

# GRAB BAG

BOOK SHELF // GLIMPSE // WILDLIFE // POP CULTURE // WORDS // Q&A // FOOD // FUN



PHOTO BY LYNETTE RAE MCADAMS

Oregon grape flowers in spring with showy clusters of bright yellow blossoms, followed by plump berries of dark blue.

## Wild Side

### *Mahonia aquafolium*

#### Oregon grape

By LYNETTE  
RAE MCADAMS

A true native to the American West, Oregon grape flourishes along the Pacific Coast from south-east Alaska to northern California, thriving in the understory of the dense forests of the Northwest. An evergreen shrub averaging 3 feet tall and 5 feet wide, it is easily mistaken for holly, as its dark, glossy green leaves wear prickly spines that are sharp to the touch.

A member of the barberry family, *Mahonia aquafolium* flowers in mid-to-late spring with showy clusters of bright yellow blossoms, followed by plump berries of dark blue, which can resemble Concord grapes. Though incredibly (incredibly) tart,

when mixed with sweeter offerings, like huckleberry and salal.

Medicinally, the plant has a long history of use. Native cultures used it to cleanse the blood, treat infection, and ease digestive troubles, and modern herbalists continue to prize its roots and stems for the alkaloid they now recognize as berberine — a strong anti-microbial and liver stimulant that can be used both internally and externally to treat a variety of illnesses and conditions, including psoriasis and amoebic dysentery.

In February of 1806, Merriwether Lewis catalogued the plant in his journal, along with a description, referring to it as “mountain holly”; he even carried a specimen home on his return journey. Later, pioneers along the Oregon Trail used it as both medicine and food, helping *M. aquafolium* earn its place as Oregon’s state flower, an honor bestowed on it in 1899.

the berries are edible, and were a valuable part of an indigenous diet, especially

#### Crossword Answer



PHOTO BY MATT LOVE

Tony, an Astoria High School student, shreds it on stage during a field trip performance at St. Helens High School.

## A GLIMPSE INSIDE

By MATT LOVE

### St. Helens High School and the Rock Zone

Tony's face instantly changed. Thirty seconds earlier, playing electric guitar on stage, his visage had appeared normal. He was still playing, but something had transformed him. I could see it plainly.

He and his band mate were kicking off a lunchtime show at St. Helens High School in front of 50 teenage strangers — not an easy audience to please — and this was Tony's first

gig outside the friendly confines of Astoria High School's monthly open mic event, Astoria Hi-Fi, held in my classroom.

A teaching friend of mine from St. Helens invited my 10-student crew to headline their Friday Lunch Live event. We accepted and rode the magic bus eating sugar cookies and listening to Stevie Wonder and Prince on cassette to get pumped for the show.

Up there, under the lights, Tony wasn't merely winning over the

audience; he was slaying them with supercharged crunchy riffs. He looked gone, almost beatific, shredding, shaking his head, moving around.

A smile came over me, and I nodded. I knew what Tony's countenance meant. I'd seen it before — he was in the rock zone, an existential state similar to checking into the Eagles' "Hotel California." Once you get in, don't ever expect to leave.

I doubt Tony will ever leave. With his guitar, he'd recently discovered a passion, perhaps the one true passion in his life, and that's my dream for every student who attends high school. It could be trigonometry or it could be rescuing dogs. They just need to find one.

They call Tony's passion rock 'n' roll, and it's not quite dead yet.

To view Tony and his band mate Evan's stellar performance, go to: <https://youtu.be/UQlqo1o-3OE>

*Matt Love is the author/editor of 14 books, including "A Nice Piece of Astoria" and "Of Walking in Rain." He teaches English at Astoria High School. His books are available at coastal bookstores or through his website, [nestuccaspitpress.com](http://nestuccaspitpress.com)*



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