

Native plants restore damaged habitat, thrive in urban yards

By **DIANNA TROYER**
For the Capital Press

McCALL, Idaho — A hunch to supply the niche market of native plants has

paid off for Jim Crawford and Margo Conitz at Buffalo-berry Farm.

“We originally thought we’d set up a greenhouse to grow conifer trees for refor-

estation but realized it was such a competitive market,” says Crawford. “We chose to pursue the native plant market instead.”

Conitz recalls their first

growing season in 1994 on their land in mountainous west-central Idaho south of McCall.

“We had a demand for our crop of local native shrubs for fire restoration near McCall,” she says. “Things built from there.”

Their farm specializes in growing native plants of the Intermountain Northwest including perennial wildflowers, wetland and upland grasses, conifers, trees and shrubs.

While native plants have long been used for restoration projects, they are becoming increasingly popular with consumers wanting beautiful, drought-tolerant plants in their yards. In some areas, thirsty lawns are being replaced with low-maintenance native perennials.

“We’re seeing increasing demand for native plants from retail consumers living in low, dry areas,” says Crawford. “Several cities in Utah require residents to grow native plants for landscaping to conserve water.”

To keep up with demand, Crawford and Conitz tend to plants in their 4,000-square-foot climate-controlled greenhouse and a 10,000-square-foot fenced area for large containers. To help them, they hire three or four seasonal, part-time employees during the spring planting season and during the fall packing season.

“Our plants are used for habitat improvement, mining reclamation, erosion control projects and campground



Courtesy of Buffalo-berry Farm

To supply a variety of markets, Jim Crawford and Margo Conitz raise native plants at Buffalo-berry Farm in west-central Idaho near McCall.

improvement,” says Crawford. “We’re also a source to landscapers and other nurseries for native plants.”

They strive to match seed sources, elevations and soil types to produce plants best adapted to certain sites.

To help their plants absorb nutrients, “we inoculate seedlings with species appropriate mycorrhizal fungi,” says Conitz. “The plants carry that association into the field, giving them an advantage when planted in harsh sites.”

As they gather seed in the fall, they find one of their favorite shrubs, the Russet Buffalo-berry and namesake for their business.

“It’s an interesting shrub because of its unique growing places,” says Crawford. Native Americans used it for medicinal purposes and whipped the berries with water to make a frothy dessert.

As they look over the plants in their greenhouse, Conitz says, “It’s gratifying to know our plants are being used for many purposes, especially helping to restore wild areas.”

Crawford says, “We enjoy working with our agency friends on their projects and showing individuals and groups the process of growing plants started from native seed.”

Your banker should own a pair of boots.

When you choose Banner Bank, you’ll get 125+ years of agribusiness experience and the tailored solutions you deserve. All from a partner dedicated to building relationships that help your business and community thrive.

Let’s create tomorrow, together.

bannerbank.com



Member FDIC

N17-3#6

HORTICULTURAL PERLITE

• PROPAGATION, SOIL MIX AND PLUG GRADES •

- 100% natural
- light-weight
- in bags or bulk



- aids drainage
- and aeration
- holds moisture

SUPREME PERLITE COMPANY

for distributor information call

www.perlite.com (503) 286-4333 info@perlite.com

N17-3#8

Refrigeration

Complete Systems For Dormant Storage

- Ethylene, Temperature and Humidity Control
- Microbial, Endophyte Management

TRADE ALLY ENERGY TRUST OF OREGON

503-475-7046 carbontech@frontier.com

N17-3#13D