

Helping Western landscapes go native

Native Roots markets plants that were domesticated by UI researcher

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — A small company is making big strides as a supplier of ornamental plant species native to the Great Basin.

Now in its fourth year of sales, Native Roots will supply wholesale nurseries in the region with 30,000 plant plugs and about 10,000 seeds.

The company markets 46 species of ornamental native plants and has more than 500 species in development.

The business started with baby steps and the tenacity of a University of Idaho researcher. Steve Love, a long-time potato breeder, got the opportunity to shift gears to horticulture and native plants — his first loves — in 2005 when the university wanted to strengthen its horticulture extension work. The university created the position of statewide consumer horticulture specialist and tapped Love for the job.

Easy decision

“It was not a hard decision to make the move,” Love said, adding that he also enjoyed his work in potatoes.

When he made that switch, which mostly involved teaching and training, he also wanted to develop a unique research project. Idaho was in the middle of its last significant drought cycle, and with a static water supply and growing demand it was clear landscapers were going to have to learn to get by with a little less water, he said.

He and then UI turf grass researcher Tom Salaiz started teaching water-saving principles for home landscapes. But they needed the plant materi-



Courtesy University of Idaho
Steve Love, University of Idaho horticulture specialist, with shrubby penstemon.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Andy West, lead grower and production manager at Nature Roots, checks a plot of arrowleaf buckwheat at the company’s production facility south of Twin Falls, Idaho, on June 9.

als to back up the principles, he said.

That put Love on the path of trying to “create a whole pallet of plants people can landscape with and save water.”

His first efforts to collect native plants were during a camping trip to the Pioneer Mountains in 2005. Since then he’s collected about half of the materials. The other

half has come from other collectors, and he has seeds and plants from many sources.

Domesticating those species, which are highly variable, to produce a consistent and viable commercial product is a long-term endeavor. It takes years of breeding, selection and cultivation. Once he had several species stabilized, the Native Roots people stepped up to develop a mar-

ket for the plants, he said. “It’s been a really exciting deal. I have a lot of personal investment in the plants,” he said.

Six years ago, Native Roots started bringing Love’s plants into their operation to begin seed production.

“We’re trying to create a whole new line from wildflowers. It’s been a fascinating process,” Love said.

Native species now flourish on 130 Native Roots plots, where plants are grown and harvested for seed. The seed is cleaned and either sold or planted to produce plugs. Both are sold to wholesale nurseries, said Andy West, Native Roots lead grower and production manager.

The native species can replace ornamentals in landscapes to save water and increase pollinators. Because they are perennial, there’s no need to replant every year, he said.

‘Giving back’

“Essentially, it’s giving back to the environment, putting back what’s already there, creating a natural ecosystem with native plants,” he said.



Western Innovator

Native Roots

Location: Twin Falls, Idaho

Product development: Steve Love, University of Idaho Extension horticulturist

Lead grower and production manager: Andy West

Owner and CEO: Steve Paulson

Products: Native plants and seeds

Operation: 14-acre production facility, three greenhouses

Employees: 4 full-time, 4 to 7 part-time

Legal contract: Licensing agreement with University of Idaho to bring the products to market

Native Roots started marketing 31 species in 2014 and adds five species to the offerings every year to avoid saturating the market.

“Most nurseries only have a small section dedicated to native plants. We’re trying to educate the public on options available to them,” he said.

Lack of education is the only thing keeping the business from booming, he said.

In addition to its Native Roots branded line for use in ornamental landscapes, the company also produces other genetically diverse plants and seeds that were not developed by Love. They go to restoration projects.

In that business, the company sells as much as 1-1/2 tons of seed, including a native turf grass mix, and up to 250,000 restoration-grade plants a year.

Marion County Farm Bureau to honor NORPAC Foods at concert

SALEM, Ore. — The Marion County Farm Bureau will present its 2017 Modern Agriculture Award to NORPAC Foods on stage June 30 at the Elsinore Theatre before the start of a concert by country-western artist Ned LeDoux.

“Our purpose is to promote, protect and advance farm interests in Marion County. This award is a formal expression of thanks for the major investment made in recent years by NORPAC Foods to expand its operations in Salem,” said John Zielinski, president of the Marion County Farm Bureau, in a press release. “NORPAC has been committed to our valley



Courtesy NORPAC Foods
NORPAC Foods will be honored by the Marion County Farm Bureau at an upcoming concert in Salem.

and its growers for over 90 years, and this latest investment strengthens all of agribusiness here. Marion County Farm Bureau appreciates the

work and the people of NORPAC Foods. Please join us for a great evening and concert.”

Tickets for the concert, which starts at 7:30 p.m. on

Friday, June 30, can be found at ElsinoreTheatre.com, or by calling the box office at 503-375-3574. Reserved seat prices range from \$20 to \$30.

NORPAC Foods Inc. is a farmer-owned cooperative that grows and processes frozen vegetables and fruit, along with canning vegetables. Headquartered in Salem, NORPAC is Oregon’s largest fruit and vegetable processor.

NORPAC was established as Stayton Canning Co. in 1924 and now operates processing and packaging facilities in Stayton, Salem, Brooks and Hermiston, Ore., and in Quincy, Wash.

The co-op was among

the first processors to use quick-freezing units to produce what are known as Individually Quick Frozen, or IQF, products.

More than 200 farmers grow on contract with NORPAC, raising 27 different crops ranging from strawberries, broccoli and cauliflower to zucchini, corn, beans and peas. According to the co-op website, NORPAC is Oregon’s largest vegetable and fruit processor and the largest unionized agricultural employer in the state.

The co-op has about 1,000 full-time workers and employs up to 3,500 during the peak harvest and processing season.

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20 Northwest Locations 1-800-765-9055 www.oxarc.com

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Saturday, June 24
Washington State Dairy Ambassador Coronation. 5-9 p.m. Bynes Performing Arts Center, 18821 Crown Ridge Blvd., Arlington, Wash. Doors open at 5 p.m. with the program beginning at 5:30. This year dinner will not be provided; instead there will be light hors d’oeuvres and refreshments served during a short intermission. Tickets purchased by June 16 will be adults \$20, students \$10, and under 6 years free. Tickets purchased after June 16 or at the door will be adults \$25, students \$15, under 6 still free. For ticket information, please contact Gloria Edwards by email at gloria.wsdw@hotmail.com or 360-273-7313. Website: <http://wastatedairywomen.org/ambassador-contest.html>

Sunday, June 25
Sierra Nevada Lavender and Honey Festival. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Downtown Sparks, Nev. In addition to lavender and honey products from local producers, the festival will fea-

ture arts and crafts, event-themed food, music, guest speakers and demonstrations, a children’s area with train rides, free yoga sessions and even a signature beer from Great Basin Brewing Co. Website: www.lavenderandhoneyfest.com

Tuesday, June 27
Range Field Day. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Northern Great Basin Experimental Range, 100 Placidea Butte Road, Riley, Ore. Presentations will include managing wildfires, livestock grazing for fuels management, safe sites and restoration of sagebrush rangeland. For more information, contact Chad Boyd, office: 541-573-8939, cell: 541-589-4990, email: chad.boyd@oregonstate.edu. To RSVP for lunch, call Petrina White at 541-573-4085.

Wednesday, June 28
Caneberry Field Day. 1-5 p.m. North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Mileway Road, Aurora, Ore. Pesticide registration updates; pollinator protection; weed management; and an introduction to two new OSU faculty members, Greg O’Neill, IR-4 Field Center Director, NWREC, and Marcelo Moretti, weed management, Department of Horticulture. Other topics are the spotted wing drosophila, strategies for replanting red raspberry, biocontrol of brown marmorated stink

bug and irrigation practices to enhance fruit quality. Walk through the latest advanced selections and new cultivars in the caneberry breeding plots. Website: <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/NWREC/>

Wednesday-Saturday June 28-July 1
128th Annual Washington State Grange Convention. Ocean Shores Convention Center, 120 W. Chance at La Mer NW, Ocean Shores, Wash.

Thursday-Friday June 29-30
3rd International Conference on Livestock & Nutrition. 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Avani Atrium, 880 Phetchaburi Road, Bangkok, Thailand. The Bangkok Livestock Nutrition Conference welcomes attendees, presenters and exhibitors from all over the world. Cost: \$699. Website: <http://livestock-nutrition.conferenceseries.com/>.

Friday, June 30
Farm Practices to Support Beneficial Insects. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Day 2 of this two-day class will offer a tour of the Wandering Fields farm in the Applegate area. Participants will practice identifying beneficials and observe how a blend of hedgerows, cover crops, flowering seed crops and native plants creates a system of biological pest management. Participation on Day 1 on June 9

is a requirement to attend the tour. Cost: \$15 one/\$25 two from the same farm. Website: <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarmDream>.

Bark Beetle Field Day. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. University of Idaho Extension Kootenai County office, 1808 N. Third St., Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Participants will get first-hand exposure to major bark beetles’ biology and research into controlling bark beetles. Pre-register by June 23. Cost: \$20 (\$22 with a credit card at www.uidaho.edu/BarkBeetle/) Website: www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry

Friday-Tuesday June 30-July 4
St. Paul Rodeo. Rodeo Arena, 20045 Fourth St. NE, St. Paul, Ore. The St. Paul Rodeo will continue to bring a slice of the old West to the north Willamette Valley. Information: (503) 633-2011, tickets@stpaulrodeo.com, Website: <http://www.stpaulrodeo.com/>

Saturday-Tuesday July 1-4
Molalla Buckeroo Rodeo, 815 Shirley St., Molalla, Ore. The Molalla Buckeroo Rodeo has been an Oregon tradition since September 1913. 503-829-8388.

Website: <http://www.molalla-buckeroo.com/>

Thursday-Sunday July 6-9
Marion County Fair. Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. Website: <http://www.co.marion.or.us/CS/Fair>

Friday-Saturday July 7-8
2nd Annual Prineville Truck and Tractor Pull. 7 p.m. Friday, 4 p.m. Saturday. Crook County Fairgrounds, 1280 Main St., Prineville, Ore. Website: www.crookcountyfairgrounds.com

Idaho State Ram Sale. Twin Falls County Fair Grounds, 215 Fair Ave., Filer, Idaho. The “Suffolk Show of the West” begins at 6 p.m. Friday and continues at 10:30 a.m. Saturday. For more information, call 208-344-2271 or email idahowool@gmail.com Website: idahowool.org

Wednesday, July 12
Blueberry Field Day. 1-5 p.m. North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Mileway Road, Aurora, Ore. Find out about the latest research in blueberries. <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/NWREC/>

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Correction
In a story that ran in the June 16 editions of the Capital Press, the name of April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, was incorrect. The Capital Press regrets the error.

Correction policy
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