



SymbiOp Garden Shop

Willamette Wildlings sells non-hybridized Oregon wildflower seed sourced from the Willamette Valley. Owner Shari Cappel-Fisher said she wanted to provide seeds for gardeners without them having to meet a large minimum.

Willamette Wildlings: Nursery sells native wildflower seed, plants

By ALIYA HALL
For the Capital Press

CRESWELL, Ore. — Before Shari Cappel-Fisher opened her seed and plant nursery, she worked as a technician at the City of Eugene's native plant nursery, where she routinely had to turn down members of the public who wanted to buy their plants.

"We didn't sell to the public, but it made me realize there is a hunger out there for people who want to grow their own natives," Cappel-Fisher said. "I was thinking it would be really nice if more of the retail nurseries in town had a better offering of native plants."

In 2011, Cappel-Fisher opened her nursery, Willamette Wildlings, which produces both containerized native plants derived from Oregon seed sources and non-hybridized Oregon wildflower seed sourced from the Willamette Valley.

Cappel-Fisher said she started with selling plants, but received inquiries about seed, too. She said that at the time there weren't many local sources for people to get seeds without having to meet a large minimum.

"I decided that I could

absorb that minimum and package them and offer seeds to the home gardener that way," she said.

Although Cappel-Fisher doesn't collect the seeds herself, she tests them for purity and germination before selling them. She said that she wants to keep the plants as local as possible because they're adapted to the area.

"They tend to do better for our home gardeners and it's also better for the local ecology," she said. "You're not swapping out the local genetics with something outside the area."

There's also overlap between the plant and seed sections of the business. Cappel-Fisher explained that some of her native plants are grown from the seeds she sells.

Beyond genetics, Willamette Wildlings started the seed line with beauty in mind.

"I want to have things that stand up and compete with the pollinator industry, because there's more people out there getting into natives," Cappel-Fisher said. "I wanted to offer things that could be easier to grow and a bit more showy while also supporting pollinators."

The biggest challenge that

Cappel-Fisher overcame over the years is learning which natives lend themselves to being cultivated in a nursery setting.

"As much as I think that's a really cool plant and I'd love to offer that one, it doesn't do well in containers," she said, adding that she also had to learn which soil certain natives prefer and different tricks to make seeds germinate faster.

Looking ahead, Cappel-Fisher wants to lean further toward growing the seed side of the company. In 2021, she started to sell seeds wholesale as well as in three retail nurseries in the Portland area, but seeds are still available to purchase through the Willamette Wildlings online store.

With Cappel-Fisher's background in wildlife management with a botany focus, she said she always enjoyed growing plants but Willamette Wildlings is the perfect mix of growing plants and supporting the ecology.

"I love the idea of getting these plants out into people's yards and having them experience the benefits that these plants bring," she said. "I just really enjoy knowing that I'm contributing to that."



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