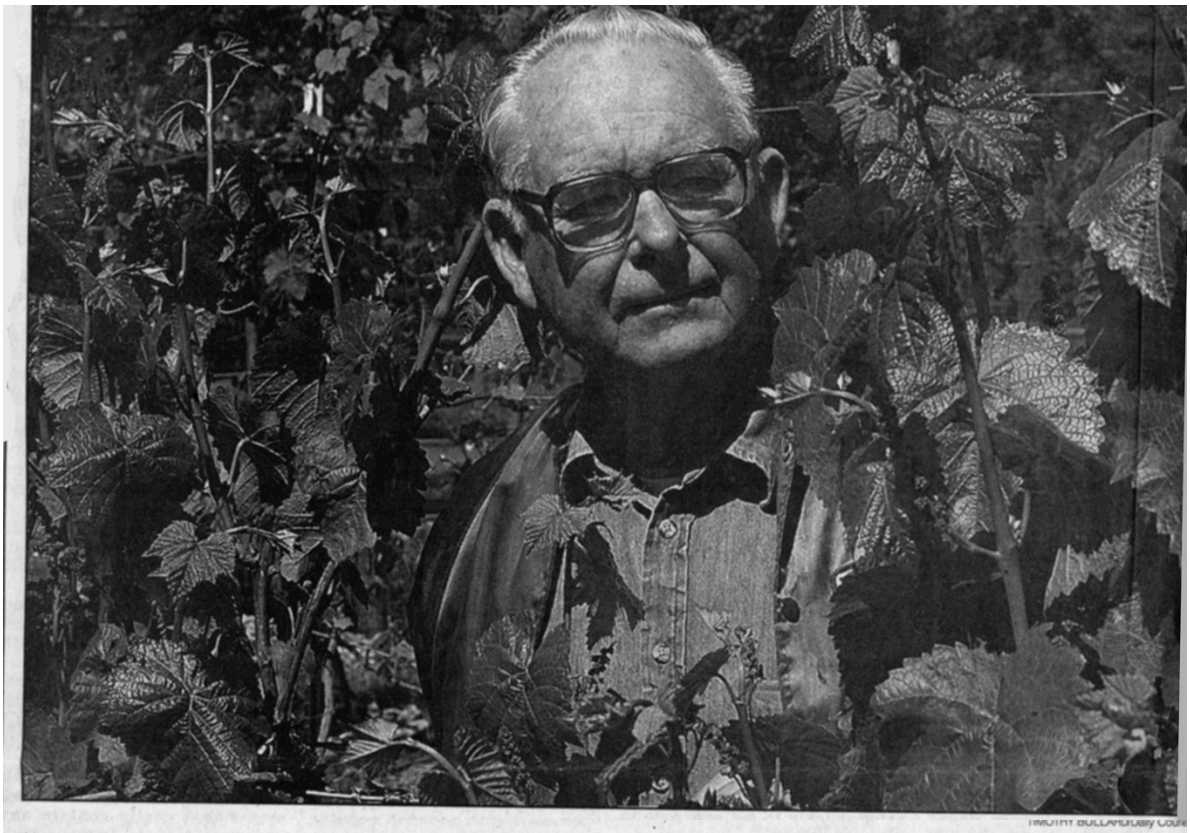
TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Ed Weitzel transplants Seascape strawberries, top left, while Jackie Dwyer uncovers starts in the Master Gardner greenhouse.

TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Careful temperature control, above, leads to successful sweet pea starts, below.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
4/20/00



It's a 40-hour-a-week job for retiree Bill Crooks, but his garden includes fruit trees, arbors, veggies, berries and flowers.

He's a glutton for gardening

By Barbara Baily
of the Daily Courier

Eleven years ago Bill Crooks traded a leisurely lifestyle in Los Angeles for life in the fast lane on Fish Hatchery Road near the Applegate River.

After Crooks and his wife, Patty, fell in love with the river during a visit and bought their six-acre home in 1989, he installed so many fruit trees, grape arbors, berry bushes, and vegetable and flower gardens that taking care of them makes a 40-hour a week job look like a piece of cake.

"I've been a lot busier since I moved here and this is more work than a full-time job. The gardening never stops and I wish I had two of me," he says with a laugh. Their property was once a working gladiola farm.

It takes him about eight hours to trim just the lawns, but Crooks, 72, is quick to point out that it's a labor of love.

"I've always been into gardening. When I was a little kid I planted beans to see what they'd do."

Crooks retired as a technician for the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the couple's three grown children live nearby. While Patty Crooks appreciates the bounty from her husband's garden, she doesn't share the hobby.

"I've got a brown thumb," she says, "and it guarantees that things die on me."

Bill Crooks raised citrus trees and avocados in Southern California, so after moving to the Rogue Valley he took a Josephine County Master Gardener class to learn about gardening here.

"I strongly recommend the class to anyone who moves here from another climate zone," he says.

Crooks has nine tomato plants this year. "My favorite tomatoes are Early Girl and

You name it and Bill Crooks likely has it planted

Ace," he says. "I like to grow indeterminate plants because they keep growing and producing throughout the season. Determinates give you a big crop all at once, and that's good for people who like to can."

Surplus tomatoes and corn are frozen in zip lock bags and tossed in one of two large freezers. Last fall Crooks air-dried ears of corn and a few months later boiled them in a pot of water with some baking soda to reduce acidity and soften the skin.

"They tasted good," he says, "and that's probably what the pioneers did.

"I give vegetables to friends and neighbors and they usually give me something back," he says. "I'll send a zucchini to one neighbor and she sends back mock apple or green tomato pie."

Within the confines of a vast, six-foot tall fence he also has crops of Walla Walla onions, garlic, beets, Swiss chard, zucchini, rhubarb, asparagus, cantaloupe, melons, squash, green beans and Silver Queen and Golden Jubilee corn. His arbors contain 13 varieties of grapes, and last fall he produced 12 gallons of wine and two gallons of "seconds."

"To make seconds," he says, "you use the grapes after you get the juice out and add sugar and water. I also make raisins from seedless red Suffolk grapes."

All but one of his grape vines were started from cuttings.

"A neighbor gave me Interlaken green grape cuttings," Crooks says. "You stick two or three nodes in the ground, leave one above ground level, water it and put wood chips around it to keep the plant from drying out. On a hot, sunny day late in the summer the concord grapes and blackberries smell like they're baking in the oven."

Thick blackberry and raspberry hedges run along the side of the property, and Crooks makes his own blackberry brandy. "Himalayan blackberries grow wild in this area," he says. "The Chinese who worked here during the Gold Rush brought them."

He freezes his berry harvest and his wife makes jam during the winter months when the kitchen is cool.

Crooks' impressive orchard includes two varieties of pears and five types of apples. In the middle of the garden Crooks cut a large golden delicious tree down to a stump and grafted on four different types of apples.

He also has cherry, peach and nectarine, Santa Rosa plum and Italian prune trees.

Then there are the flowers: peonies, Lenten roses, hollyhock, wildflowers, Japanese knock weed, Sweet William, orange poppies, more than 20 lilac bushes, and a veil of wisteria that drapes over the front of the house. His favorite flower is the Alstroemeria lily.

"They're long-lasting as a cut flower and very colorful." he says.

A neighbor's horses and cows graze in the back half of the pasture. "I'm continually repairing fences that were knocked down by cows," he says.

When he isn't tending to his many crops or making his own compost, Crooks volunteers at the Josephine County Extension Office, helps out at the Master Gardener's annual spring fair and mans their booth at the Saturday Growers' Market.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
5/25/00

Master Gardener named Volunteer of the Year

Fenton does it all, from greenhouse to garden to computer information

By Barbara Baily
of the Daily Courier

Five years ago, retired engineer Oscarlee Fenton and his wife, Nancy, bought 5 acres of wooded property in Merlin, landscaped a large chunk of it, and built a spacious home. That same year Fenton, 69, took the Josephine County Master Gardener course, and he's devoted time to the program ever since.

During Thursday's annual banquet, the program honored Fenton by presenting him with the "Volunteer of the Year" award.

"Oscar is there helping all of the time. He's a computer expert who's taught a lot of people how to access gardening information on the Internet, and he was my right-hand man when we built a couple of greenhouses," says Joe White, Josephine County Master Gardener president.

Graduates of the Master Gardener program this year also received certificates at the banquet, and Katie Denton was presented with the "Behind the Scenes" award by her peers for keeping the program's two greenhouses in operation last winter.

"After the greenhouse manager became ill, Katie was there every day through the winter to water, fertilize and organize them," Fenton says.

"The thing I enjoy most about the program are the people you meet," he continues. "Someone will call and say: 'My tree is dying. What's killing it?' They don't even know what kind of tree it is, so what can you tell them? It could be a million things. As a radio plant doctor in the Bay Area says, 'I think it's at a stage where it deserves a decent burial.' People don't realize how much is going on under the ground, especially around trees, and how damaging it is to pave it over. They just think of the plant as the part you look at, but there's more going on in the soil than there is on top."

Other callers wonder why seeds they've saved from last year's hybrid plants won't germinate.

"People like to save their seeds and replant them, but a lot of hybrid seeds are sterile. One lady came in with corn seeds she'd saved from the previous year, and wanted to know what was wrong with the new crop. Well, she planted hybrid seeds and the new plants came in as mutations," he says.

Fenton was born in South Dakota, earned a civil engineering degree in 1953, and built bridges for the California Division of Highways before joining the state's Department of Water Resources. He later built wastewater treatment plants in the San Francisco Bay area, and retired as a district manager.

The Fentons, who have children and grandchildren in Portland and San Francisco, moved to Grants Pass because it's almost midway between the two cities. While Fenton devotes himself to the Master Gardener program, Nancy is a member of the American Association of University Women and tutors children at Fort Vannoy Elementary School.

"I was born and raised on a farm, so I've always taken care of gardens and lawns. When we moved here, I decided to become a Master Gardener and I've met a lot of nice people through the program. The engineer in me likes to understand why a plant isn't doing well and what's causing the problem," he says.

Fenton adds that people who enter the Master Gardener program because they love gardening must also learn to love bugs. "A lot of the people who come into the program don't want to touch them or even look at them, but if you love gardening, you have to love insects, too," he says.

When Fenton came on board, Master Gardeners did their record-keeping on home computers, and he's spent a lot of time since developing a centralized computer system and training volunteers to use it.

"A lot of members played with their own computers at home, but didn't like to use the one in the office, so they kept their own individual files, and when they left, they'd take the meeting minutes and other records with them," he says.

Fenton also rolled up his sleeves during the construction of two greenhouses behind the OSU Extension Service auditorium on Ringuette Street.

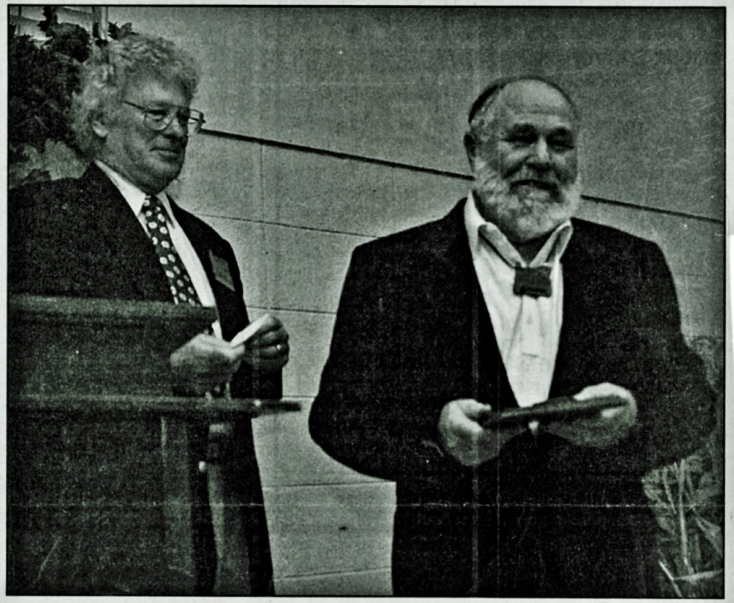
"The Master Gardeners raise plants in them during the winter months, and the plant sale during the annual spring garden fair is a big money maker for the program. We also use the greenhouses for Master Gardener training sessions. We sell plans for the small greenhouse at the extension service for $20, so anyone who wants to build their own can see ours in operation," he says.

Fenton has volunteered 133 hours so far this year, and during the same period, the 120 members of Josephine County's Master Gardener program collectively contributed 3,982 hours educating the public and maintaining the organization.

Fenton also serves as the group's state representative. "I carry the news back and forth from the state's quarterly meetings," he says.

What type of gardening is Fenton's favorite?

"It's the lawn," he says. "A lot of people say that a lawn is so much work, but I think it's the easiest thing to take care of. I just let the sprinkler come on automatically and sit on my tractor while I mow it," he says with a smile.



KEVIN LAUNIUS/Daily Courier

Oscarlee Fenton, right, accepts the County Master Gardener Volunteer of the Year award from Josephine County Master Gardener president Joe White during a banquet last week.

Workshop grows Master Gardeners

■ **WHAT:** The Oregon State University Extension Service will conduct a Master Gardener Workshop.

■ **WHEN:** Classes will be held all day for 12 consecutive Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. starting the third week of January, 2001. Extension agents, specialists and local experts offer a basic, practical course in plant science and horticulture. After finishing classwork, participants take a comprehensive exam and perform 60 hours of volunteer work through the Master Gardener program.

■ **WHERE:** The OSU Extension Office, 215 Ringuette St., Grants Pass.

■ **COST:** The program is free but there is a $60 materials fee for a comprehensive gardening binder and incidental expenses.

■ **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Call the Extension office weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 476-6613.

Grants Pass Daily Courier
10/25/00