WEST MULTNOMAH

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Winter 2014 eNewsletter

This is the perfect time to plant bareroot seedlings and roam through native plant sales!

Soil School!

Is soil an exciting topic? It is when taught by OSU soil instructor James "Dr. Soil" Cassidy! Join him and two other national experts on soil and gardens, PSU's Dr. Scott Burns and the University of Delaware's Dr. Doug Tallamy for an entertaining and informative one-day workshop on soil.

- **Saturday, April 5, 2014**
- **8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**
- **Lewis & Clark College, 0615 SW Palatine Hill Road, Portland**

Find out what's in soil, how to take a soil sample and analyze some of your own soil in this entertaining and informative one-day workshop. Registration costs $30 for single person/$50 for double. Cost includes lunch and a Soil Social following the workshop! Register now at http://www.wmswcd.org/content.cfm/Events/2014-Soil-School.

Native Plant Sales

Where are the native plant sales in your community?

Did you know that native plants take less time and energy on your part than non-native species? It's because they are already acclimated to our area's climate and soil composition. Native plants will grow better too and take less water and little to no fertilizer. They are also much better for local birds and other wildlife! Here are some local native plant sales that you might want to visit soon:

East Multnomah SWCD (Portland): Place your pre-orders for native plants on the EMSWCD website until February 9th. The plant pick up day is Saturday, February 22 from 10 am-3 pm in the District's back parking lot. http://emswcd.org/workshops-and-events/annual-native-plant-sale/

Tryon Creek Watershed Council $2 Native Plant Sale: The TCWC is taking pre-orders for native plants now for distribution in February. Each plant is only $2 and you must order a minimum of 10 plants. Find out more at: http://tcwc.tryonfriends.org/2013-native-plant-sale-open-for-preorders/

Tualatin Hills Spring Native Plant Sale: This plant sale is Saturday, April 26 from 10 am – 2 pm at the Tualatin Hills Nature Park Interpretive Center, 15655 SW Millikan Way, Beaverton. For more information, call 503/629-6350. They have a wide variety of tree, shrub, and flowering plants and experts on hand to answer your questions about the best plant for your location. Friends of the Tualatin Hills Nature Park sponsor the event with proceeds going towards future park improvements and environmental education programs. Visit the Nature Park Interpretive Center in the weeks before the plant sale to pick up trilliums and other early blooming wildflowers. http://www.thprd.org/nature/programs/nativeplantsales.cfm

Skyline Grange (Portland): This native plant sale takes place Friday, April 16, from9 am – 5 pm at the Skyline Grange, 11275 NW Skyline Blvd. A wide variety of native flowers, shrubs and trees will be available, including bareroot seedlings. http://srnpdx.org/event/skyline-grange-native-plant-sale

Audubon Society: This native plant sale is Sunday and Monday, April 20 and 21, from 10 am-4 pm at Audubon, 5151 NW Cornell Road. More than 100 species of Oregon wildflowers, shrubs and trees will be available. Audubon will also have special lists of plants that are best for sun or shade as well as plants that attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Plant experts will also be on hand to answer all your questions. http://audubonportland.org/sanctuaries/plant-sale

Winter composting

This is the time of year when we just want to hunker down with a steaming cup of hot chocolate. But even though it's winter, there are things we can do now to benefit our gardens. For instance, it's important to pay attention to your compost pile during these cold months. Keeping your pile "alive" and protected in the winter is relatively simple and will ensure that you have a great source of nutrient rich material for your vegetable garden, ornamental plants, pastures, or crops come spring.

Cooler air temperatures can slow down the microbes responsible for composting. You can keep your pile active by turning and controlling moisture. Even if the temperature outside is below freezing, the middle of an active compost pile will be 100 degrees or more. After composting slows down, the temperature of the pile will drop to ambient temperature when it will be "curing." You'll know your pile is ready when it looks evenly textured and is crumbly like garden soil. That can take from 3 months to a year, depending on how you manage your pile.

The key with managing compost in our area is keeping it out of the rain. Too much water fills up the pore spaces and won't allow proper airflow through the pile. We usually get more than 40 inches of rain during the winter and that can turn a compost pile into a soggy mess. Even if the pile is still composting while wet, it will probably start to smell!

If you don't have a permanent structure or cover for your compost, you can cover it with a tied down tarp. If your pile seems dry, add a bit of lush organic matter or water. If your pile has gotten too wet, take off the tarp on a sunny day a let it dry out before recovering. You can also turn it more often and add perforated PVC pipes to increase air flow. An exposed compost (or manure) pile can leach otherwise valuable nutrients, particularly if not already cured, which can end up in well or ground water. So, hold onto those nutrients!

For more information on manure composting (and composting, in general), see: http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfn/fall06compost.

Invasive Species

Tackling English ivy

Winter is a great time to pull English ivy on your property and also look for new infestations. Most of our broadleaf trees drop their leaves in the winter. Our diverse native wildflowers have also gone dormant making the evergreen leaves of English ivy much more noticeable in the trees and on the forest floor. Try to take a walk around the forest this winter and document where ivy is growing. When you find small patches, go ahead and pull it from the ground and cut it off of the trees. The soil is moist from the rain, and the roots come out a bit more easily. If you are surprised to find an overwhelming amount of ivy that has been growing unnoticed, contact the Conservation District and we may be able to help you craft a plan to handle the invasion.

Several landowners in the District have participated in an ivy removal program we offer with the agreement to maintain ivy-free trees in the future. If ivy was removed from trees on your property more than 12 months ago, it's a good time to get back out and inspect the trees. Don't be surprised if you see small vines starting back up the tree trunk. Cut these off while they're still small and manageable.

Restoration

Save Sturgeon Lake

The Conservation District and the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) are pursuing local, state and federal funds to re-build the Dairy Creek channel between the Columbia River and Sturgeon Lake. The District worked closely with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), the Port of Portland, and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) over 25 years ago to restore connectivity, improve fish migration and prevent lakebed sedimentation. But flood waters in the mid-90s blocked the channel with woody debris and sand while two Reeder Road culverts at Dairy Creek are now failing and threaten fish passage.

The Conservation District is seeking support and assistance from Multnomah County to replace the culverts. The District is also asking ODFW, which owns and manages the land and lake, and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to help pay the estimated $1.6 million required of the District as the Corps-required "local project sponsor." We are also meeting with local island property owners, elected leaders at Metro, Multnomah County, the City of Portland and state legislators who represent Sauvie Island (including State Rep. Brad Witt and Sen. Betsy Johnson) to serve in leadership positions.

Our goal is to negotiate an agreement with Corps and multiple partners – including funding commitments – by late spring. With budget uncertainty in Congress and intense competition for restoration project funding, our best effort is necessary to meet our funding goals. If you would like more information, please check our website or contact us.

Help preserve Vermont Creek

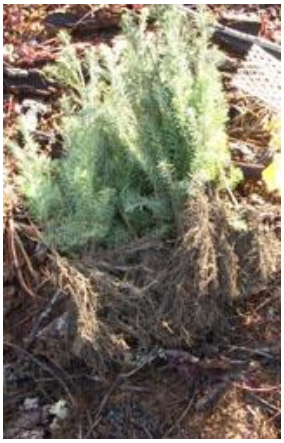
West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District and SOLVE are working with local residents to restore this popular creek. If you'd like to help, the third and final planting day is Saturday, February 15 from 9 am-1 pm. Mark your calendars and grab a friend for this great event. Tools, gloves, plants and supplies are provided.

Work was started in 2011 when Conservation District Urban Conservationist Mary Logalbo invited SOLVE to join the community to restore Vermont Creek. Mary is still involved along with two dedicated SOLVE Stream Team Captains, Steve and Maria Cahill. Since then, volunteers have removed invasive plants (reed canary grass, Himalayan blackberry and English ivy) and replaced them with native shrubs and trees. The end result is cooler water for fish, improved habitat and food sources for amphibians, birds and insects and improved erosion and flood control. It also means cleaner water for summertime swims and lots of opportunities for kids to search for frogs and tiny fish.

Register to help with this last planting by visiting http://solveoregon.org/get-involved/event-registration.

How to plant bareroot seedlings

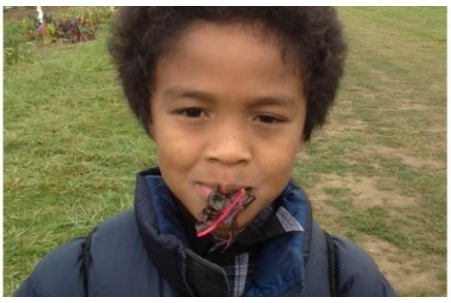
Bareroot plants are harvested from the field in winter when the plants are dormant and ready to be replanted. They are affordable, hardy, have well-developed roots, and are easy to handle, transport and plant.



After purchasing your seedlings, keep them cool and the roots moist until planting day. Store them in a shady location or refrigerator. When you are ready to plant, dig a hole wide enough and deep enough for the roots to spread out. Remember that roots grow down and laterally. Mound some soil in the center of the planting hole and drape the roots over the mound so they hang down and are not turned up at the ends or crowded. Plant trees and shrubs to the depth they were planted in the nursery. The junction of the stem and root should be level with the ground. Then fill the planting hole with loose soil and gently pack the surface. Build a berm around the planting hole and water thoroughly to eliminate any air pockets.

We recommend using Willamette Valley native plants for their added wildlife, low-maintenance and stormwater benefits. Always make sure you are selecting the right plants for your site by analyzing your planting area and then looking at plants that compliment your site's characteristics. Make sure you pay attention to the shade as well as soil moisture. Check our website for information on the benefits of using native plants, our calendar for upcoming native plant sales and other related information.

Education & Outreach



Field trips to the farm

Beyond working with K-12 students on field studies, native habitats, and edible gardens, the Conservation District has long been providing support for school field trips to Sauvie Island Center. Located at Howell Territorial Park which boasts a hedgerow, an orchard, a forest, and a farm, SIC serves elementary school youth of Portland by providing hands-on educational field trips. The Conservation District believes that it is important for students to connect the systems and laboring required in their schools' vegetable gardens with those of a working farm. Many of the students who visit the Center are visiting a farm for the first time and sampling brand new vegetables as well. Beyond enjoying local foods, students also learn about the

valuable role of pollinators (particularly native bees) when visiting the on-site hedgerow. Lastly, students explore the small forest to observe the impacts of all manner of animals, birds, and plants on soil decomposition and formation.

SIC's education programs seek "to increase the food, farm and environmental literacy of the next generation." During the center's field trips to Sauvie Island Organics farm, students take part in a variety of classes including Soil Exploration, Seed to Harvest, Plant Parts Investigation, Wildlife and the Food Web, and Pollination Station. Students also spend time in the Grow Lunch Garden, planting, tending, harvesting and eating fresh vegetables.

This fall, kindergarten, 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 7th grade students from Sauvie Island Academy and three 5th grade classes from Markham Elementary School visited the Center. The S.I. Academy visit coincided with National Food Day and students worked with local chefs from Firehouse restaurant to harvest, cook, and eat a farm-fresh meal. All students take a short survey asking if they've had the food before whether they'd like to eat it again. The survey shows what level of familiarity kids have with various vegetables and gauges favorability-whether their taste changes after trying them. Anna Goldrich, SIC Executive Director notes, "What is interesting (to me) is how much change you see with kids who haven't been on a farm and tried things before. Even the Sauvie Island kids had a 50% increase in favorability, but the Markham kids had a 156% increase." Markham, in SW Portland, is a new school partner for WMSWCD where 50% of its students receive free or reduced lunch. Markham's fifth grade class and WMSWCD are hoping to work on a native habitat garden in the spring.

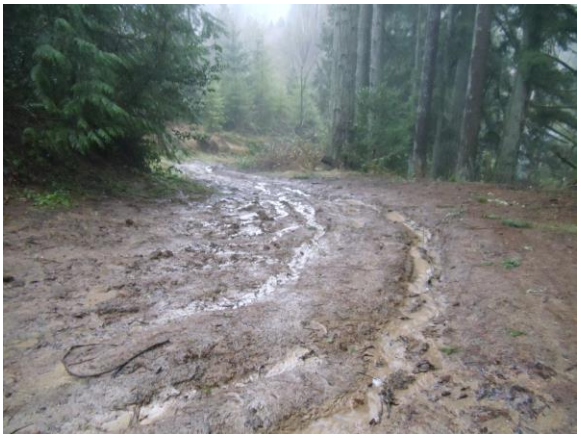
The Conservation District and the schools we serve find great value in our relationship with Sauvie Island Center. We hope to provide students with hands-on, educational field trips that foster greater knowledge of local foods, farming, pollinators, and more, for years to come. And students love it! To quote one student- "It was the best field trip I've been on in a long time!"

Forestry

Look for winter damage in your woods

The winter in western Oregon brings heavy rainfall and strong winds that can damage to your woodland. Often times, damage is pretty minimal, but a few things deserve your attention.

Hazard trees: Some trees pose a risk to visitors in a forest. Heavy storms can cause limbs to break or cause trees to lean as soil shifts. Occasionally broken branches do not make it to the ground and instead get hung up in the canopy of other trees. These branches are sometimes called "widow makers" and can fall at inopportune times. Leaning trees can become weak and there is a risk they can fall. If they're far from roads or walking trails, they may not pose much risk, but if they're near a road or building, they could fall and damage property or cause injury. You can actively remove hazard trees, but sometimes an experience professional is needed to do the work safely. When possible, see if you can avoid the area in immediate vicinity of these hazards. Eventually nature may take its course and shake the limb loose or fall the tree for you. If there's nothing below to be damaged, the fallen wood can just become wildlife habitat on the ground over time.



Forest Roads: Heavy rain can erode a forest road which makes the road less useful to you and may add unwanted sediment to local streams. Light erosion can be difficult to see, but sometimes a solid stream begins to flow down the middle of a road. If this occurs, you can temporarily dig a small trench, or water bar, that diverts the water off of the road to the surrounding forest floor where it can be absorbed by the soil and vegetation. Contact the District for additional advice on what to do in these areas. We're particularly interested in working on road erosion in the McCarthy Creek Watershed since there are known sediment issues in the stream.

Culverts: Culverts are drainage pipes installed under your forest road where the road crosses streams and small seasonal drainages. After heavy rain they can clog with soil, wood, and other debris causing rainwater to flow over the road instead of under it. Eventually it will damage your road and carry sediment to nearby streams. Culverts need annual maintenance and we encourage you to take a look at them a few times every winter to make sure they're draining properly. If you stay on top of it, you'll be able to easily clear debris with a shovel or other hand tools.

Farming & Gardening

How to help prevent soil erosion this spring

"A nation that destroys its soil destroys itself." Franklin Roosevelt wrote those words in a letter to all State Governors in support of the act that created Soil & Water Conservation Districts. That was in 1937 and the nation had just passed a series of laws in response to the devastation caused by the Dust Bowl.

Eighty years later we've have come a long way in our understanding of the strength and fragility native soils. Yet erosion will always be a concern.

Soil erosion is the detachment and movement of soil particles, most often caused by water and wind, gravity and even ice. Since it may take 200 years to form one inch of soil, erosion occurring on your land is usually a bad thing. While soil erosion is of most concern on farms, steep hillsides or along a stream; erosion around a house can compromise foundations, clog drains, undermine garden plants and depending on where the soil goes – lead to liability issues.

In most instances, soil erodes when the surface is not adequately covered, allowing wind, rain, and flowing water to dislodge soil and carry it away. One of the best ways to stabilize soil and slopes is by planting grass, shrubs and trees. Their root systems, and the fibrous mycorrhiza fungus that attach to it, literally hold the soil in place. The roots can also create holes, known as pores, which allow water to seep into the ground so that it doesn't pond on the surface and wash soil away. The plants also pull water up out of the soil, through the process of transpiration, preventing soil in steep areas from getting too saturated and heavy.

The roots of plants also pump organic matter deep into the soil. Organic matter, formed from the breakdown and composting of living material, is one of the most important parts of soil. It is literally the glue that holds soil together. Organic matter also helps water to seep deep into the soil while providing nutrients for crops, trees and even ornamental plants in the garden. While mulches, composts and other organic amendments can add organic matter to soil, plants are the most efficient way to get it deep into the soil and help prevent soil erosion.

For more information on soil, erosion, or other conservation practices, contact the Conservation District or attend Soil School on April 5th, 2014. Registration for Soil School can be found here: http://www.wmswcd.org/content.cfm/Events/2014-Soil-School

Check out our website to learn more seasonally friendly tips and let us know how if we can help you care for your land,

Dick Springer
WMSWCD District Manager