



Raising Natives

Lorane Valley nursery offers container-grown natives.

Driving out to Doak Creek Nursery on a perfect afternoon in October, there seemed to be no place I'd rather be than the Lorane Valley. The blend of pasture, vineyards and forested hillsides was irresistible. I turned off Territorial Road onto Jackson Marlow Road, and asphalt soon gave way to gravel. The road rose gently through a mile or so of meadow before plunging briefly into ferny woodland. The nursery was the last stop on the road, and as I parked near the house and garden I could see the nursery spread out below against a backdrop of mixed forest.

Cynthia Lafferty credited her sister and brother-in-law (who until recently owned Balance Restoration, a wholesale business) for the idea of a nursery selling container-grown native plants. Getting started was challenging, she said, but she already had a great love of native plants, so it seemed a natural choice. Cynthia (with her now ex-husband) started the nursery as wholesale only, but she soon learned that many homeowners were interested in fitting native plants into their landscape to bring butterflies and birds into the yard, so now she sells retail, too. A wide variety of trees and shrubs dominate the nursery rows, but she tries to maintain a mix of groundcovers, ferns and wildflowers as well.

Herbaceous groundcovers included wild ginger, bunchberry, a fragrant native violet, a small sedum with bright green leaves and yellow flowers (*Sedum oregonum*) and coast strawberry. Among the woody groundcovers were some of the nicest plants I've seen of salal, creeping Oregon grape and kinnikinnik. She also grows the prostrate ceonothus 'Point Reyes' (native to California into southern Oregon) because, she said, it is such a successful groundcover for dry places. She pointed out a well-drained bank beside her driveway where she has successfully combined it with lavender (non-native!) and Douglas aster.

Among other ceonothus species native to Oregon I spotted the evergreen buckbrush or greasewood (*Ceanothus cuneatus*). Cynthia told me that it is plentiful along a creek (named Buckbrush Creek!) on the southeast side of Mount Pisgah. Buckbrush is not well-known as an ornamental but it has the potential to be very useful in summer-dry gardens. I was pleased to see another attractive, evergreen shrub nearby. There is always a need for evergreen shrubs that don't get too big, and Oregon box (*Pachystima myrsinites*) is a sweet plant that grows to about four feet.

Cynthia showed me some full, leafy one-gallon plants of Pacific ninebark, a tall deciduous shrub with white spring flowers that she said can take wet, heavy soils. Nearby was another pleasant native shrub that likes to grow along streams. Twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*) carries yellow, tubular flowers dis-

tinctively in pairs. The flowers produce black fruit between bracts that turn red as the fruit ripens. Cynthia suggested mixing twinberry and Pacific ninebark with red osier dogwood to make a big, wildlife-friendly hedge.

Willows are staples of native plantings. Shrubby Scouler willow is good for upland situations; Sitka and Hooker's willows are found in wet places on the valley floor. Young shoots of the more tree-like Pacific willow, *Salix lasiandra*, have yellow bark, changing to red near the tips. Cynthia said it can, like most willows, be cut back repeatedly to emphasize the colorful new shoots. Wetland willows are vital larval host plants for butterflies. (The popular non-native butterfly bush, *Buddleia* spp., is spreading into riparian areas and out-competing willows, and has recently been placed on Oregon's noxious weed list.)

The native plant industry is relatively young, and Cynthia reported a certain amount of trial and error with growing methods. I was impressed with the quality of her plants, though. She ascribed much of her success to the use of mycorrhizal preparations, but a few plants still prove difficult to propagate or to keep alive in a pot. She has had considerable success growing madrone and Oregon white oak to a useful size by raising them in tall, narrow containers that allow for growth of a taproot without harboring too much moisture. Excess moisture does not suit either species, and a stunted taproot can mean failure after planting.

We had a chuckle about the fact that the colorful garden by Cynthia's house is almost all non-native. "Well, I've been gardening since I was a teenager and I just have a passion for all plants. I can come up here tired after working in the nursery and still be happy work in this garden. I just love it," she said. This spring, though, Cynthia planted up a nearby slope in the afternoon shade of an Oregon white oak with ferns, evergreen huckleberry and a few native perennials. "This is one of my very favorite plants," she said, fondling a tidy checker mallow named *Sidalcea virgata*. "It makes this low clump of foliage and sends up spikes of pink flowers, and when it is done you can just cut off the stems." It's a plant any gardener would love.

Doak Creek Native Plant Nursery is certified free of sudden oak death. The nursery (83331 Jackson Marlow Road, Eugene) is open by appointment: phone 484-9206. **EW**

Rachel Foster of Eugene is a garden consultant and author of All About Gardens: Tips and Commentary from the Southern Willamette Valley, a selection of her past columns from Eugene Weekly. The book (192 pages, paperback, with drawings by Diane Lewis) is published by Stone Pig Press and sells for \$14.95. She will sign books Dec. 4 at Gray's Garden Center in Eugene (10 am) and Springfield (4 pm). Contact Rachel at 683-7427 for a list of book stores and garden centers where you can see her new book.

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