Volume 4, Issue 7, 2006, September 2006

Northwest Native Plant Journal

A Monthly Web Magazine

Late summer fun with Northwest Native Plants

Native plant resources on the internet

And More!

Published by The Wild Garden: Hansen's Northwest Native Plant Database

Northwest Native Plant Journal

A Monthly Web Magazine

Departments

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About this Web Magazine

This Journal was created under the direction of Wally Hansen – a dedicated Grower, Aficionado and Passionate Lover of Northwest Native Plants.

This Journal is not 'commercial.' Our goals are:

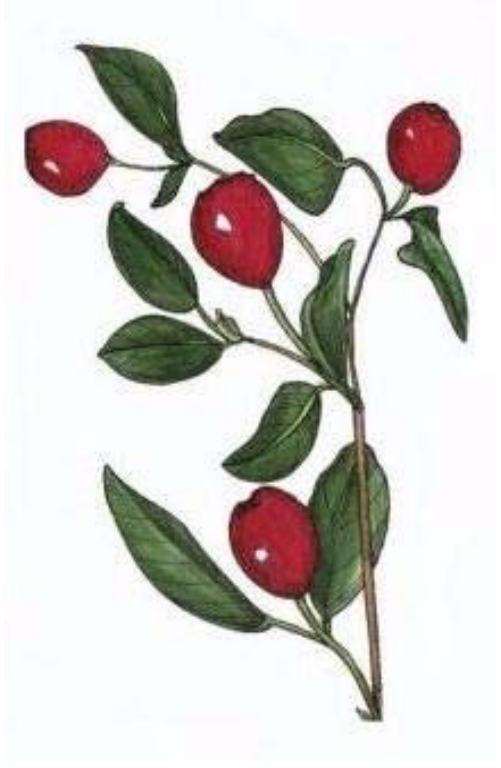
A — To generate interest, even passion, concerning the magnificent Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest.

B — To help you create your own Native Plant Gardens, large or small, for home or work.

C — To help you propagate and "grow on" those species that interest you the most.

D — To inform both Home Gardeners and interested Professionals of many disciplines concerning trends and news items from my little corner of the world.

E — To help the reader enjoy native plants more by understanding the historical and cultural role of native plants (i.e.–use by Native Americans, Pioneers, Early Botanists, etc.).



Red Huckleberry (Vaccinium parviflorum)
Painting by Heidi D. Hansen

On the Cover

Maple

This tree grows in Bush's Pasture Park in Salem, Oregon. In one area of this park, there is a large grove of these maples giving a lushly shaded area for picnics and play.

The park area totals 89 acres and includes natural groves of old oak trees, an orchard with fruit and flowering trees, an outstanding rose garden with over 2,000 roses, and paved paths for bicycling, jogging and strolling.

Pringle Creek winds through the eastern part and there is a large section of natural growth that has a beautiful wildflower area.

The main part of the original estate was donated by Mr. Bush in 1917, intending it to be used for park and playground. Later the additional acreage was purchased. The park includes the historic house and barn and is the pride of Salem residents.

The Historic Deepwoods Estate has an English style garden created by Lord and Schryver in 1929.

Photo by Jennifer Rehm

Rare plant puzzle

Photo © Donald C. Eastman

Name this plant!

A clue to help you on your quest for the correct answer:

"I'll gladly join you for afternoon tea,
if you wish to invite me."

Send me an email with the correct botanical name of this plant. A small prize to those who correctly identify by September 8, 2006.

Good luck!
Wally

Answer to last Journal's puzzle:

Menyanthes trifoliata

Congratulations to all who correctly answered!

To Do List

Caring for your NW Native Plant Garden

1 – Watering — September can be the driest month of the year so keep an eye on your garden and water when necessary, especially watch those plants you've added this year. Remember the basics: Water in the early morning. Water the soil, not the leaves. Water deeply and occasionally rather than shallow and often.

2 – It is bulb time. You'll want to get them now and store until the weather is a little cooler. For best selection, buy bulbs as soon as they are available. Keep in a cool, dry place until time for planting in October.

3 – It's also a good time to add fall color to the garden with Vine Maples (Acer circinatum), American Cranberry (Viburnum trilobum) or Three Leaf Sumac (Rhus triloba).

4 – If mature perennials are flopping, tie them up or use plant supports or stakes (criss-crossed like an X with ends inserted in the soil) to keep them upright and to prevent them from smothering neighboring plants.

5 – Watch for weeds — Although this time of year it's tempting to forget about weeding, keep up with it. There's an old saying about weeds that one year's seeding means seven years' weeding.

6 – Bird Feeding — Fall is the time overwintering birds establish their food sources. If you haven't already, put out your bird feeding equipment. The birds will be looking for treats and they'll return again and again all through winter. It might be a good time to turn that birdbath into a bird feeder. And while you're at it, think about adding more plants to augment the wildlife habitat portion of your landscape. Plants that retain their fruits are good choices (the Snowberry (Symphoricarpos) comes to mind but there are many others) and shrubs like Oceanspray (Holodiscus discolor) are very desirable to birds.

Sparky's Corner

A special message from our frisky contributor

Summer is so much fun! I love romping around the nursery. Sometimes we fly through the trees just for the thrill of it and sometimes we are looking for food. We've had yummy berries from the Indian Plum this year. The samaras on the maples are good, too.

And mushrooms! Every time it rains (not so much of that lately) we wait a couple of days and then the mushrooms start popping up everywhere. And did you know there are truffles? We find them when we're investigating. I heard there are pigs who do nothing but look for truffles. Imagine that! I don't know if the two-leggers let the pigs eat the truffles or not. I hope so.

I found some serviceberries the other day. OOh, so good! The blackberries are about ready. Currants and huckleberries are great, especially when they're warm from the sun. Nothing is better than hanging out with your buds and filling up your belly with warm hucks. Then you have to take a nap. It's a rule. Eat, sleep, it's all good. (I heard a mommy two-legger say that the other day.)

We're in gathering mode now. It's just starting. The acorns are ready but the filberts aren't quite there yet. When the nights are cool, we wake up early and start looking for food to bury. But mostly the nights are still kind of warm. Won't be long though until it's fall and that's when we kick into high gear putting away our winter forage.

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Sparky's Corner, continued

I went to visit old Mr. Snorters the other day. He was talking about trees. He knows a whole lot about them. He said his favorite tree is a Garry Oak but he wouldn't tell me which one it was--said it was a secret. That does not make sense. How can a tree be a secret? Bizarre. He said the oaks don't have lots of acorns every year. Every two or three years they have a lot but the other years, not so much. He told me that's why Wally has a lot of different kinds of trees growing here, because in the years when there aren't so many acorns we have other things to eat. Like, for instance, Doug Firs. Old Mr. Snorters told me when he was a little guy, he and his buds used to race up the Doug Firs and see who could grab some seed and race down the fastest. Crazy. A guy could get hurt that way if he fell. He said nobody ever fell though.

After talking to him I looked around at the trees. Right here in the nursery we have the oaks and the Doug Firs and also we have maples and birches. These are big trees, not little ones in pots. We have bushes--rhodies and blueblossom and Oregon grapes, too. Good food on those grapes. The only problem with the grapes and the berries, they are only good for right now. You can't bury them for winter. So in summer we eat the berries and mushrooms and bitter cherries. We eat as many as we want. We leave some for Wally though. He does like his huckleberries.

Gotta go now. My buds and I are going to race up and down the Doug Firs. Don't worry, we'll be careful.

Sparky

My friend, Scampers, could not restrain himself when JoAnn came out to the nursery with her camera. He just had to get a closer look at her. Someday that curiosity is gonna get him in trouble!

Flowers and Fruit

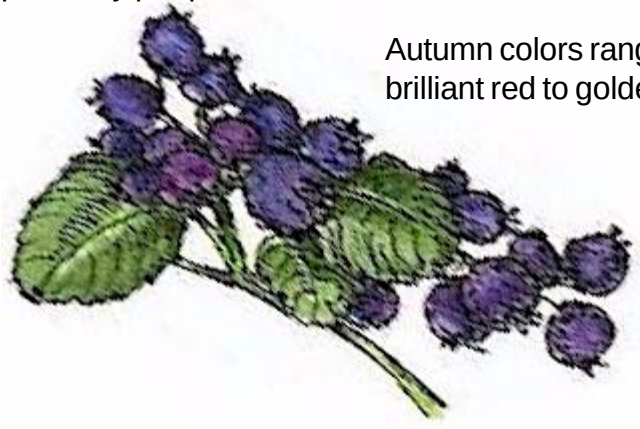
Multi-faceted Northwest Native Shrubs

Landscape plants don't have to be just for looks. If you select those plants that also provide food for people or wildlife, you'll get a lot more "bang for the buck" as the saying goes. These NW Native Shrubs give flowers, fruit and often winter interest as well.

Serviceberry or Saskatoon (Amelanchier alnifolia) is a choice deciduous shrub reaching between 6 to 10 feet at maturity. It is extremely hardy, prefers full sun and likes a healthy layer of mulch.

Saskatoon flowers generously with 2 inch tightly packed clusters of white blooms with yellow centers.

After the flowers fade, pea-sized purple fruits appear. The fruit is so delicious this plant is grown commercially in Canada as a produce crop. Wherever it grows, it is prized by people as well as wildlife.



Autumn colors range from brilliant red to golden yellow.

Serviceberry (Amelanchier alnifolia) Fruit graphic by Heidi D. Hansen, Photo by JoAnn Onstott

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Flowers and Fruit, continued

Tall Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium) is the largest of the Mahonias. It's year-round glossy leaves are beautiful contrast to the luscious yellow flowers and the dusky blue fruits. New growth is copper to bronze in spring.

Oregon's state flower flourishes in sun or shade and is highly drought tolerant.

It can reach 10 feet in shade but is usually about 5 feet tall in sunny gardens. It is long lived, perfectly suited to USDA zones 5-10.

Tall Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium)
Photos by JoAnn Onstott

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Flowers and Fruit, continued

Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus)
Flower photo by JoAnn Onstott, Fruit photo by Jennifer Rehm

Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus) is a thornless brambling shrub which grows rapidly into dense thickets of upright 4-6 foot stems. It makes a very effective fencing material and provides shelter for wildlife. The white flowers are about 2 inches across. They are followed by tart, red fruits that tumble into your hand when ripe. So delicious! This is an excellent filler plant to soften corners of your yard. It prefers moist sites but will tolerate dryer areas.

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Flowers and Fruit, continued

Salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis) flowers are so lovely! Most unusual for a bramble type shrub. The reddish-purple color and the fluffy semi-double form are cause enough to include this plant in your garden. And the fruits are a big hit with wildlife. The taste of the fruit varies dramatically from bush to bush and even from year to year. Sometimes it is quite tart, sometimes more sweet. It is an excellent substitute for raspberries in jam or pies. Salmonberry grows naturally along the Pacific coast from Alaska to California in open forest areas in sun or part shade.

Salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis) Photos by JoAnn Onstott

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Flowers and Fruit, continued

NW Native huckleberries are Wally's favorite fruit and you may find they're yours as well. There are several varieties of Vaccinium available. Some are short, some tall, some evergreen, some deciduous. The fruit sizes are from 1/4 inch to 1/2 inch. All have delicious fruits, beautiful foliage and sweet little bell-shaped flowers.

These hucks can be found in nurseries specializing in Northwest Native Plants:

--V. alaskense (Alaskan Blueberry)

--V. caespitosum (Dwarf Huck)

--V. globulare (Globe Huck)

--V. membranaceum (Mountain Huck)

--V. myrtillus (Billberry or Whortleberry)

--V. ovalifolium (Oval Leaf Huck)

--V. ovatum (Evergreen Huck)

--V. parvifolium (Red Huck)

--V. scoparium (Grouseberry or Red Alpine Blueberry)

Fruit of Oval Leaf Huckleberry (Vaccinium ovalifolium), flowers of Evergreen Huckleberry (Vaccinium ovatum), photos by JoAnn Onstott

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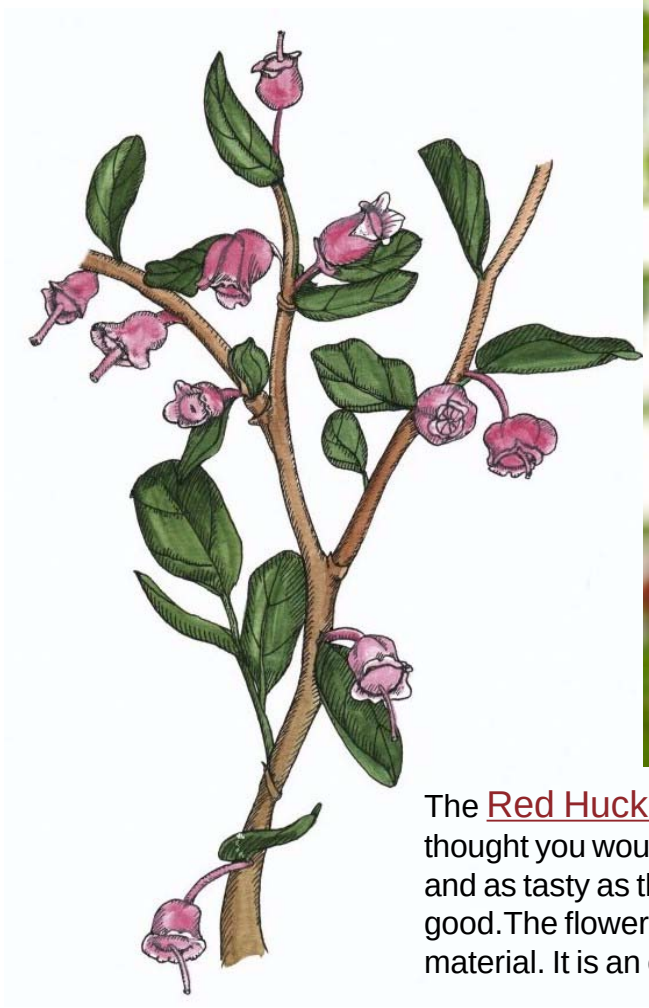
Flowers and Fruit, continued

Red Huckleberry (Vaccinium parvifolium), flower painting by Heidi D. Hansen, fruit photo by JoAnn Onstott



The Red Huckleberry (Vaccinium parvifolium) is so different from those hucks with blue fruits we thought you would enjoy a peak at this rather unusual shrub. As you can see, the fruits are mouth-watering red and as tasty as they are attractive. Though they are not as plentiful as in other varieties, they are every bit as good.The flowers are tiny, greenish to flesh-colored. This particular huck likes partial shade and rotted log material. It is an excellent companion to the Pacific Rhodie.

The Art of Gathering

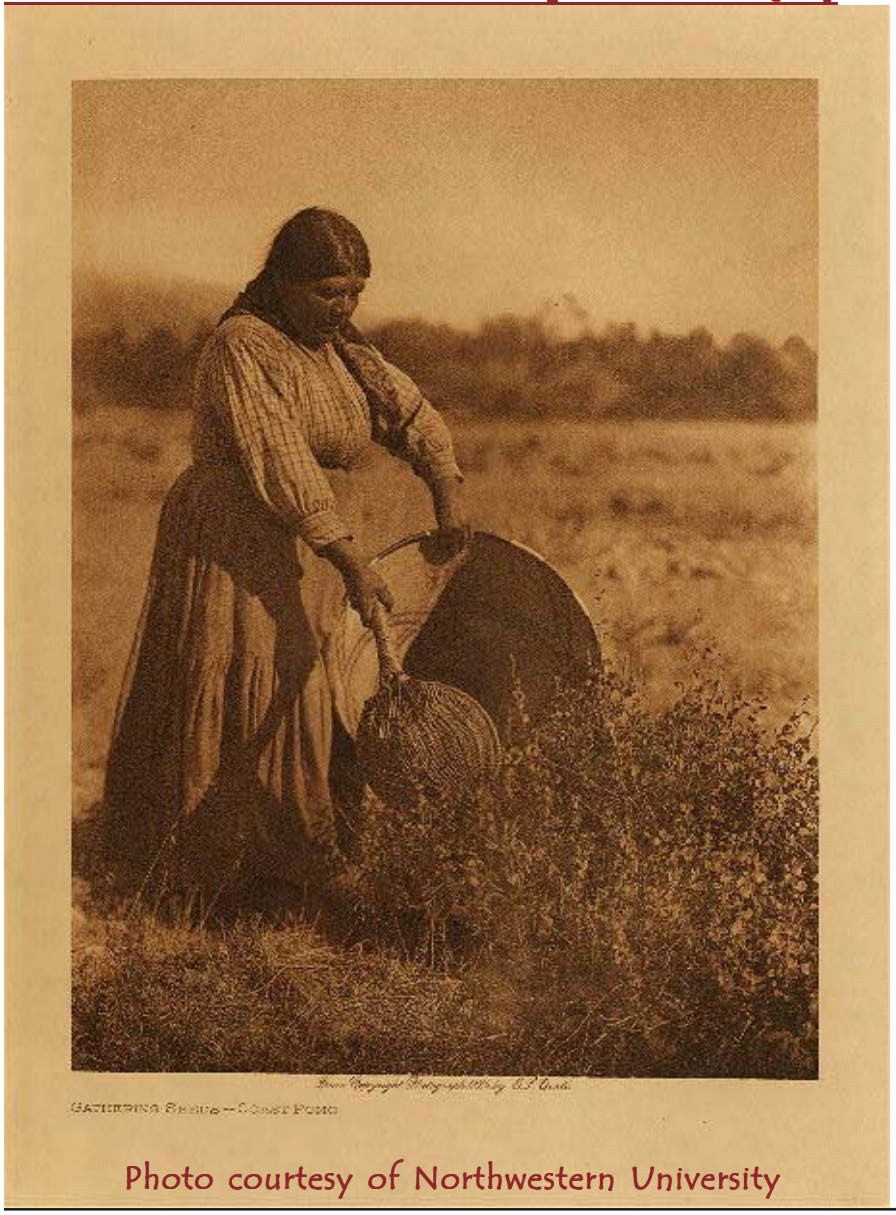


Photo courtesy of Northwestern University

Autumn activity of our ancestors

There are three main reasons for gathering seeds of native plants:

1. **For propagation.**
2. **For food, medicinal purposes or seasoning.**
3. **For crafts.**

Gathering for Plant Propagation

Seeds of native plants are rarely found to purchase. You can often buy the plants but if you're a bit adventurous, you might consider collecting the seeds to grow your own. There are some caveats, but collecting seeds for next year's planting can save you money and give you the warm fuzzy feeling of having helped native plants to multiply. And it doesn't remove the plants from the wild like digging them up would (which is a definite no-no!) as long as you only take a few seeds from any area.

Seed collecting was a vital part of plant growing for our ancestors. Obviously they couldn't shop from an online catalog, or run over to a nursery to buy a plant all nicely potted up. These are conveniences we enjoy today. But in olden times folks had to start their own plants. Transplanting a giant oak was not an option so they learned to start one from the acorn. A big-leaf maple could be had by gathering the seeds and taking the time to grow one.

Today the possibility of enhancing the landscape by gathering seeds, potting them up, nurturing them until large enough to transplant and then planting these brand new native plants in one's own yard is both a boon to the budget and a very relaxing pasttime.

Although collecting seeds is an easy and pleasurable task, there are a few points to consider. First and foremost, before you begin harvesting seed, realize the importance of not demolishing the source.

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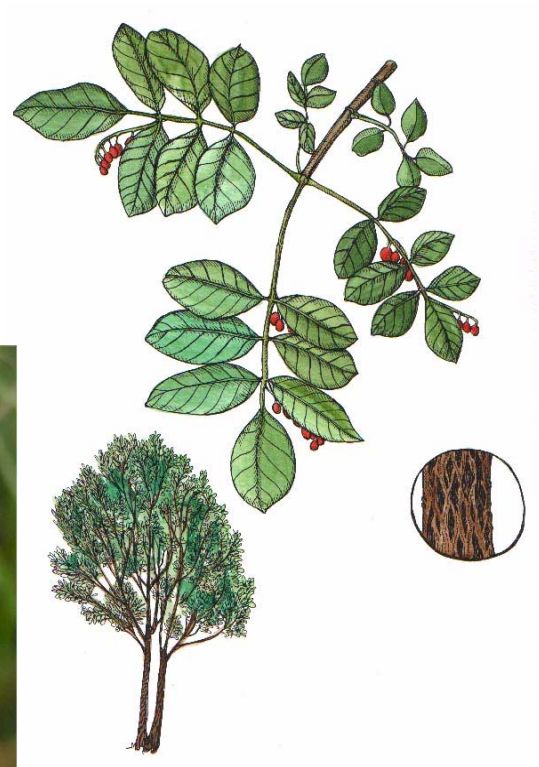
The Art of Gathering, continued

Gathering seeds is a matter of timing. For each plant, there is one time when the seeds have matured and have not yet been distributed by nature in the manner intended by the design of the seed pod, the flower head, or the seed itself. If the flower head has dried and turned brown on the stem, or if the seed pods have turned brown and are starting to split open, or you can hear the seeds rattle when you shake the pod, or if you can see that animals or birds are eating the fruit, then the seeds are ready to gather. Gather the seeds prematurely, and you make the task of cleaning the seed both difficult and time consuming. Wait too long, and the seeds will have dropped to the ground, flown away in the wind, been broadcast by exploding seed pods, or eaten. Determining the correct time to gather mature seeds is done by careful observation. There is no substitute for paying attention, studying nature. There is little to gain by collecting the flower heads when only 5 or 10% of the seeds have ripened. Nature considers seeds to be ripe about the time their containers have been destroyed by the weather.

Fall is a good time to collect seeds that will be sown next spring. And because there is such diversity among the sizes and shapes of seed pods and seeds, there are various ways to collect.

Some seeds are lodged deep within the fruiting body of a plant. For example, huckleberries, crabapples, and blackberries have seed inside the fruit. The best way to harvest is to let the fruit become very ripe, but not rotten. Harvest the fruit, collect the seeds within and let them dry thoroughly.



Good candidates for gathering seeds when their time is ripe: (left) Checkermallow photo by Jennifer Rehm; (above) Oregon Ash (Fraxinus latifolia) Painting by Heidi D. Hansen

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The Art of Gathering, continued

To collect seeds from plants that offer small seeds on flower heads, try tying a paper bag poked with holes around the seed heads as they begin to ripen. This way you can catch the seed before it falls to the ground. Seeds from alium, lilies, and most other perennials can be collected in this manner. Or collect flower heads in small paper bags, carefully labeling them as you collect. Labeling is extremely important if you want to keep track of what you have. It's good to note when and where you collected the seeds for later reference.

Seeds should be harvested in the afternoon when it is sunny and dry. If it is foggy and rainy or dewy, mold and mildew can get into the seed pods. Do not collect when there is moisture on the pods.

Also, do not take seed from plants that are in any way inferior, or have been plagued with pests or disease. You will collect these problems along with the seed.

After collecting the seeds it is necessary to make sure they are sufficiently dried before storing. A good way to dry them is to scatter the pods and flower heads on pieces of cardboard. Spread the seed pods and heads evenly.

Store them in a warm, dry well-ventilated room for a week or two, letting seed pods and flower heads dry naturally. Don't try to speed things up by placing seeds in an oven or a hot window. You can also dry on a porch or patio, anywhere outdoors that is protected from direct sun. Just cover them with a piece of screen or mesh fabric like cheesecloth so they don't blow away and birds can't get at them.

Larkspur (Delphinium menziesii) just beginning to set seed. Photo by Jennifer Rehm

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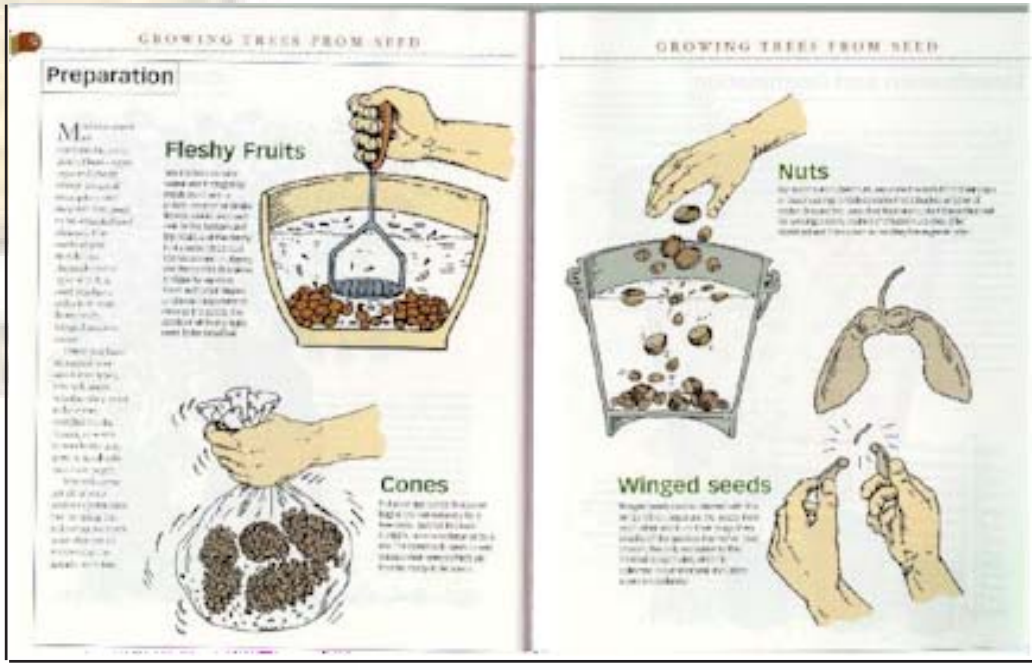
The Art of Gathering, continued

Once seeds have dried completely, clean them up by discarding pods, stems, petals, insects and all bits of vegetation. With most seeds this can be done by jiggling the cardboard flat for a few minutes until they separate and passing the seed through a screen or wire mesh. Large seeds can be hand picked. Or you can winnow the seed by passing it from one cardboard flat to the next, blowing off the chaff along the way.

Seeds must be stored in a cool, dry dark place before planting next spring. Studies have shown that if temperatures are too warm during seed storage, enzyme activity increases and the seeds will not be viable. Most seeds, if properly packaged, can be frozen. Freezing seed will also kill any insects lurking about. Film canisters, baby food jars and cocktail olive jars are ideal containers for storing seeds. Little manila envelopes are nice, too.

Note: Seed collection for any purpose is generally enjoyed by children. It's a great way to introduce kids to gardening and crafting. The various activities involved are not beyond most school aged children. Even the littler ones can participate in gathering, separating the seeds from the chaff, in decorating homemade seed packets, etc. And just about anyone can sprinkle seeds on a surface covered with glue for crafting.

In the UK, the Tree Council holds a "seed gathering season" and for 2006 this is observed from September 23 (the autumn equinox, considered to be the first day of autumn) through October 23. They suggest events such as guided walks to enjoy the beauty of autumn colors, workshops and other activities to gather seeds, nuts and fruits to grow a whole range of trees. These don't have to be organized events. They can just be a walk with family or friends. The Tree Council also publishes a book called *The Good Seed Guide* as well as several other books, posters, etc. A sample from this book is shown at right.



As you can see, this is very basic information, helpful to anyone who wants to collects seeds for propagation.

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The Art of Gathering, continued

Gathering for people or bird food, medicinal purposes or seasoning

When gathering seeds or nuts to be ingested or used on the skin, many of the techniques for propagation gathering can be followed. The main difference is to be quite sure the seeds have not been exposed to chemical poisons or other undesirable substances. If you're sure the seeds are safe, a good practice is to scrub the seeds carefully and then allow them to dry naturally to get rid of any dust or bugs. If you want to make sure they will never sprout, you can put them in a very slow oven for a couple of hours. Allow them to cool thoroughly before storage. Hot seeds tend to sweat and seeds must be totally dry to avoid mold or mildew.

Consider making a wreath for the birds. Wind branches into a nice shape, weaving the ends into the form so they're securely stuck. This is a good use of those tree and shrub trimmings--if they've dried out so they don't bend, you can soak them in water for an hour or so until more pliable. When your wreath form is dry and sturdy, start poking stems of seed pods into it, weaving the ends in. The more seed pods you add, the more securely they'll all be fastened--they'll hold each other into the wreath. Pretty leaves, sticks of different sizes and colors, thistles (careful not to get stickered!) are good to add. Put in some bright string or yarn for nesting materials. Grasses will also be appreciated by your feathered friends. Be careful to only incorporate items that will not harm the birds. Use no glue or wire (use string instead if needed), nothing artificial. Pure natural materials are necessary for this project.

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)

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The Art of Gathering, continued

Gathering for crafts

Crafting with natural materials is a fun thing to do and your creations are only limited by your imagination and the availability of materials. Since you are simply considering the appearance of the seeds or nuts, you can bypass the storage steps and of course viability of the seed is not important.

Photo © Marianne D. Wallace. Shelf fungus on tree trunk in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. October 2003

Acorns, cones from fir or pine or sequoia, seed pods of checkermallows and larkspurs, the bark of trees like paper birch or ninebark, all these are natural substances that lend themselves to creating beautiful decorative objects. Bits of lichen and Spanish moss, puffballs and various fungi come in colors of grey to gold to orange, a whole rainbow of shades.

Shelf fungus, when young, is white and soft on the underside. You can draw a picture on it with a sharp stick or a nail and when it dries it will be hard and the drawing will darken. It looks quite a bit like scrimshaw. The shelf fungus tops range from orange to brown to grey or black.

A cardboard picture frame covered with seeds or the scales from a pine cone, then brushed with varnish is unusual and stunning. A candle from the dime store wrapped in paper birch bark tied with raffia makes a gift almost anyone would love to receive. Those cheap plastic or glass vases you find by the bushel at tag sales can be encrusted with seed pods and acorns and even little sticks and transformed from something you can barely give away to become quite beautiful.

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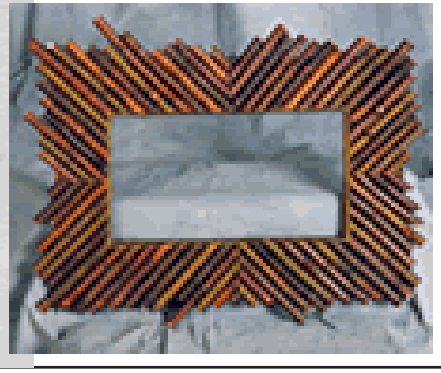
The Art of Gathering, continued

When I was a child my mother would put on a long-sleeved shirt and her dungarees, pack a pair of gloves, some clippers and a few paper bags and we'd go off for an adventure. We called this "weed picking." We'd drive slowly down country roads looking for pretty "weeds." Cattails were always a favorite as were thistles and grasses, anything with shape and color that we admired. They had to be not quite ripe, the seeds tight to the plants or else they'd shatter before we got them home.

We'd carefully trim a few here and a few there, never taking many from any one place. When we thought we had enough we'd head for home and cart our treasures to the back yard. We'd get out the vase—we had a special big brass vase we used for this—and begin arranging.

We'd hang those that had seeds upside down from a tree and spray them with clear laquer. They dried quickly and into the vase they'd go along with lichen-covered branches and brightly colored leaves. When we were done, the arrangement went to the hearth where we dutifully admired it until after Thanksgiving. It was beautiful!



Natural crafts examples: (left) woven basket filled with gathered materials. (below) frame made of sticks.

Old botanical painting pf Allium. Note the seed pods in various states of maturity.

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The Art of Gathering, continued

When they were young, my grandchildren used to come visit me for a week in early September and one of the activities they most enjoyed was making things out of natural materials. We'd make holiday gifts for everyone, something different each year. Sometimes we made candles (2-litre pop bottles with tops cut off, natural findings placed against the insides and filled with wax, cut away the pop bottles when cooled). Sometimes we engaged in "fern smacking" (place ferns on cotton fabric napkins, cover with white paper and then several layers of newspaper, smack the ferns with a hammer until the image of the fern is stained sufficiently onto the napkin). And sometimes we made suncatchers (squares of glass with Vine Maple leaves between, tape the edges and attach wire hanger). The cost was very low and the children were so proud of their work. They learned the joy of giving something they'd made with their own hands and they still treasure those memories as do all the family members who received these true gifts of the heart.

Whether you gather for propagation, for food or for fun projects, think of the people in olden times who did the very same thing. Sometimes time seems to stand still.

Resources:

The Tree Council (http://www.treecouncil.org.uk/) is a group whose goals are:

1. Making trees matter to everyone
2. More trees, of the right kind, in the right place
3. Better care for all trees, of all ages
4. Inspiring effective action for tree

Northwestern University, http://www.northwestern.edu

Terry Kramer, a Bayside free-lance writer

Examples of natural crafts (left to right): Candle covered with bark and leaves; ball with leaves and lichen, "weed" bouquet

Grow Your Own Furniture

Willow crafting is more than just baskets!

Willows are lovely small trees or shrubs, depending on the type. Most folks are familiar with pussy willows which announce spring with their soft, woolly nubbins on the willow branches. As a child in grade school my teacher brought in pussy willows she had cut in her yard and we colored the furry “flowers” with crayons in pastel shades of pink and blue and yellow and lavender. Today I don’t bother with the coloring part but just cut some and plunk them in a vase. Nothing needs to be added to a bundle of pussy willows to make a fine bouquet but you could use crayons or pastels to add some decorative hue if you are so inclined.

Consider, then, some of the other uses one can make of the cut willow branches (called ‘whips’). They are pliable and strong and willow furniture will last for years if properly cared for.

I made a chair a few years ago and it is still as beautiful and pristine as the day I made it. I keep it on the patio sheltered from the direct weather but it stays outdoors all year. Last winter I sat in my very comfortable chair and sipped a cup of hot chocolate when there was snow on the ground. Felt quite decadent doing so, I might add.

Willow baskets are still wonderful and well worth the time and effort to make them. We’ll always need good baskets.

This baker’s shelf (right) took about 8 hours to create from gathering to admiring time.

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Grow Your Own Furniture, continued

Willow crafting is not new. Indeed, it has been commonly done round the world for centuries. Baskets and trellises and fences and tables and even toys for children are made of willow.

Willow craft basics:

You'll need some simple supplies--

--Something to cut the branches for the frame, and the willow whips. Big loppers work well, a hand saw, pruning saw or chain saw. Depends on the size of branches you are going for.

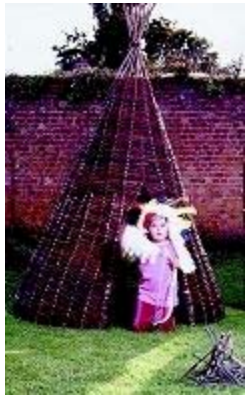
--A tool to prepare the whips. A rasp is the preferred tool for this. The one my instructor recommended was the Stanley Sureform Rasp. It's small enough to fit your hand and it is available most everywhere. The blade becomes dull eventually so you have to get replacement blades. The rasp I used for my chair still had a couple of big pieces of furniture's worth of blade left in it. This rasp costs about $6 or $7 and replacement blades run around $4-5.

--Hammer and nails. You'll need nails in appropriate sizes for your wood and whips. Not too big either. Panel nails or other kinds that have those little ribs in them are best because they stay where they're put better than smooth nails.

--A drill with bits a little smaller than the nails you'll be using.

This is the Stanley Sureform rasp. There are probably other brands as well.

A compost corral, a wigwam and a trellis, all made of willow whips. All this from simple NW native willows!



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Grow Your Own Furniture, continued

There is a company in England called English Hurdle Somerset that's been making use of this delightful plant for four generations. They grow their own withy (willow) beds to supply the craftsmen weaving material for designs both "classic and innovative." Their products are among the most beautiful I've ever seen. See their website at www.hurdle.co.uk.

Canada also boasts willow and twig craftspeople. Cotton & Willow in Calgary, Alberta, produce stunning frames for mirrors or pictures and the shelf in the baker's rack style (shown on page 23).

Here in the U.S., several companies craft exquisite rustic furniture from willow, some using additional natural materials as well. This chair was made by the Alder Brook Company in Maine.

Gathering your framing branches and your willow whips.

For the frame of whatever you're making, just about any kind of tree or shrub will work. Let the required strength for your project guide you in choosing what to use. Elderberry wood is not a good choice because it's not sturdy enough. You want maple (anything from Vine to Big-Leaf), oak, pine, fir, crabapple, even branches from a large rhodie will be fine.

The willow whips should be big enough to drive a nail through but small enough to be bendable. For my chair the whips were about 1/2 inch in diameter. For a basket you would want 1/4 inch or larger. Use the illustrations in this article to give you an idea of what size you will need.

This is a very personal craft and there are no laws or restrictions imposed other than what will work for you. If you're making a table to hold a 200 pound refrigerator you better have some hefty whips and a strong frame. A little plant stand wants smaller sized materials.

(top) This sturdy chair is made of big willow whips and birch slats that were planed smooth on one side. (bottom) One of English Hurdle Somerset's beautiful fences.

⇨More⇨

Grow Your Own Furniture, continued

My beautiful chair! Sometimes I put a cushion on the seat just for esthetics but it doesn't need it. It's perfectly comfortable just the way it is.

Preparing the frame wood and whips.

Here's where your rasp comes in. You will transform the wood and whips from branchy and nubby to smooth. You don't want to get poked when you sit in your chair and the project will be far more lovely when the material is sort of burnished.

First, nip off any side branches with your hand pruners unless they will be incorporated into your design. Get them as close to the wood as possible without removing any bark. That bark gives beauty and strength and longevity.

Using your rasp, sand off all remaining nubs and make the material as smooth as you can. Run your hand over the whips and you will feel any places that need more work. Rustic is OK, splinters are not OK. Take your time and do a good job. The final product is only as good as the materials you use to make it.

April Song

by Sara Teasdale

Willow, in your April gown
Delicate and gleaming,
Do you mind in years gone by
All my dreaming?

Spring was like a call to me
That I could not answer,
I was chained to loneliness,
I, the dancer.

Willow, twinkling in the sun,
Still your leaves and hear me,
I can answer spring at last,
Love is near me!

⇨More⇨

Grow Your Own Furniture, continued

Now build the frame.

Figure out what you want the frame to look like. The frame for my chair was about the same design as frames for the tables others in my class built. Study photos and you can see the difference between the straight frame and the curvy willow.

Cut the pieces of wood to the right size if needed. Where you want to hammer in a nail to fasten them together, drill a pilot hole first. Always drill a pilot hole to prevent splitting the wood. This goes for the whips also. If it splits anyway, take it off and use that piece for something else. A split won't heal itself, it will just split further and the frame must be very strong.

Test the frame on level ground to make sure it doesn't totter. Dirt is not usually a good testing spot. Make any necessary adjustments and get your piece to stand true and level.

Fill it in!

Once the frame is done, begin bending the willow to the shape you want. Drill and then nail each piece in place. Each additional piece of willow strengthens the project. When we put the first piece of willow on my chair I had my doubts about it ever holding a human body. The instructor said not to worry and he was right. It's plenty strong. The four willow pieces that make the arms are luxuriously wide enough for not just my arms but a glass of tea as well. It's the whole of the structure and not the individual bits that make these creations strong and long lasting.

Photos of frames built and in progress, taken during a willow workshop at Homestead Hall, "a country meeting place near Regina Beach, California."

⇨More⇨

Grow Your Own Furniture, continued

If you've ever seen the movie Phenomenon with John Travolta and Kyra Sedgewick, you may have an incorrect perception of willow furniture. Those that Kyra built (and John bought) were poorly planned. I guess Hollywood just isn't the right source for willow designs!

A simple addition of a few curvy sticks takes this plain old wire trellis from common to creation.

When you're done adding all the willow, take a look at your creation. Something I learned in my class is that there is a final, finishing touch to almost every one I've seen that was not noticeable when first viewed but just made the piece complete after it was added. In my chair, it was the arch that goes from one front leg to the other. Without it, the chair was fine, it worked perfectly and I'd have been a happy woman. But with that last flourish, the chair is just, well, done.

The tables that others in class made had a finishing touch as well. The tops of the tables were willow pieces nailed across the frame like little soldiers, all in a neat row. But the finish was when an additional piece of willow was nailed across those raw ends. The tables went from rough to right downtown style.

Protect your newly finished project from rain, especially the first year. It will become more beautiful as the willow bark ages to a satin-like finish.

⇨More⇨

Grow Your Own Furniture, continued

Willows are such wonderful material to use for building all kinds of things, it's a wonder someone hasn't built a house from it. But maybe they have, I don't know. I think this gazebo is one of the most beautiful willow creations I've ever seen. It was done by a gentleman in the UK by the name of John Waller who calls himself an Underwoodsman. I am not exactly sure what that means but for me, I'm calling him a genius of willow work.

John Waller's gazebo. See his website at http://www.underwoodsman.co.uk.

Now if I'd made this myself, I would have finished the top a little differently. Perhaps a round sort of willow bubble at the very peak. Or maybe a fan shape as a topknot. Or some willow loops tied together like a rose. I just may have to go out back and see if I have any willow shoots long enough to make my own gazebo. Wonder where that rasp went .....

The last pussy willow of spring. Photo by Jennifer Rehm

Living Willow Structures

Functional ‘topiary’ with a twist

Long freshly harvested willow cuttings (whips) can be used to make functional and attractive structures in the garden that grow and develop throughout the years as well as the seasons. This has been done on the continent for centuries but is only lately found favour in America.

I first learned about it from an article in our local newspaper. A lady in the area has ‘caught the bug’ so to speak, and made several of these creations for herself and friends or neighbors. I thought I had cut that article out for reference but can’t locate it right now but as I recall, she was especially fond of living gazebos as an alternative to the more usual patio umbrella way to get some shade. And I must agree, this form of gardening is much more exciting than an umbrella. For one thing, the fact that it’s alive ensures that it will be cooling to sit beneath. The arching branches overhead not only provide shade but a lovely sound as a breeze rustles the leaves.

This is devilishly easy. You can make woven screens, arbours, arches, tunnels, domes (for adults or smaller versions for children’s play) and trellises to support climbing plants such as honeysuckle, wild grapes or clematis. Even the most basic structure can look very nice and, as with other willow workings, there are no rigid rules to follow.

This is very different from making willow or ‘twig’ furniture. You’re actually growing willow trees, but in shapes, sort of like topiary work. Since you’re working with live trees, with any luck at all they’ll grow and mature and you’ll be able to enjoy them for years and years. Willows are quite hardy.

⇨More⇨

Living Willow Structures, continued

Any variety of willow with enough growth can be used to harvest the cuttings if the whips are long and preferably straight, especially for larger structures. You can use more than one kind of willow for different stem color, leaves and catkins. We like cutting them in fall the best because the rain will take care of the watering. The winter hibernation will give them a chance to root well before they begin growing in the spring. Probably not all will grow so you may have to replace some in the spring but that is OK. Just incorporate the new ones into the structure and the established ones will help the fresh ones grow. In a year you won't be able to tell which were replaced.

To begin, prepare the site just as you would for growing any type of cutting.

Push the fresh whips about 12-18 inches into the ground about 1- 1/12 feet apart. If desired, a bit of rooting hormone on the cut end of the whip can be used. You can put them in the ground straight up and down or at an angle, depending on what you're making. A vertical whip tends to sprout fresh growth only from the top but diagnonal whips will sprout along their length so you'll have a denser covering on the structure.

Clarewilks' living garden bench shown from autumn planting, resting over winter and generous sprouting the following summer. This is an elegantly inspired design. The 'wave' pieces just above the bench seat are not alive but they add contrast and strength and help to hold the whips in place. And they are beautiful!

⇨More⇨

Living Willow Structures, continued

Tie the whips together to form the shape. Use some soft ties for this, strips of old nylon stockings work very well as they have some stretch to them which allows the whips to grow unhampered. If you use grafting tape the whips will sometimes graft themselves together which may or may not be a good thing, depending on what you're after.

For a dome or arbour, tie the whips together at the top. For the sides of your dome, tie the whips in a criss-cross pattern. This works for fences also.

The cuttings will begin sprouting new growth in spring. You can let the new stems grow, weaving them into the structure or letting them stick up for an unkempt look, or you can trim them back. Watch over the structure the first year to make sure it gets enough water, just as with any other new planting. After the first year you probably will not have to water at all.

This living willow gazebo is dormant during the winter. In spring it will be adorned with catkins, all soft and furry. By summer it will be a cool leaf-covered bower.

⇨More⇨

Living Willow Structures, continued

The beginnings of a wigwam. Next, more whips will be planted on the diagonal between those already in place and then tied at intervals to these uprights, leaving an opening to enter the structure.

Resources:

Living Willow Sculpture by John Warnes. The blurb about it says it will show you how to make many items "and also living willow seats (scented if you like!)."

Sefton Living Shade Project's website http://www.livingshadeinsefton.co.uk/careofwillow.htm has excellent information on "care of living willow structure after planting."

Allotment Forestry, The Local Woodland Products Initiative.

Bbc.co.uk's gardening page has some very good instructions on creating living willow structures. http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/design/projects/fencing_willowstructure.shtml

Sara's Garden in South Wales is a business which will create the living willow structures for you. You might get some ideas from their website or, if you're in South Wales, they are a resource you may take advantage of. http://www.livingwillowstructures.co.uk/

University of Colorado at Boulder has a very informative document online titled *Green Mansions: Living Willow Structures Enhance Children's Play Environments* by Sharon Gamson Danks of EcoSchool Design. http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/13_1/Volume13_1FieldReports/WillowArticleFinal.pdf

Clarewilks sculpture, http://www.clarewilks.co.uk/information/default.htm

Salix: Native Willows

The trees to grow for willow crafts

Salix fluviatilis (Columbia River Willow, Sandbar Willow)

This rare beauty is native only to the banks of the Columbia River and lower Willamette River of southwestern Washington and northwestern Oregon. An attractive willow, it reaches 7 - 20,' developing a shrubby form. From the light brown, scaly bark grow hairy branchlets, soft as silk, and 2-6," lance-shaped, light green leaves with hints of blue. In early spring it is covered with cheerful 1½ - 3" catkins.

Columbia River Willow, Sandbar Willow (Salix fluviatilis)
Drawing from the USDA database

Unidentified willow at the Lewis and Clark Garden in the Oregon Garden, photo by Jennifer Rehm

⇨More⇨

Salix: Native Willows, continued

Salix hookeriana (Hooker's Willow, Bigleaf Willow or Coastal Willow)

This petite willow is rounded and shrubby with stout, stiff branches. It remains small, reaching only 20' at maturity with a spread of up to 10.' It has lovely, hairy oval leaves, soft to the touch, with grayish green hues. In spring, large, 4" catkins burst into halo of yellow anthers, celebrating the end of the dark days. This tree grows in eastern Siberia but in North America it is native only to the Pacific coast, from Alaska to northwestern California. It is hardy in USDA zones 6-10. Being highly tolerant of salt spray and brackish standing water, this willow is a wise choice for coastal plantings. It is even capable of growing in sand dunes as willows contain potent rooting hormones. In fact, their branches may be placed in water for several weeks and the steeping liquid used as a rooting stimulant for cuttings.

Hooker's Willow (Salix hookeriana) drawing from USDA database.

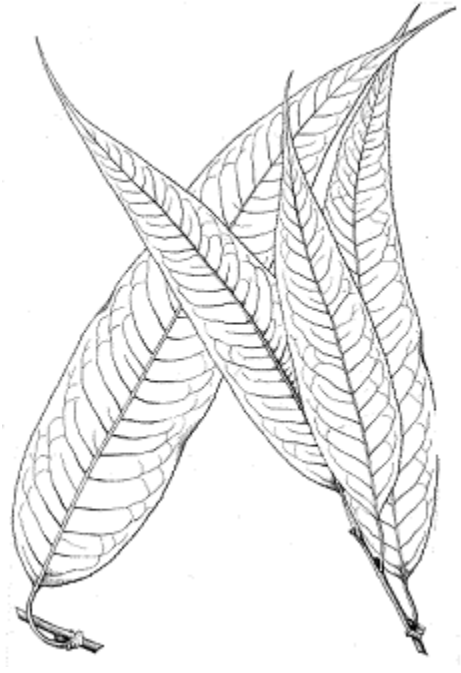
Unidentified willow in the old botanical print at right.

⇨More⇨

Salix: Native Willows, continued

Salix lasiandra (Pacific Willow)

Pacific willow is one of the larger native willows, reaching 50' tall with a slender, delicate form. It commonly develops several stems. The bark is cracked and yellow in mature trees while the leaves are 2-6" long, narrow, sharply pointed, much like the leaves of a peach tree. The Pacific willow likes moist, sand or gravelly soil but is tolerant of dry conditions. It is native to the west, from BC to Saskatewan and south to California, in USDA zones 2-9.



Pacific Willow (Salix lasiandra)
Photo by JoAnn Onstott

⇨More⇨

Salix: Native Willows, continued

Salix lasiolepis (Arrowyo Willow)

This upright willow will become a small tree to 30' tall. It is found in low, wet, full sun areas of California and Oregon in USDA zones 8-9.

It has long narrow dark glossy leaves that are a bit curled. The flowers are catkins and appear before the leaves in the Spring. Native Americans obtained an aspirin substance from Arrowyo Willow much like the synthesized version on store shelves today. The long slender branches and twigs of the willow are woven into baskets and furniture because they are so pliable. This is a good wetland restoration plant.

Painting of Beaver with Pacific Willow and Oregon Ash bark by Heidi D. Hansen. Drawing of Arrowyo Willow (Salix lasiolepsis) leaves by Marci Degman

⇨More⇨

Salix: Native Willows, continued

Salix scouleriana (Scouler's Willow, Mountain Pussy Willow or Fire Willow)

A hardy, rapidly growing shrub that can attain 30' and wide spread of 10.' Scouler's willow is found from Alaska to California and east to Manitoba, as well as South Dakota and New Mexico. It is extremely hardy and survives to USDA zone 5. In the wild it is found along streams and in dry, upland sites to 3000' elevation, often following fire (giving it the common name, Fire willow). It is successful at preventing erosion on steep slopes. This willow has red or yellow, velvety twigs and soft hairy dark green leaves. It is a charming "Pussy Willow," bearing subtle, furry catkins, relished by children of all ages. Cut a few for a flower arrangement and bring a smile inside. For large catkins, prune regularly and steep the clippings for a "rooting tea."

Scouler's Willow (Salix scouleriana)
Photo by JoAnn Onstott

⇨More⇨

Salix: Native Willows, continued

Salix sitchensis (Sitka Willow, Coulter Willow or Silky Willow)

This variety is the most common willow of the Pacific Northwest but its range also extends into the Rocky Mountains at low elevations and it is hardy to USDA zone 4. It grows well on sand and gravel bars of rivers and in forest clearings. A distinctive shrub, the Sitka willow grows only 2 - 10' tall and equally wide. Sitka willow has dark brown branches and dark, shiny, 2-4" leaves with velvety undersides. Native groups used this willow for smoking meat and fish, as it does not give off a strong or offensive odor when burned. They used the strong and flexible bark of all willows for making ropes.

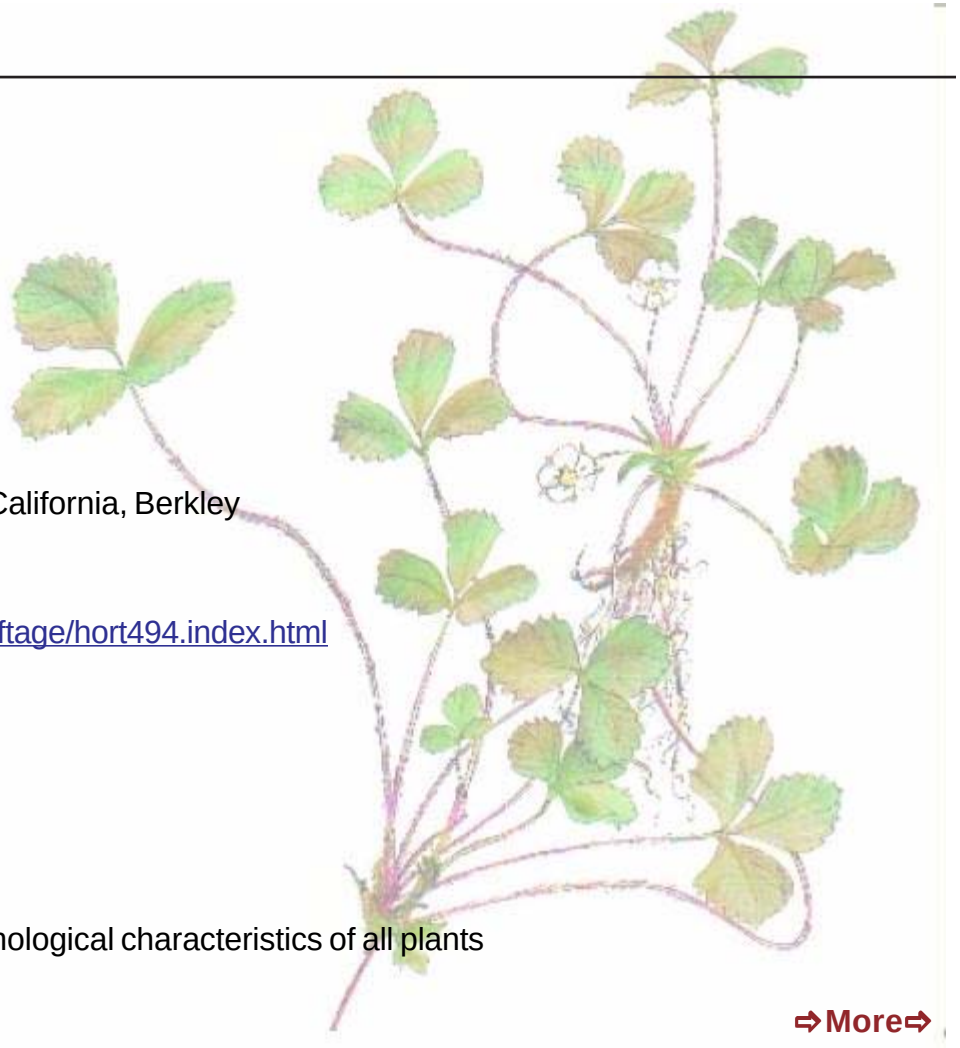
Sitka Willow (Salix ditchensis) drawing from USDA database.

Unidentified willow in art deco vase.

Useful Plant Databases on the Web

Here is a good collection of web data bases that will be useful to professional growers and all native plant gardeners. This list is from a larger list compiled by Lawyer Nursery in 2002 and published in one of their flyers. I wish to thank them for this public service.

Wally



American Bonsai Society

http://www.absbonsai.org/abs_home.html

Bonsai web

http://www.bonsaiweb.com
Portal of links to educate about the art of bonsai.

CalPhotos

http://elib.cs.berkeley.edu/photos/

Over 33,000 plant images from the University of California, Berkley

Cornell University online grafting course

http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hort494/graftage/hort494.index.html

Fire effects on plant species

http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/
USDA, Forest Service site.

Flora of North America Web Site

http://hua.huh.harvard.edu/FNA/
Taxonomic relationships, distributions, and morphological characteristics of all plants native and naturalized found in North America.

⇨More⇨

Useful Plant Databases on the Web, Continued

Bonsai web

http://www.bonsaiweb.com
Portal of links to educate about the art of bonsai.

Fire effects on plant species

http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/
USDA, Forest Service site.

Forest Types of the United States

http://forestry.about.com/library/tree/bltypdex.htm
Maps of the most common forest types.

Forestry index

http://forestryindex.net/
Links to news & info on the forestry industry.

Cornell University online grafting course

http://instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hort494/graftage/hort494.index.html

Growit.com Rooting Database

http://www.growit.com/Know/Rooting.htm
"Extensive information on rooting cuttings of woody plants, organized by botanical name. Developed for commercial growers."

The Native Plant Network

http://nativeplants.for.uidaho.edu/network/
Information on how to propagate native plants of North America.

⇨More⇨

Useful Plant Databases on the Web, Continued

Woody Plant Seed Manual

http://www.wpsm.net/
Manual by the US Forest Service covering seed biology, genetic Improvement of forest trees, seed testing, certification of tree seeds and other woody plant materials, and nursery practices.

River Corridor and Wetland Restoration

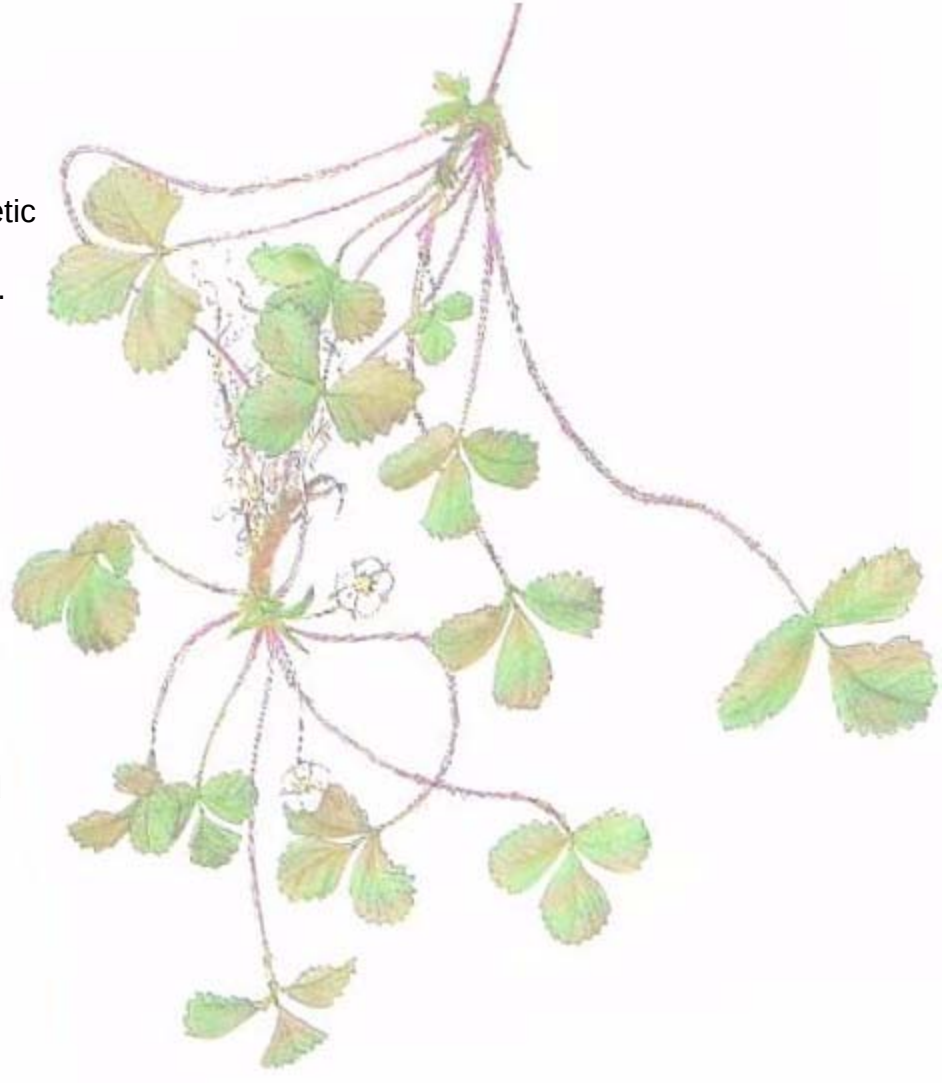
http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) site

Soils

http://homepages.which.net/~fred.moor/soil/links/10102.htm
A website about soil fertility, chemistry, and pH with many interesting links.

Soil Science Society of America

http://www.soils.org/
Website for soil science professionals. Offers information and links.



Personal notes from Wally

One of the most noble activities a person can do in their lives is to plant a tree. This is not an act for oneself, but a gift to all who will benefit from a tree during it's long stead. Children can climb it, families can picnic beneath it, lovers can gaze into one another's eyes in it's shade. Squirrels can perform their incredible acrobatics on it's branches, birds can nest there away from predators. Each tree cools a spot of earth, afixes the soil and replenishes the very land on which it grows by dropping leaves as they are no longer needed.

All this comes from planting a single tree. Lucy Larcom's poem, Plant a Tree, describes these benefits with her lovely words.

PLANT A TREE
Lucy Larcom 1826-1893

He who plants a tree
Plants a hope.
Rootlets up through fibres blindly grope;
Leaves unfold into horizons free.
So man's life must climb
From the clods of time
Unto heavens sublime.
Canst thou prophesy, thou little tree,
What the glory of they boughs shall be?

Good luck!
Wally

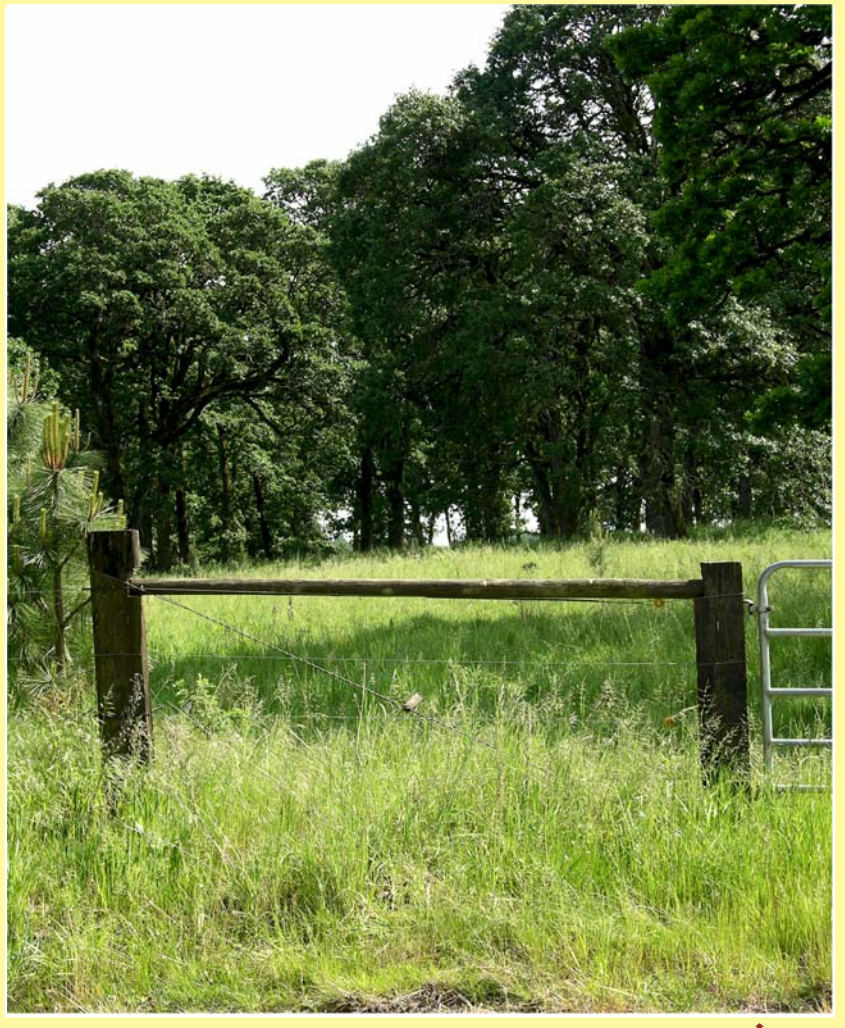


Photo by JoAnn Onstott

NOTICE: NURSERY IS CLOSED

In November 2010,
Wallace W Hansen NW Native Plants
Native Plant Nursery and Gardens
closed permanently.

Many thanks to all our gardening friends for your interest in the native plants of the Pacific northwest. It has been our pleasure to serve you.

www.nwplants.com

Our website, www.nwplants.com, is no longer commercial. Our goal is to continue Wally's legacy of generating interest, even passion, in the magnificent native plants of the Pacific Northwest through information and illustration.

Good luck! Good gardening!

Pacific Madrone
(Arbutus menziesii)
Red bark, glossy green leaves, white flower clusters.
Unique and outstanding!