

Another dry year may be coming

Extension Service offers tips for gardeners to prep for water scarcity

What a lovely winter we are having. The morning fog burns off before noon, daytime highs are in the 60's, and we've had weeks without rain. What may be the most enjoyable winter I have experienced in eighteen years living in Oregon, may turn out to be a year with the driest summer. If you look at the depth of the water in the Umpqua River, it seems like it should be mid-summer. The river level presently is not as low as the winter of 2014 or 2015, but with no snow in the mountains, we are probably going to see early irrigation restrictions this summer.

As you prepare for the growing season of 2018 you really need to plan for

an extremely dry growing season. Don't assume the Umpqua River will continue to provide unlimited amounts of water for irrigation throughout the entire year ahead. So what are some things that a gardener can do to prepare for a low rainfall and river flow year?

The first thing you can do is to evaluate your landscape. Ask yourself if there are areas that can receive less irrigation water. Normally our native trees and shrubs can survive without regular watering, but so many interesting introduced species are not water hardy. Using drip irrigation or soaker hoses in those areas that need more water is a way to keep your plants alive while using less water.

Lawns are often the area of

our landscape that receives the most water. Cut back to one application of about a half an inch of water each week. This is enough to keep the root system alive, but the grass will turn brown. When fall rains return the lawn will recover more rapidly than if you stopped all watering.

Don't put in new perennial plants this winter and spring. New plants don't have time to establish a strong root system before summer and will require regular irrigation to stay alive.

Minimize the size of your vegetable garden for water needy plants. Focus on producing vegetables like potatoes and squash for dry farming with no irrigation. This can be done with early planting, wider spacing between plants, mulching



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soil surfaces and improving soil moisture holding capacity with compost and biochar. Coming out of a very dry winter allows for early planted spring crops that

can make the majority of their growth before the summer heat.

If you want to discuss good gardening practices in a dry year, you should attend our "Spring Into Gardening" seminar on Feb. 24 at Umpqua Community College, Bonnie Ford Nursing and Science Center. The seminar is a series of gardening classes that begin at 8:30am and go until 4pm. During the day you will be able to take four classes for a total of \$25. The garden class topics range from growing berry crops, vegetable gardening, use of water-wise plants, how to

build great soil, mistakes to avoid in your garden, container gardening, gardening in low rainfall years and all about tools. We will also have classes on food preservation and wine and beer making.

To register for this program and make your class selections, go online to the Douglas County OSU Extension webpage at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/douglas/> and scroll down to "Spring into Gardening 2018 Workshops." Registrations and payments are due by Feb. 22. Go online to <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/douglas/horticulture> to find more information about gardening in a dry year.

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