GARDEN notes

FALL 2024

Northwest Horticultural Society

Eleutherococcus senticosus
Image by Richie Steffen

The author's pollinator garden in May.

What I Learned About Pollinator Gardens

Text and Images by Devon Burns (unless otherwise noted)

I recently embarked on a new path within my horticulture journey. I decided it wasn't enough to just know all the plants (don't worry, I still don't know them all . . .), but I also wanted to know more about the pollinators and other non-human neighbors who were using those plants. So, I took the Pollinator Steward Certification class through Pollinator Partnership. I learned so much during the class, and I wanted to share some of that information with my fellow gardeners and naturalists in the Northwest Horticultural Society community.

Doom, gloom, and hope. I won't spend too much time dwelling on the negative; the research is out there and easy to find. So, I will just briefly mention that there are many reasons pollinators are struggling today, like the use of pesticides, habitat loss to development, disease, parasites, and a changing climate. But there is hope, and the action steps you can take begin in your very own garden. Having pollinators in your garden will help your flowering plants reproduce; and, if you are a fruit or veggie gardener, you'll have a reliable way of pollinating your crops. These individual benefits plug into the greater whole of helping three quarters of the world's flowering plants and one third of the world's food crops continue to be pollinated. Every little bit helps.

Bumblebee action on Lupinus cv.

Bumblebee closeup on Lupinus cv.

Pollinators aren't just bees. Pollinators are a diverse group of animals including bees, birds, butterflies, moths, bats, hummingbirds, flies, and everything in between. There are also so many different types of bees! In fact, there are over 4,000 native bee species in North America. And, while they are an important pollinator, honeybees aren't native to North America and are actually considered livestock. I found in my own native plant pollinator garden that I had at least one of every type of bee local to my area; there were around 13 different types of bees that I never even knew existed. It's worth planting a pollinator garden just to see the cool, shiny green bees buzzing about.

Pollinators need food, shelter, and a place to raise their young. Okay, so I do love a good "pollinator garden" filled with wonderful perennials like *Echinacea*, *Helenium*, *Rudbeckia*, and *Coreopsis*. But where these gardens fall short for me is that those plants don't always support our West Coast native pollinators. We're planting ornamental plants and thus limiting our ability to support our own local pollinators. The honeybees and generalist pollinators will be very happy with the abundance of nectar, but the gained aesthetics don't necessarily provide a working system for native insects to thrive. Many pollinators have co-evolved with specific plants. I think we've all heard about milkweed and the Monarch butterfly; the same concept applies to a whole host of pollinating insects. Another thing to consider is that some native, solitary bees don't travel very far—they may live their entire lives just in your yard! Compare that to the honeybee, which can travel up to several miles to find food and then return to the hive, so they have very different needs.

Western tiger swallowtail butterfly (ALAN SCHMIERER, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons)

We love blooms all season long and so do our native pollinators. In fact, it's critical that plants in a pollinator garden provide three seasons of blooms during spring, summer, and well into fall. Another thing we have in common

with pollinators is we love to see a wide diversity of plants in our gardens.

Pollinators need diversity in plant structure and flowers. For example, a combination of native woody plants, herbaceous plants, and grasses provides different stem, leaf, and flower structures for native pollinator habitat and feeding. For herbaceous plants, consider diversity of the flower structure like flower color, shape, and odor. Many of us are avid plant collectors; so, perhaps, we can set our collecting sights on obtaining a vast amount of different flowers, shapes, stems, and more!

But I'm afraid of getting stung! If you are allergic to stinging insects, you'll want to consider your own health and safety before embarking on your pollinator garden journey. For the rest of us, most native bees aren't aggressive, and it is perfectly ok to have them buzzing about. In fact, only half of the world's bee population is even capable of stinging and only female bees can sting. So, please don't confuse those annoying yellow jackets ruining your summer barbecue with our non-aggressive native bees.

But, you say, pollinator gardens can look messy, especially in the winter! There is always tension in a garden between how things look and how things work. It depends on the goal of the garden. In providing pollinator habitat, I would ask you to remind yourself that you are providing shelter, food, and a place to raise the young of our fellow insect neighbors. You're creating a system! So, leave the leaves as they fall and leave the seed heads for the birds. If you just can't stand it, there are maintenance techniques you can use to find a balance between having a tidy pollinator garden and still maintaining the integrity of the system. You may cut long stemmed perennials back to varying heights starting as low as 6 inches and up. You can also use the Chop & Drop method where you cut back the stems of perennials and either leave them as they lay or bundle them up with some jute twine and place the bundles at the back of your garden against the soil. This allows overwintering bees and insects to still burrow into the stem cavities or into the soil for the winter.

***Iris tenax* – Washigton native (Richie Steffen)**

Bee on *Helenium* cv. (Jeangagnon, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons)

So, what can you do to help your local pollinators survive and thrive?

- Plant native plants. Even if it's just a few to start. You can plant them in the ground or in a container on a balcony. It's okay to start small.
- Combine plants with different bloom times for a full season of food.
- Plant lots of different types of native plants to attract lots of different types of pollinators.
- Do not use pesticides in your garden.

***Solidago* sp. – Washigton native (Rick Peterson)**

***Symphyotrichum subspicatum* – Washigton native (Richie Steffen)**

You are not alone in trying something new. Here are some resources to help you on your pollinator garden creation journey:

- **https://pollinator.org/**
- **https://homegrownnationalpark.org/**
- **https://xerces.org/**
- **https://www.usda.gov/peoples-garden/pollinators**
- **https://northwestmeadowscapes.com/pages/planting-advice**
- **Native Plant Primer books for each region of the U.S.**

- Resist the urge to "clean" your pollinator garden—leave the leaves, the seed heads, and the stems. When things are looking really messy in say, February, I like to remember that a pollinator garden is a living, breathing system that is shared with my pollinator neighbors.

Devon Burns is professional horticulturist and Program Manager for the Hardy Fern Foundation as well as an NHS member.

Osmanthus heterophyllus 'Variegatus'

Osmanthus heterophyllus 'Variegatus'

Aucuba japonica 'Mr. Goldstrike'

PLANTING COLOR FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Text and Images by Richie Steffen

I love using greens and branches from the garden to decorate over the holidays. There is something so satisfying to be able to harvest a bit of beauty in November and December to bring inside. As the last of the deciduous trees and shrubs lose their leaves, the broadleaf evergreens and conifers come to the forefront of our gardens and beg to have a few snips taken to brighten the holidays.

My favorite go-to group for holiday greens are the broadleaf evergreens. The diversity, color and texture of this group is unparalleled, and so many will hold up extremely well in a vase. A traditional favorite has been hollies, but I find the same joy in *Osmanthus*. Nearly all *Osmanthus* will last well as a cut stem, and they can give a similar holly look with a softer less prickly, spiney leaf. One of the best is *Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Variegatus'. It is a robust grower, so there is always a little extra to harvest. If you prefer green, plant *Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Purpurea' or *Osmanthus* × *fortunei*, both have dark shiny green leaves that are handsome indoors.

Aucuba is another beautiful choice. Although some consider it mundane, it is plentiful in the nurseries and reliable in the garden. Over the last several years, spectacular new cultivars have become more available providing stunning variegated foliage and a greater range in leaf forms. 'Mr. Goldstrike' is an old standard that has attractive yellow speckled leaves, but two cultivars that are a step up are 'MonHinsuru' SUNNY DAZE® and 'Suruga Benten'. Both have denser growth with smaller more rounded leaves. If you prefer dark green foliage, 'Rozannie' is another standard variety that has a similar compact habit and the rounder leaves of SUNNY DAZE® and 'Suruga Benten' but

lacks the variegation. *Aucuba* stems will last for weeks if the water is changed regularly in the vase. The stems can last so long that they will often root and can be transplanted to pots outside in the spring.

I also don't mind a sprig or two of *Camellia japonica* as a cut, but it is sometimes hard to avoid accidentally cutting off shoots loaded with flower buds for spring. These buds will not force well early in winter, so it seems a waste. I would prefer to snip a bit more of my camellias in February or early March when the buds are more likely to open to reveal the lovely flowers.

We should not forget about our native broadleaf evergreens. Salal, *Gaultheria shallon*, is a popular cut green for the floral industry. I grew up knowing this plant as "lemon leaf" as it was often called in my aunt and uncle's floral shop in Steelton, Pennsylvania. As a young boy, I had no idea of how intimately I would know this plant in the future. When I think of those sprigs tucked among the chrysanthemums and carnations, I can only think those branches were a long way from home! One of the nice things about salal is that there is always a little bit that needs to be pruned back as well. The other native I find essential for the vase is *Vaccinium ovatum*, evergreen huckleberry. The small dark green, shiny leaves remain fresh looking for well over a week in a vase and there are always an extra bit that can be clipped to bring inside.

One of the surprise groups of broadleaf evergreens that I have enjoyed for holiday greenery are several Southern Hemisphere evergreen shrubs. Many of these have small to medium-sized foliage and have added unusual leaf forms and colors for seasonal arrangements. Initially, I added these simply as a way of pruning these plants to enhance their shape, but now they are on the regular cut list and have proven to be long-lasting and lovely. The first of this group that I harvested was a mature plant of *Callistemon* 'Woodlander's Hardy Red'. The long stems covered in narrow thin leaves is quite attractive. Stems that have flowered in the past also have unusual decorative seed pods that cling tightly to the stem. This shrub is on the edge of its hardiness and has been knocked to the ground over the last two years; but, during milder years, it is a gem in the garden and vase. Our *Grevillea victoriae*, one of the most reliably hardy in the genus, was also one of the first Southern Hemisphere shrubs that I harvested. The leaves are similar to a willow leaf, but shorter and a bit more stubby and are

***Aucuba* 'Rozannie'**

***Aucuba* 'Rozannie'**

Camellia japonica

Vaccinium ovatum

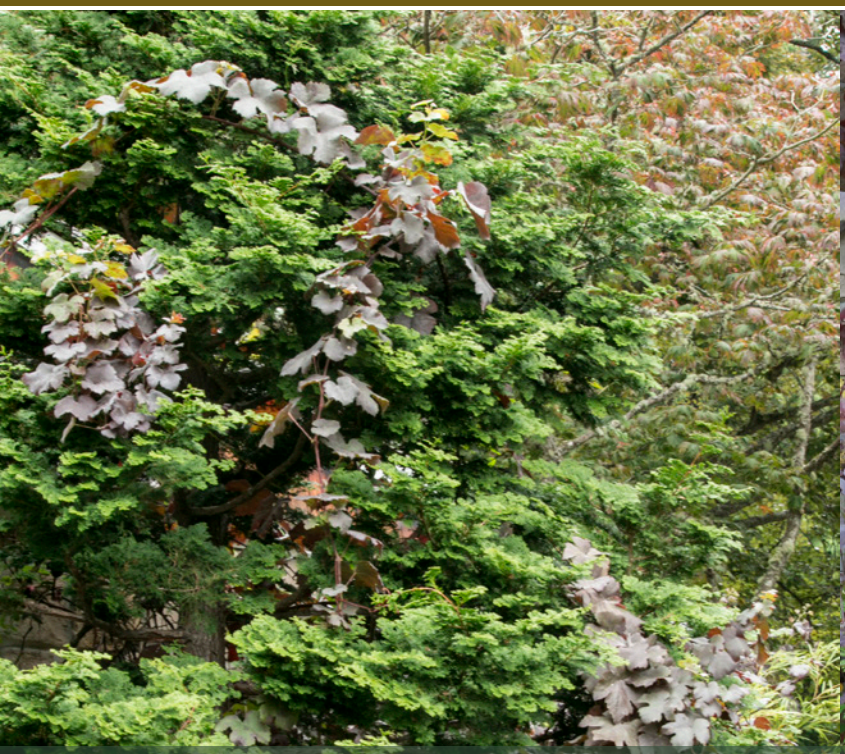
Grevillea victoriae

Leptospermum grandiflorum

long-lasting for floral arrangements indoors. As an added bonus, many have silvery white foliage. One of my favorites to cut is *Olearia* × *oleifolia* (originally purchased under the name *Olearia* × *mollis*). The foliage of this cultivar is tidy and clean in appearance and silvery green on top of the leaf while bright white on the underside. This shrub readily sprouts from old wood so any pruning I do only results in a fuller shrub next year. Other species and selections are also good for cuts, but some can be rather tender in the garden. *Olearia illicifolia*, *Olearia* × *haastii* and *Olearia* × *mollis* 'Zennorensis' have been some of the hardiest at the Miller Garden.

The hardiest of the *Leptospermum*, often called tea trees, also offer silvery foliage along with tiny leaves on long, thin graceful stems. I have cut many branches off of the three large plants of *Leptospermum grandiflorum* over the last 15 years. This species has been reliably hardy at the Miller Garden, only occasionally partially defoliating during the coldest of winters. The only issue I have now is that the best branches for cuts are now too high to easily reach! There are a few other species and selections that have been hardy in the region and all make excellent additions to holiday arrangements.

Conifers are a classic for the holidays. Pines and firs seem like a perfect choice, although I rarely take these from the garden. Both of these conifers regenerate poorly from a cut branch, and it is easy to disfigure the shape. The best-looking greens are also generally from the best-looking part of the plant, and it is hard to take much off without it starting to show. I will skip these for *Chamaecyparis*, *Cryptomeria* and *Thuja*. All three of these can sprout from cut branches, as long as you do not cut back too far. I love the feathery scaly foliage of Hinoki cypress, *Chamaecyparis*



Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Gracilis'

Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Spiralis'

obtusa. Selections like 'Gracilis', 'Well's Select' and older plants of 'Nana Gracilis' are robust enough to provide greens every year.

Cryptomeria japonica, the Japanese cedar, is one the most useful greens I use. Japanese cedar can regrow new shoots even if a large branch is removed. I often use the holidays as an excuse to open the plant up some to get more light into the center to encourage a fuller look. The golden foliage of the cultivar 'Sekkan-Sugi' is texturally beautiful as well as colorful. The twisted needles of 'Spiralis' can add an unusual look to a holiday arrangement. If you are a lover of the odd or like modern radical floral design, you must plant either 'Aurcarioides' or 'Dacyidioides'. Both of these cultivars grow with long, thin wiry stems and have the longest and best stems for floral design, if they are cut back regularly.

Not all conifers make good greens for seasonal décor. Avoid hemlock (*Tsuga*), spruce (*Picea*) and true cedars (*Cedrus*). All three of these drop their needles quickly and are poor performers in a vase. They are best enjoyed in the garden. Fortunately, there are several dwarf cultivars of all three of these genera, and they would perform admirably as an outdoor container plant.

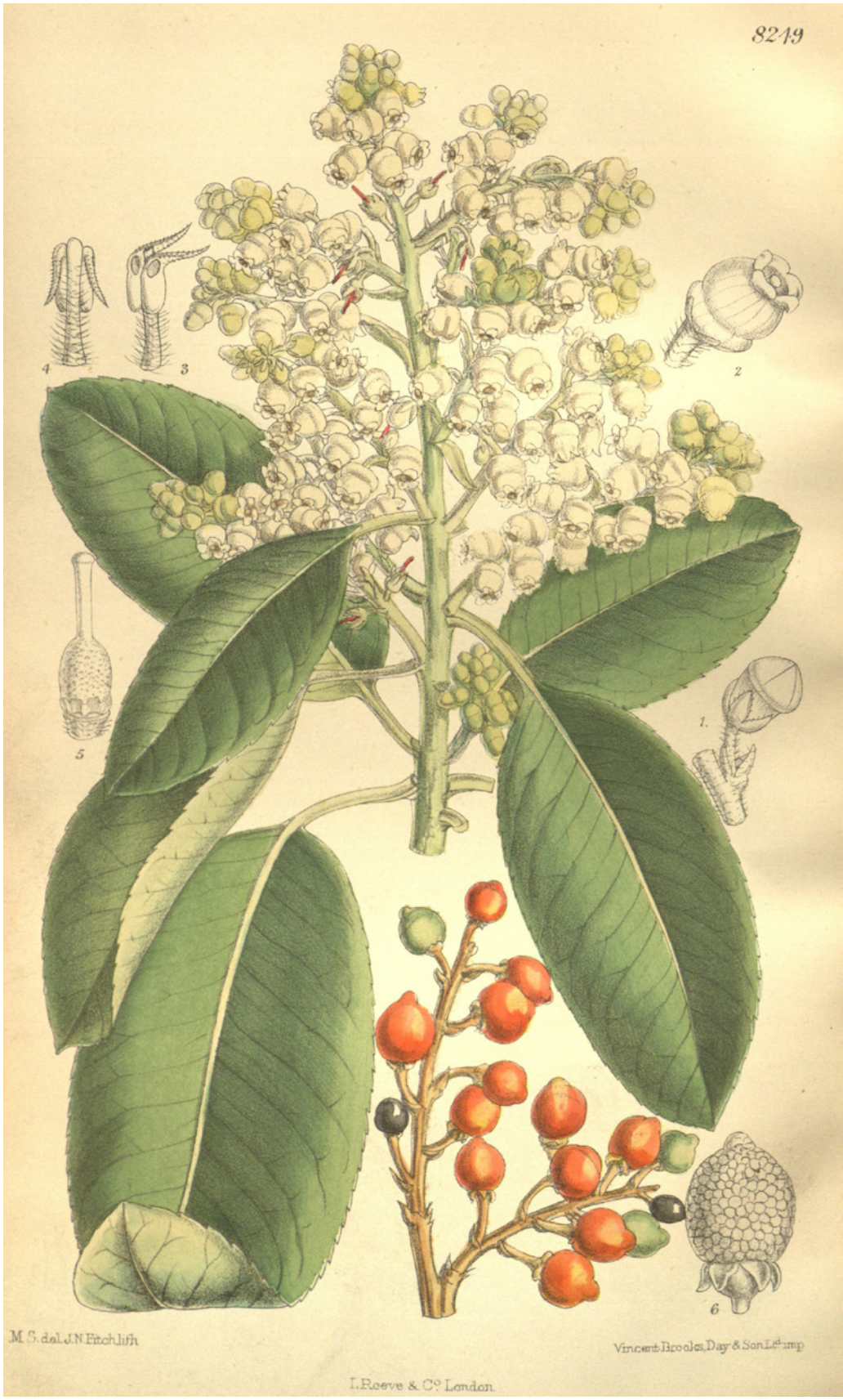
Richie Steffen is Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and long-time member of NHS.

Cryptomeria japonica 'Spiralis'

Cryptomeria japonica 'Knaptonensis'

Arbutus menziesii: Our Iconic Madrone Tree

Kym Pokorny



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ROSEBURG, Ore. — With distinctive peeling bark and statuesque form madrone trees play an iconic role in the Pacific Northwest landscape. Whether they are growing at the northern end of their range in British Columbia or south to San Diego, madrones are the type of tree that you forever recognize once you see one.

Madrones (*Arbutus menziesii)* aren't as attractive, though, when diseases cause tip dieback, cankers on the trunk and, sometimes death. About 20 years ago some madrones in Washington — both in home landscapes and in the wild — showed signs of disease. Soon the problem appeared in Oregon, along the coast and inland to the Rogue and Willamette valleys and up into the foothills.

"Madrones are known for being difficult to grow so people were glad to hear from experts."

Over the years the diseases waxed and waned. But in 2022 Alicia Christiansen, Oregon State University Forestry and Natural Resources Extension agent and associate professor of practice in the College of Forestry, began to get calls.

Lots of calls.

"It was a wet spring, perfect for foliar diseases to pop up," Christiansen said. "People saw the damage and got concerned and started asking a lot of questions. It got me thinking that I should do a workshop. We needed to get education out about this tree and its health issues."

Interest was confirmed when 70 people showed up for All About Arbutus: A workshop covering Pacific madrone from A to Z. Terry Nightingale drove the distance from Seattle to Roseburg because he'd been to one presentation in Washington and wanted to delve deeper into the subject. He has an overgrown hill at the back of his urban lot that's made up of clay soil with a deeper level that's always moist. He'd like to plant madrones there.

"They are really beautiful; one of the trees that really stand out in the Northwest," said Nightingale, who is a member of the advocate group Arbutus ARME, an organization that actively advocates for madrones. "They give me a feeling of home. It's my fantasy to have *Arbutus* there, madrones up there keeping the slope from sliding down."

That could be a problem. Madrones are notoriously difficult to propagate, and they demand well-draining soil, said Dave Shaw, OSU Forestry and Natural Resources Extension forest health specialist and professor in the College of Forestry. Much of the damage comes from *Phytophthora* — a species of common microorganisms, one of which caused the potato blight in Ireland in the 1840s when 1 million people died and another 1 million fled.

Phytophthora disease appears worldwide and is the number one disease of nursery crops in the United States. The list of species affected by the Phytophthora disease is long and includes popular plants like rhododendron, daphne, dogwood, camellia and apple. Madrone is also on the list.

Joining Christiansen and Shaw at the workshop were Marianne Elliott, a plant pathologist at Washington State University, and Michael Yadrick from Seattle City Parks. Elliott presented a segment on Phytophthora — whose

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name means "plant destroyer" — which is most common in irrigated areas such as urban settings and irrigated nursery stock. But it's made itself at home in the wild, as well. The number of diseases that affect madrone is lengthy and the individual cases are difficult to identify. Symptoms appear as leaf spotting, twig dieback and cankers on the trunk.

"The more we use molecular techniques to identify fungi we realize that field diagnosis is problematic," Shaw said. "We need to gather the fungi and take it back to the lab. That is a lot of work and takes money. Funding for madrone research is miniscule compared to commercial species like Douglas fir."

There are some things to do if a tree is suspected to have Phytophthora or one of the many fungi that affect madrones. Shaw advises growing madrones in full or almost-full sun, pruning off any black branches and raking up leaves and disposing of them. Cleaning tools as you work is important. Irrigation for these drought-tolerant trees is not needed; in fact, water can encourage disease. Find more information in the Extension publication "Forest Health Fact Sheet: Diseases and Insect Pests of Pacific Madrone." Also, Washington State University has a website on madrone: https://ppo.puyallup.wsu.edu/madrone/about/

Climate Change a Disease Factor

The diseases that plague madrones have been with us for a long time, but environmental conditions make disease more severe, Elliott said.

"The diseases have been here," Elliott said. "The pessimism people have now is that they look so bad. I hear a lot of that, but in most years they look fine. Certain problems are worse some years. The difference is climate change and urbanization. It's having an effect. Hot, summers — drought — causes root disease and stem cankers to be really aggressive and can cause dieback."

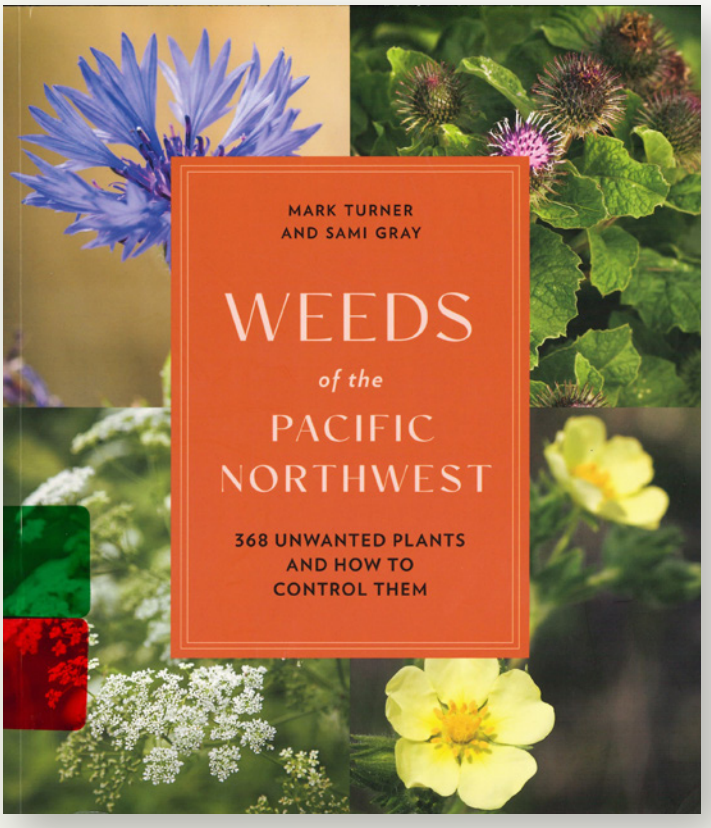
Indeed, climate change has a role as does the tree's microclimate, she said. In the forest under big Douglas-fir it would be too humid and would encourage disease. They prefer and will stay healthier in open spaces, and healthy trees are more equipped to fend off diseases.

Steve Hart, who has 40 madrones growing on five acres in the Melrose area near Roseburg, is one of those who are concerned about the tree. Hart bought the property in 2004 and in the last couple of years, which have been bad for disease, he lost five or six large trees. He came to see if there's anything to do for the remaining trees and left the workshop with some information and tools to help.

That's the response Christiansen was hoping for.

"I think they went away feeling more empowered to grow the species," Christiansen said. "They came excited and went away with the knowledge to manage them. Madrones are known for being difficult to grow so people were glad to hear from experts, so they have the knowledge to try these techniques on their property."

Kym Pokorny is newly retired from being the Public Service Communications Specialist at the Oregon State University Extension Service in Corvallis, Oregon.



LITERARY NOTES from the Miller Library

Brian Thompson

Weeds of the Pacific Northwest may not sound like an exciting book. But look closer at the sub-title: *368 Unwanted Plants and How to Control Them.* Gardeners — these are OUR weeds! Time to get to know them, and how to eliminate them. Or just live with them.

Resembling an oversized field guide, photographer Mark Turner's superb pictures make identifying your culprits quite easy, especially as he provides two or three images for each species. Turner honed his craft by illustrating two of the standard guides to our native plants: *Wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest* (published in 2006 with co-author Phyllis Gustafson) and *Trees and Shrubs of the Pacific Northwest* (2014 with Ellen Kuhlmann).

Author Sami Gray had an important role in the third edition (2019) of *Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest*, writing in the character of original author Art Kruckeberg for new additions and in organizing the photographs. She brings the same skill set in writing this book, clearly aimed at the small-scale gardener.

This combination of talents has resulted in a book that is both an important reference work and a fascinating look at the non-native plants that have established themselves in our region. A few natives that can overrun cultivated plantings are also considered.

An example is *Equisetum arvense*, the common horsetail. We learned that although this is native throughout most of the northern hemisphere, it is "so ubiquitous and so aggressive" these plants are "widely treated as weeds."

With deep roots (to 20 feet!) it is very difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate — no surprise to gardeners dealing with this plant. The final advice: "Small patches may be discouraged, though probably not vanquished, by persistent pulling. Or you could move."

How to get rid of other invaders? There isn't a one size fits all answer. In the chapter "Out, Damned Weed," Gray presents the many techniques and tools available, including a thoughtful discussion on both conventional and alterative herbicides. The conclusion? "Prevention is preferable to marathon weeding sessions on hands and knees. And if a few weeds survive, it's not the end of the world."

Brian Thompson is the manager and curator of horticultural literature for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear NHS Members,

As the year draws to a close, it's rewarding to reflect on how eventful it has been. This year, we presented 29 webinars, 36 in-person classes and tours, 4 in-person lectures, a spring symposium, and a virtual fall symposium. Additionally, we hosted two major member benefit events: Heronswood Day and Meet the Board Tour. None of this would have been possible without **your support and encouragement**, and for that, we extend our heartfelt gratitude. We're also deeply grateful for the hard work, passion, and dedication of our incredible Board. Special thanks to Richie Steffen and Daniel Sparler for generously sharing their knowledge and time through their writings and lectures.

As we close out 2024, we also bid farewell to two Board members completing their terms—**Corinne Hollister** and **Emily Dexter**—and thank them for their dedicated service. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Emily for her hard work and guidance as treasurer during this time, ensuring that NHS continues to **operate on sound financial principles**. I am also deeply grateful for her support and mentorship throughout my first year as president. Looking ahead, we're pleased that Emily will remain connected to us as a volunteer.

The NHS Board is excited for the coming year, with 2025 planning already well underway. At the upcoming Northwest Flower and Garden Festival, we're proud to sponsor **Neil Lucas**, an esteemed recipient of the RHS Victoria Medal of Honor and a leading authority on **grasses and their role in naturalistic landscapes**. Be sure to catch his talks at the show and stay tuned for more details on an exclusive event with him hosted by NHS during show week.

As we move forward, the simple yet profound part of our mission—**to be a forum for the PNW horticultural community**—continues to inspire us. Many unexplored avenues and opportunities remain for us to expand our role and better serve the diverse facets of this vibrant community. We are committed to exploring these paths to fully realize our mission.

Equally important is listening to your feedback and creating opportunities for members and the broader community to help shape our future. We're excited to explore the launch of a **volunteer program** in the coming year. This initiative will enable interested individuals to join our committees and initiatives, working together toward our shared goals.

In these times of change and uncertainty, **community and camaraderie** are more important than ever. Just as vital is the peace and healing that come from stewardship and immersion in nature in all its forms.

Wishing you a joyful holiday season!

Sashi Raghupathy
NHS President

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Autumn in the Garden
Image by Richie Steffen