

December 2025



THE GRAPEVINE

OSU - Columbia County Master Gardener™ Program

505 N. Columbia River Hwy, St. Helens OR 97051

Phone: 503-397-3462

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/master-gardener-volunteer-program>

OMGA Newsletter: <https://omga.org/newsletter/>



Monthly Meetings

Executive Board Meeting

1st Thursday each month, 10:30 AM
via Zoom. For link to join, contact
colcmg.secretary@gmail.com

Chapter Meeting

4th Thursday each month, 6:30 PM
Extension Office

BugNutz Meeting - NEW TIME

2nd Wednesday each month, 5:30 PM
Extension Office

Seed Saving Group

2nd Thursday each month, 5:30 PM
St. Helens Public Library

Link to the OSU Online Resources and
Publications - Searchable Directory:

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/>



2025 Executive Board

- Katherine Johnson, President
- Larry Byrum, Past-President
- Dennis Snyder, Vice President
- Gail Martyn, Secretary/ Treasurer
- LaVina Patterson, Historian
- Karen Harte, OMGA Rep.
- Peggy Crisp, OMGA Alt. Rep.

It has been decided to have a newsletter dedicated to just our membership and local organizations. This newsletter will be published once a month and will be edited by the President of the Columbia County Master Gardener Association (CCMGA) and the Master Gardener Program Coordinator. Please send any news items, events, articles, pictures, etc. to Gail Martyn by the 25th of every month at colcmg.secretary@gmail.com

The President's Corner

The gardens are donning their frosty PJ's

Well, folks, December's rolled in like an old friend bringing chilly nights and quiet days. The garden's tucked in tighter than Grandma's quilt — with mulch for a cozy blanket and leaves piled high like soft pillows. The only thing stirring' might be the odd brave weed, but we don't pay 'em no mind this time of year.

This month's for sittin' back on the porch with a warm cup of cocoa, dreamin' of next spring's flowers and veggies. Maybe you're thumbin' through seed catalogs like me, makin' plans that'll change come March — and that's just fine. Heck, maybe it's time to treat yourself to a shiny new trowel or a pair of goat skin gloves to brighten those chilly days.

So, here's to December — the garden's takin' a well-earned nap, and so am I. Let it slumber and get ready for the dance of dirt and leaves that is just around the corner.

Katherine Johnson, President



From your Treasurer

2025 Financial Audit: We now have a complete Audit Committee.

Reimbursements: If you make approved purchases and expect reimbursement, get your dated receipts to the Treasurer within 90 days of purchase and *prior to December 31* as Board Policy requires. If you have the ability to scan your receipts or take a picture of them, that's even better. Just send the PDF or picture file as an attachment to

colcmg.treasurer@gmail.com.

BugNutz Meetings—A New Time

Second Wednesdays, 5:30 pm, Extension classroom

BugNutz meetings are now rescheduled to a new time. We will begin our meetings at 5:30 pm. I say begin, because we are a learning group and spend most of our time appreciating insects we collect. It is not a highly structured group. We formatted the meeting after attending entomology group meetings with other Master Gardeners around the western part of the state for several years. (This is where we really learned the most!) At those meetings, people brought samples from clients that they, either needed help identifying, or had identified, and wanted to share their knowledge with the rest of us. Traditionally, BugNutz collect insects that they want to learn more about. We identify them and add them to the displays which we curate.

In addition to identification, BugNutz also visit schools when invited, make presentations to other groups, and attend tabling events such as the Kiwanis Daybreakers' Children's Fair this past Halloween. Participation is completely up to volunteers, but all Master Gardeners are welcome.

With the clinics now opening, the BugNutz have been thinking of ways we might assist and help educate ourselves and the community. Please join us, in only to satisfy your own curiosity. -- *Debi Brimacombe*

Spring Garden Fair

May 2, 2026 ♦ 9 AM - 3 PM

Columbia County Fairgrounds Pavilion



2026 Spring Garden Fair

Our repurposed garden book drive was a success at our Spring Garden Fair this year. *We are looking to do it again!*

Books were displayed and made available by donation at our CCMGA table, proceeds went to our chapter.

You can bring your books to our Chapter meeting's (beginning in January) or contact Karen at colcmg.omgarep@gmail.com.

Growing Luffa's

This past year, Russ & I decided to try growing "Luffa gourds" in the demo garden. It is also spelled Loofah.

It is grown, not only to eat, but for making organic sponges. They taste like a squash when less than 6" long. We tried eating one. To me it tasted like a cross between a zucchini and a green bean. If you try to eat them when they are too big, they are fibrous. When it reaches full maturity, the interior skeleton dries out, making it become an organic sponge that is useful as a bathing sponge or one for doing dishes.

Luffas require a long growing season. 150-200 days. This requires you to start plants indoors. They are very sensitive to shock and will die so care must be taken when transplanting to not disturb the roots. Shock could not only stall them out a month, it could kill them. We purchased starts this year.

They are fussy and sensitive. The air temp needs to be about 70* for hardening them off. Small plants need protection from cold nights.

They need full sun! They need consistent watering. They don't like to dry out and they don't like overwatering. They want 3" of compost before planting and they want balanced 4-4-4 fertilizer. We now know, that 2 months before the first frost date we need to pinch off any flowers and small luffas, so that the energy can go to the maturing sponges.

So how did we do with this project? We had 14 luffas. We had 6 get to a large size, 3 of them became mushy. Three are still drying and I feel hopeful about them. The rest of the gourds didn't get ripe enough or large enough to cure before freezing. To properly cure them, they are supposed to stay on the vine to dry for as long as possible.

They must be harvested before the first freeze. Freezing will destroy them.

Next year we will start the plants early on a heat mat indoors & hope for a nice long hot summer. Ha, ha, ha! Fingers crossed we will have some seed to share in January.

We hope you all have a Merry Christmas! - Cassie & Russ Hall



How Did Roses Get Their Thorns?

From *The New York Times*

August 2024 by Carl Zimmer

Submitted by Katherine Johnson

The prickles as botanists call them, evolved in roses and other plants thanks to a single gene, a new study found. There is no rose without thorns, the old saying goes. But to botanists, there is no rose with thorns: The spiky outgrowths of a rose stem are called “prickles” and are biologically distinct from the stiff, woody thorns of other plants.

Prickles are a remarkable example of evolution repeating itself. In the past 400 million years, plants evolved them 28 different times. Roses grow prickles on their stems, whereas others grow them on their leaves or their fruits. Grasses grow tiny prickles on the flowering tufts. *Solanum atropurpureum*, a wild relative of potatoes that grows in Brazil, has prickles so nasty that they have earned it two fearsome nicknames: “Purple Devil” and “Malevolence.”

A new study published on Thursday in *Science* sheds some light on how plants evolved prickles from scratch to many times: Over and over again, each species took advantage of a single gene. The discovery opens up the possibility of altering the DNA of plants to remove their prickles, making some wild plants easier to grow as crops.

Zachary Lippman, a plant geneticist at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, got curious about prickles as he studied a group of crops that includes potatoes, tomatoes and eggplants. While the crops are all prickly-free, some of their wild relatives are covered in the little daggers. Early farmers must have bred the prickles out of the wild plants as they started using them for crops.

“Who wants to cultivate eggplants that you can eat if there these prickles poking you all the time?” he asked. The loss of prickles let Dr. Lippman and his colleagues to wonder how the spikes had evolved in the first place. It’s likely that prickles arose in many plants as a defense against animals that would devour them. But prickles can serve other purposes, too. Some plants use them to hook onto surfaces while climbing. Some wild grasses use them to hook their seeds onto the fur of passing animals.

Charles Darwin recognized that the same trait can evolve many times over in the history of life – a process known as convergence. Bats and birds, for example, both evolved wings for flying. But they took different evolutionary paths to the same destination: Bat wings evolved as membranes that grew between their fingers, whereas birds evolved wings made of feathers. To understand how plants converged on prickles, Dr. Lippman and his colleagues crossed one variety of domesticated eggplants with its wild, prickly relative. Some of the hybrids had lots of prickles, while others had none.

Comparing the DNA of the plants, the scientists found that a specific variant of a gene called LOG was only carried by plants with prickles. Botanists had long known that LOG genes help produce a hormone that signals plant cells to grow. But in the wild eggplant, a special version of LOG allowed prickles to grow.

Dr. Lippman ran the same experiment on two other kinds of eggplants, crossing them with their wild relatives. Each time the researchers discovered a LOG variant was responsible for prickles in the wild plants. “We found that it was the same gene that had independently accumulated mutations in all three lineages to lose these prickles,” Dr Lippmann said.

It might seem puzzling that mutating a LOG gene could take away prickles without harming the eggplant as a whole. After all, LOG genes are known to be essential for plants growing at all. It turns out that plants have evolved many copies of LOG genes over millions of years. Dr Lippman and his colleagues speculated that one copy of the LOG gene evolved in the wild ancestors of eggplants to make prickles, while the other versions went on with their original job of helping the plants grow.

He and his colleagues wondered if LOG genes were important to prickles in other plants as well. In dozens of species, they discovered evidence of the same link. Blocking a LOG gene in roses, for example, interfered with the development of prickles. “We can make these giant prickles turn into tiny little buds,” Dr Lippman said. The new findings could help scientists transform wild plants into domesticated, Fr Lippmann said. He and his colleagues tested this possibility on a wild Australian plant sometimes called the desert raisin. The sweet fruit is normally prickly. But after the researchers snipped the LOG gene from its DNA, it became free of prickles. Vivian Irish, an evolutionary biologist at Yale University was not involved in the new study, said it showed that convergence can happen in a way that Darwin did not envision. Each time prickles arose, plants did not evolve an entirely new way to make them. They just borrowed the same gene again and again. Innovations in many cases might simply reflect reusing old genes in new ways, Dr Irish said.

Let's Stay Certified and Keep Growing Together

Thank you so much for the time, care, and heart you bring to your work as OSU Master Gardener™ Volunteers. The impact you make whether through answering questions, teaching others, or simply sharing your passion, ripples out in ways that truly matter. We're so grateful to have you as part of this community. As we look ahead, we'd love for all of you to stay connected and continue sharing your gifts through the OSU Master Gardener Program.

To do that, a quick reminder: in order to stay active in public-facing volunteer roles, it's important to maintain your Certified Master Gardener status. Certification is renewed each calendar year and helps ensure you're eligible to proudly wear the badge and represent OSU Extension Master Gardener program in outreach programs.

Recertification is also our way of recognizing your commitment and celebrating everything you contribute. We want to be sure you get the appreciation and recognition you've more than earned! To stay certified, all you need to do annually is:

- Complete the required forms
- Contribute at least 20 hours of volunteer service
- Complete 10 hours of continuing education

This helps ensure we're all staying current and continuing to grow in our knowledge—so we can keep offering reliable, research-based support to gardeners and communities.

Once you're up to date, you'll receive a sticker for your badge to show that you're certified for the current year. Please log your hours in the VRS system here: https://vrs.osumg.org/sec_Login/

If you run into any hiccups logging hours or accessing your account, please don't hesitate to reach out. I would be more than happy to help. Just be sure to submit everything by October 31st.

Thanks again for being such a valuable part of the program. Your dedication, generosity, and spirit are what make the Master Gardener community so special—and we're lucky to have you with us. Please reach out to Janhvi Pandey for any questions or concerns.

Janhvi Pandey

Assistant Professor (Practice) -Extension Horticulture

Oregon State University

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Help OSU Extension Columbia County Improve Gardening & Small Farm Support!

OSU Extension Columbia County is working to better support gardeners and small farm growers, and we need your input!

We're conducting a needs assessment survey to understand what resources, education, and assistance would be most helpful to you.

Why Your Input Matters:

OSU Extension provides research-based gardening and farming support through workshops, technical assistance, and community programs. To ensure we're focusing on what truly benefits community, we need to hear from you—whether you're a backyard or indoor gardener or running a small farm. If you grow food, flowers, or houseplants—indoors or outdoors—we want to know what challenges you face and what support would help you succeed. And if you own or work on a small farm, your insights will help us develop better resources for local producers and growers.

How to Participate:

We have two separate surveys—one for gardeners and one for small farm growers/producers. Each is only two pages and takes about two minutes to complete. If you do both, that's great, please don't hesitate to fill out both surveys for us!

Gardeners Survey Link- <https://beav.es/Nqs> or scan



Small Farm Survey Link- <https://beav.es/Nqe> or scan



Your feedback will directly shape and update the programs and support we offer. Thank you for taking the time to share your inputs—we appreciate your help in strengthening our gardening and farming community!

Please reach out if you have any questions/concerns to-

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[Gardening, Landscape & Small Farms Resources](#)



BECOME A MASTER GARDENER™ VOLUNTEER!

Apply now
for 2026
training!

Oregon State University Extension Master Gardener volunteers are neighbors, friends, and family whom you can go to for garden advice that is grounded in science and locally relevant.

We are garden educators and on-the-ground community scientists.

Master Gardeners receive extensive training and complete a university-taught course in topics including botany, pest identification, soil management, and diagnosing plant problems, to name a few.

Let's
talk
plants!



In person classes will run from Jan. 20th - May 5th, 2026 in St. Helens, OR. Classes are taught by OSU Extension faculty, experienced Master Gardener Volunteers, and other local experts.

Volunteer hours are a key learning experience in becoming an OSU Master Gardener. In addition to completing 40 hours of class time, new Master Gardener volunteers are required to complete 40 hours of volunteer service in approved projects. All volunteer experiences are carefully selected to help you learn and engage with the community, including demonstration gardens, farmers market plant clinics, public gardening classes, and more.

Cost: \$100, with few scholarships available

Interested? Find out more and apply here by 1/12/2026!

Questions?
Contact Janhvi Pandey
503-397-3462
janhvi.pandey@oregonstate.edu



<https://beav.es/4xw>

OSU Extension Service prohibits discrimination in all its programs, services, activities, and materials. Accommodation requests related to a disability should be made by 01/01/26 to Janhvi Pandey at 503-397-3462 or janhvi.pandey@oregonstate.edu. This publication will be made available in an accessible alternative format upon request.



**Oregon State
University**

- **Board meetings:** 10:30 AM, 1st Thursday every month, via Zoom
- **Chapter meeting:** 6:30 PM, Thursday, January 29, Extension office (no Dec Chapter meeting)
- **BugNutz meetings:** 5:30 PM, 2nd Wednesday, Extension office
- **Seed Saving Group:** 5:30 PM, 2nd Thursday, St. Helens Public Library
- **Demo Garden work parties:** will begin in April 2026
- **2026 Spring Garden Fair:** Saturday, May 2, 9:00 – 3:00, Fairgrounds Pavilion
- **Bottle drive:** Monday-Thursday, 9 AM – 1 PM, St. Helens Columbia Pacific Food Bank, Donation door
- **Bottle drive:** Saturdays, 10 AM – 1 PM, St. Helens High School parking lot, next to the mural;
December 13, January 3, February 21, March 14, April 24, May 16, June 13
- **Full list of OSU events:** <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/events?page=0>

Useful Links

- **Garden Future:** click [here](#)
- **2025 Level Up Series:** click [here](#)
- **Guide to Being a Master Gardener Volunteer:** click [here](#).
- **Electronic Volunteer Hour reporting system:** mgvrs.extension.oregonstate.edu Report by October 31
- **Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA):** <https://omga.org>
- **The Gardener's Pen newsletter:** <https://omga.org/newsletter/>
- **Facebook page:** [Columbia County Master Gardeners](#) (1,400 Followers)
- **Monthly Garden Calendars:** click [here](#)
- **Columbia County OSU Extension Newsletter:** click [here](#)
- **Executive Board email accounts to date:** copy and paste these links into your **To:** box
 - President: colcmg.president@gmail.com
 - Past President: colcmg.pastpresident@gmail.com
 - Vice President: colcmg.vicepresident@gmail.com
 - Secretary: colcmg.secretary@gmail.com
 - Treasurer: colcmg.treasurer@gmail.com
 - OMGA Rep: colcmg.omgarep@gmail.com

Columbia County Master Gardener™ Association
Board Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2025

President Kathy Johnson Presiding

A virtual board meeting was called to order at 10:35 AM on Thursday, October 2, 2025, via Zoom conference call. The president was in the chair and the secretary was present. Others present: Larry and LaVina making a quorum. Cassie and Janhvi joined as guests.

Housekeeping

- **Secretary's Report:** The September 4 minutes were reviewed. LaVina's motion to accept as presented was seconded by Larry and passed.
- **Treasurer's Report:** The September 30 Account Balances, the October 1 Budget YTD and the October 1 credit union screen shot were reviewed. Checking difference between the screen shot and the Account Balances report is due to outstanding checks. Access to e-statements has been lost again. No to changing banks. A check to Linda Snyder for \$30.16 written in June has not cleared yet. She has a deposit slip for that check. Will void it if not cleared by December 31. President suggested asking the CU about it. Larry's motion to accept as presented was seconded by LaVina and passed.
- **Correspondence:** None.

Committee Reports

- **OMGA Rep:** No report.
- **Speakers:** No report.
- **Fairgrounds Garden:** Will pick more produce on Monday.
- **Community Gardens:** No report.
- **BugNutz:** will be at the Children's Fair at McBride Elementary on October 25 and the SBWC Native Plant sale on October 11.
- **Seed to Supper:** Will meet this month. Will have several locations again next year.
- **Spring Fair 2026:** Larry was asked to have plant lists for the November Board meeting. Cassie confirmed that she would coordinate the Raffle.

Old Business

- **Board elections:** Zelda called all 2025 members. These are the folks who have volunteered for 2026: Vice President, Dennis Synder; Treasurer, Gail Martyn; Historian, Julie Polkowski; and OMGA Alternate Rep., Katrina Klift. Thank you all for stepping up. Will be in-person at the October Chapter meeting because we will have an uncontested ballot.
- **Zoom renewal:** Zoom no longer offers discounts through TechSoup. They now use *goodstack* for confirmation of non-profit status. The treasurer has applied twice and both times received emails saying we do not qualify. There is no way to print an application or verify what information or documents were supplied. There is no listed phone number. Zoom will cost \$159 without discount in 2026.

New Business

- **2026 dues:** Karen confirmed that the 2026 OMGA dues will remain \$5. The Treasurer recommended keeping our dues \$15.
- **2026 Proposed budget:** The budget was reviewed line-by-line.
 - **Clinics or Fairs:** removed because we haven't budgeted it for years.
 - **Community Outreach:** added \$100 for **School Project** (tentative).
 - **Demo Garden:** The bench by the liberty tree needs to be replaced. It was suggested that they apply for an OMGA grant for this expense.
 - **Spring Fair:** plant purchase will be increased by 1,464 plants from 2025

Action: Larry's motion to approve with changes was seconded by LaVina and passed.

- **2026 meetings:** Gail's motion to continue Board meetings via Zoom was seconded by Larry and passed.
- **Seed Library letterhead request:** A sample letter was reviewed. All agreed that this sentence should be removed: "We are more than glad to pay shipping costs". The sentiment was that if they are willing to donate seeds, they are willing to absorb the cost of shipping. They should also provide a copy of the letter before it is sent. Larry's motion to grant permission with these stipulations was seconded by LaVina and passed.
- **Grapevine distribution:** The St. Helens Library would like to post it on the Seed Library page. No one raised any objection. All agreed it should also be posted on our Facebook page.
- **Graduation:** Many possible venues were suggested. Janhvi will check them out. Two members will receive 20-year Longevity Awards. from OMGA.

For the good of the order

- **Picnic:** Dennis agreed to coordinate the 2026 Annual Picnic.

Motion to Adjourn

At 12:08 PM LaVina's motion to adjourn was seconded by Larry and passed.

Gail Martyn, Secretary/Treasurer