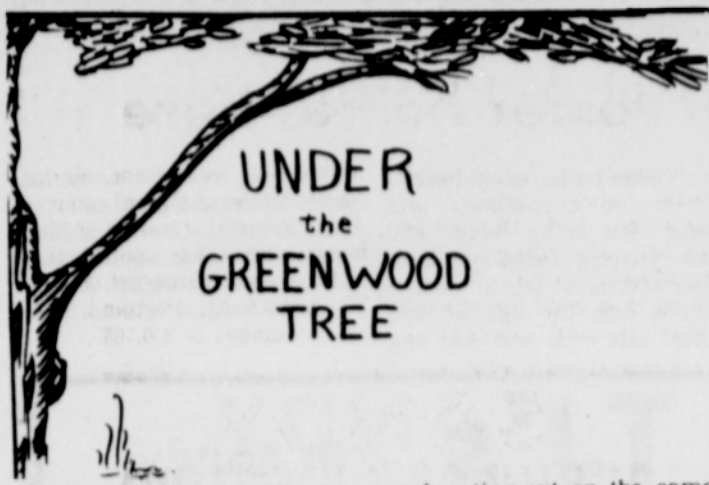




UNDER the GREENWOOD TREE

by SYLVAN HORTUS

Even though we are in the midst of the Birch Family, the seasonal bloom of the Osmaronia is at hand. So this week, we leave the orderly route we have been following through the tree families, and go to this one member of the Rose family.

The first woodland flowers and the first new green leaves are bursting out on the same tree in our local woodlands. Osmaronia Cerasiformis is leafing and blooming this Oregon March.

The individual trees of this species are sexed. The male tree has flowers that produce pollen, while the female tree has flowers that have a pistil and ovary, which when fertilized will produce fruit. The fruits are in small clusters of miniature plums. Although not true plums, they have one large seed and look like little plums. It is reputed the Indians dried the fruits like prunes and stored them for winter food. These tiny plums are orange and hard when green, but turn a juicy black when ripe. They are literally tasteless, but somewhat sweet. As the birds feed heavily on them before they commence to ripen, very few remain to be harvested. Either there were fewer birds, more Osmaronias, or darn few Indians in the days they used them for food.

The flower is typical of the Rose family. It has five white petals, a pale green calyx with five sepal-like points between the petals, and either a prominent group of stamens (male flower) or a prominent pistil (female flower) in the center. The odor, if any, is faintly putrid. Blooming as it does in early March, the lack of bees and hornets has caused the plant to rely on flies for pollination. All plants that rely on flies for cross pollination have the fragrance of carrion. The tree has a good fragrance in the newly emerged leaves. Crush them and the odor of watermelon is released. The terminal clusters of leaves expand first. They break out of the terminal sheath along with the flower clusters. The lateral buds do not develop until the terminal bunch is completely expanded and the flower bloom is past. At no time is the tree heavily foliated. This sparse foliage and the pale green leaf color are good identifying features.

As this tree is never full, and as it tends to sprout from the base, to make either a tree or a large shrub out of Osmaronia requires pruning. This is one of the plants, like Elder and amelanther, that occupy that shadowy never-never land between tree and shrub; and depending on surroundings and culture, can be either.

There are three common names applied to this tree; Indian Plum, Osa-berry, and Skunk bush. The first two have reference to the fruit; the latter to the faint odor of the flowers. This odor is so faint, the nose must be stuck into the flower to detect it. As I write this, I have had a bunch of it in the room for three days to provide models for the sketches. There is no trace of odor about. All the Oregon natives I have talked to about this tree call it Osa-berry.

Reception to honor local girls

A reception honoring Sherie International Order of the Day, Grand Christian Flag Rainbow for Girls will be held Bearer and Jennifer Burdick, at the Masonic Hall in Sandy, Grand Choir Member of the March 11 at 2 p.m. The public is invited.



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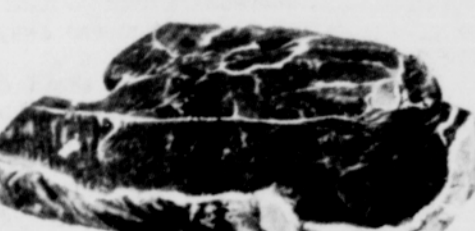
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Osmaronia
(terminal leaf cluster emerging)



Osmaronia

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