

Other kinds of flowering plants in the Applegate

BY STACEY DENTON

It's true, farms in the Applegate really do grow other kinds of flowering plants. In fact, for decades our region has supported thriving farms dedicated to growing flowers to produce seeds. The same hot, dry summers and abundant water that make for good cannabis-growing conditions also make southern Oregon one of the best places to grow seed crops in the country. Our weather helps us avoid disease problems and pestilence that farmers farther north in the Pacific Northwest (and from the Midwest to the East Coast) battle with their greater humidity.

The work of seed growing in the Applegate has a long history. Some folks may not know that the Grants Pass Grange Co-op used to have a two-story seed-cleaning and bagging machine for handling small grain crops, some of which came from the Applegate. And Wilderville

was formerly an important alfalfa-seed production zone. It may be a little hard for gardeners to relate to seed production on that scale, but growing seed from vegetable, flower, culinary, and medicinal herb crops has also been an important focus for Applegate farmers and homesteaders.

Another wave of our region's seed growing began back in the 1970s, when back-to-the-landers who moved into the Applegate focused their efforts on food production and dabbling with seed. Stone Broke Hippie Seeds was born in 1974 in Ruch and later became Sow Organic Seeds in Williams. Sow Organic was the first retail seed packet business in our region, and its pioneering work has since influenced the success of many other purveyors of organic seeds—Seeds of Change, Strictly Medicinal Seeds, Siskiyou Seeds, among others—and inspired many



Harvesting "Double Click" Cosmos seed at Flora Farm in Williams. Photo: Rob Grobman, Heartisan Films.

resilient than a homogenous one! Seed companies across the country have recognized that the seed coming from our valley is an indispensable part of organic farming and gardening throughout the US, and yet this might be a fresh idea to many locals. With so many gardeners in the Applegate, there are ample opportunities to support the success of Applegate farmers by purchasing seed locally. In addition, your crop will have the advantage of being grown with seed adapted to the soil and climatic conditions of our bioregion.

other small-scale farmers to dedicate themselves to growing organic seed.

Presently, I count 12 farms in the Applegate that are growing seed for distribution throughout our bioregion, as well as nationally and internationally. These farms include Bluebird Farm, Siskiyou Seeds/Seven Seeds Farm, Flora Farm, Lupine Knoll Farm, Wandering Fields Farm, White Oak Farm & Education Center, L & R Family Farm, Wolf Gulch Farm, Dancing Bear Farm/Madrona, Ridgeline Meadow Farm, Feral Farm, and Strictly Medicinal Seeds/Horizon Herbs. If we consider garlic seed, the list expands to include Whistling Duck Farm. These farms are either selling directly to gardeners and farmers like Siskiyou Seeds/Seven Seeds Farm, Strictly Medicinals/Horizon Herbs, and Whistling Duck Farm or wholesaling seed to other seed companies with a national presence, like Johnny's and High Mowing.

As we consider the future of the agricultural terrain of the Applegate Valley, both literally and figuratively, it would behoove us to look beyond cannabis and wine grapes. A diversified economy is more

and climatic conditions of our bioregion. If you buy your seeds from a seed company outside the area, make sure to ask where its seed is coming from. Also ask which varieties it sells are coming from southern Oregon farms. Many seed companies advertise their businesses as farm-based, giving the impression that their farms grow the seed, but more often than not just a few of their offerings are coming from US farms and the rest is coming from China and Europe.

As the price of agricultural land rises in the valley, supporting local, organic farm businesses by buying from them will be essential to maintaining the agricultural character (open space, working farms, long-term residency, safety, knowing your neighbors, stewardship ethic) and environmental integrity (clean water, healthy soils, pollinator habitat, safe food) of this valley we love.

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Notes from a Rogue entomologist

'An inordinate fondness for beetles'...and invasive pests

BY RICHARD J. HILTON

The title phrase is taken from a quote (attributed to the biologist JBS Haldane) that has become rather famous, especially in entomological circles. As the story goes, Haldane was asked by a theologian what one could conclude as to the nature of the Creator from a study of his creation, and Haldane answered, "An inordinate fondness for beetles." While the quote's precise origin may be in doubt, it is very true that there are more described species of beetles than any other order of insects. Presently, there are nearly one million known species of insects, with beetles accounting for about 40 percent.

The highest levels of insect diversity occur in the tropical rain forest, where beetle species often specialize on specific types of plants. However, even in our temperate zone we have a wide array of beetles and many examples of beetle specialists. In the Spring 2010 *Applegater*, I discussed local cucumber beetles and flea beetles that can plague vegetable gardens.

I have also discussed the problem of exotic insects, new to the area and removed from their native natural enemies. These invasive insects often become serious pests and threaten our crops and forests. In the US, more and more of these invasive pests originate from Asia as trans-Pacific trade has increased in recent decades. Many beetles fall into this group, with the Asian long-horned beetle and the emerald ash borer as prime examples, both of which can kill trees. The US Department of Agriculture has programs to halt the spread of invasive species, but it appears difficult in the case of the emerald ash borer, which has spread to 31 states since first being found in 2002 and has already killed hundreds of millions of ash trees. Neither species has appeared in Oregon yet, but the Oregon Department of Agriculture is on the lookout.

One exotic species that is not a recent arrival to the US is the Japanese beetle. This insect came from Japan and was found in New Jersey in 1916. It slowly spread throughout most of the eastern US and has appeared periodically near the Portland Airport, probably brought in on cargo planes. There was an infestation in Cave Junction, but it was successfully eradicated (Winter 2013 *Applegater*). But in 2016, populations were found in an area between



Cereal leaf beetle
(biolib.cz/en/image/id98458/).

Portland and Hillsboro. The Japanese beetle has a very wide host range and is a pest of many crops, including grapes and fruit trees; however, it is best known as a pest of home landscapes where larval grubs attack the roots of lawn grass and adults are a notorious pest of roses. Eradication efforts are under way, but the City of Roses may have a new pest to contend with.

One invasive pest to look for this spring is the cereal leaf beetle. This beetle came to the US in 1962 and made its way to Oregon in 1999 and to the Rogue Valley in 2009-10. Since then we have been monitoring it and releasing parasitic wasps to provide biological control. The beetle, while small (a quarter inch), is quite distinctive and attractive with metallic blue elytra (i.e., wing covers) and an orange thorax. The original infestation was by the Rogue River near the Table Rocks, but infestations have since been found in the vicinity of Jacksonville.

Larvae feed on small grains (wheat, barley, and oats). If populations get too high, treatment could be necessary. The larvae try to protect themselves by putting their feces on their backs, which is rather fascinating but also disgusting. However, the parasitic wasp can evade this defense and lays its eggs inside the beetle larvae. While the wasp is now established here, it has not provided the high level of control that has been seen in some other areas. Our hope is that this will be the year the parasitic wasp (with its "fondness" for the beetle) will keep the local cereal leaf beetle population in check.

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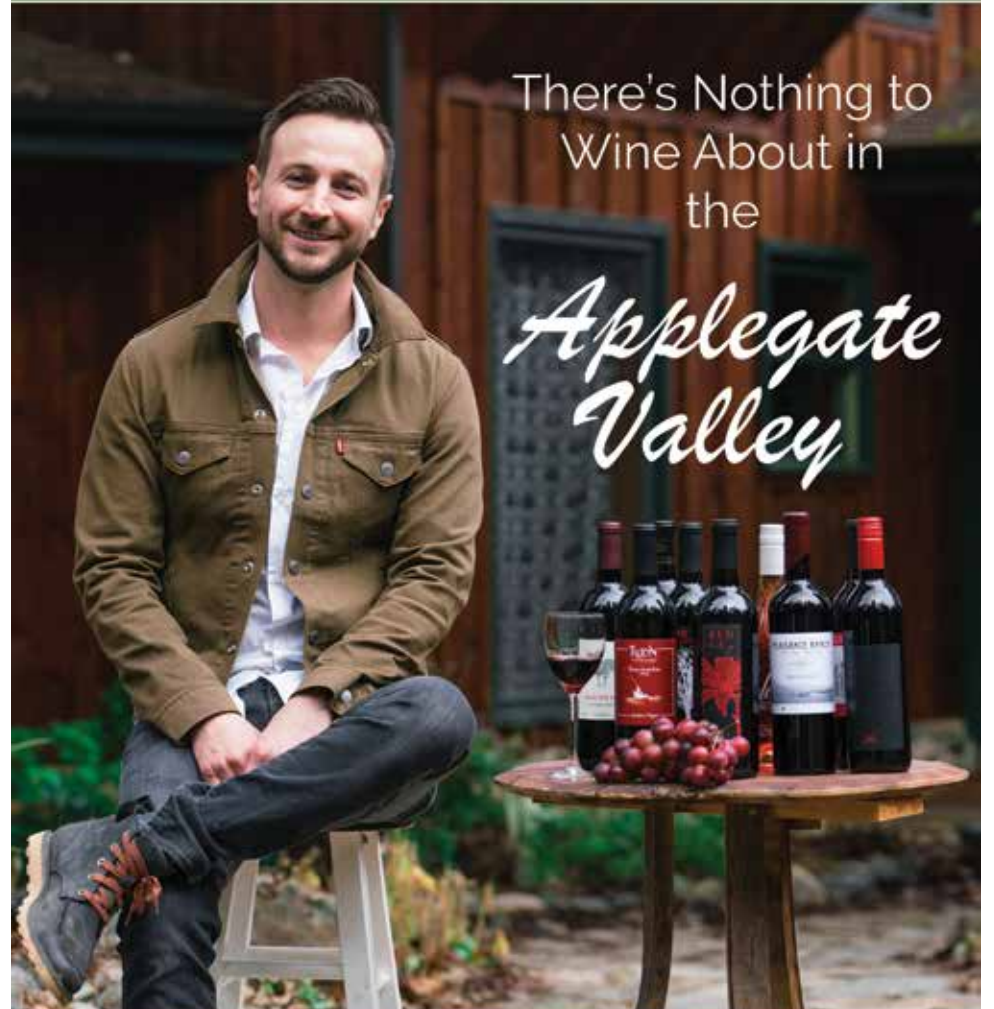
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When it Comes to Real Estate....

There's Nothing to
Wine About in
the

*Applegate
Valley*



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