

Volume 8, Issue 4-2010

July-August 2010

# Northwest Native Plant Journal

A Web Magazine

**Blue for you:  
Beneficial native shrub, p.28**

**Sparky returns!**

**Ants, surprising garden helpers, p.10**

Published by Wallace W Hansen Northwest Native Plant Nursery & Gardens

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## Feature Articles

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# About this Journal

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 Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)  
Photo by n Onstott

**Writers wanted: If you have expertise for any species of Northwest plants and wish to write an article for pay for publication in this Journal, please contact us via e-mail at [nwplants@gmail.com](mailto:nwplants@gmail.com) Some articles (and pics) might deal with propagation, culture, diseases, restoration, reclamation, fertilizers, etc.**



# On the Cover: Blueblossom

It never seems to fail: if you have a Blueblossom (*Ceanothus thrysiflorus*) in your yard, people will ask you what it is. If you're not outside, they'll even knock on your door to get the answer.

I completely understand their curiosity. The first time I noticed one of these plants was out toward the southern end of Salem. The house was a large white colonial with a laurel hedge bordering the yard and inside that substantial separation between 'ours' and 'theirs' was a row of screamingly blue plants. The stately iron fence along the sidewalk allowed pedestrians and drivers-by to share in the enjoyment of this spectacular botanical display.

I had no idea what might be the name of it, but asked Wally (a true font of native plant knowledge, sorely missed). He replied that it must be Blueblossom (*Ceanothus thrysiflorus*).

'Twas a joyful country ride soon after to the nursery where I first met the very blue flowers that adorn the tip of each evergreen branch: Blueblossom!

She lolls about at the eastern side of my yard where I planted her around 8 years ago. It appears the partially shaded, protected environment is to her liking. She's gorgeous!



Blooming even in shade....Photo by JoAnn Onstott

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Cover: Blueblossom, continued



One of my neighbors had a nice Blueblossom at the corner of her driveway. It generated a lot of questions from folks walking and driving by. She ultimately painted a lovely little sign with the plant's pedigree and staked it out beside the Blue. She said as soon as she put the sign up, inquisitive minds began reading the sign instead of knocking on her door. Also, it provided a little bit of native plant knowledge to passersby even if they didn't know they had a question. "Spreading the word," she called it. Great attitude! Wish I had the forethought to snap a photo of that sign.

Unfortunately a runaway car drove right over it last fall. The whole neighborhood mourned its demise.

Hummers should like the flowers even if they are blue but I have no facts to substantiate that hunch.

A word of caution--watch out for bees!! They really come running when those sweet smelling flower bundles are ripe. Both honeybees and bumble bees just love the blooms.

An altogether choice selection for the garden: *Ceanothus thrysiflorus* (Blueblossom).

Blueblossom and friend (*Ceanothus thrysiflorus* and *Apis nigrocincta*), Photo by JoAnn Onstott



# To do now in your native plant garden

**1** – Manicuring Rhododendrons. After your rhodies finish blooming, remove the spent flower clusters to encourage the plant to send the maximum amount of nutrients to next year's flowers. This is not hard to do but you have to do it exactly right or you'll demolish next year's blooms.

Before you start on the deadheading, look at the overall size and shape of the whole shrub. If it has grown too large, select branches to remove and take them from the largest terminal. Cutting the branches

Arm yourself with a large bucket to hold the trimmings. The dead flower bunches are sticky with resin and if you have lots of them you may want to wear gloves or carry along a damp rag with which to wipe your fingers.

At the very tip of the flowering branches you will see the old blossom cluster which is usually surrounded by one to five new little bright green shoots right on top of the last large deep green mature leaves. Grasp the dead flower cluster and carefully snap it off by bending it slightly without also snapping off the new shoots. Rhodie branches tend to be a bit brittle so you may lose some. It's not the end of the world if you break off new shoots or branches, but each time it happens the coming year's bloom will be diminished.

Here's a website full of information about rhodies and more tips on deadheading them: <http://www.rhodyman.net/rhodyho.html>.

**2** – Begin collecting seeds as they mature. Most plants produce seed of some sort and a great lot of them can be started to make new plants if you're good at doing this. I am not (yet) but it can be definitely be done and does not require any special equipment, though a greenhouse or cold frame makes it easier or so I'm told.

**3** – Mostly you should take the time to enjoy your garden while it is in full growth. All too soon it will be gone. While everything is growing in earnest, the birds and butterflies and bees are enjoying the naturalness provided for them. Don't let their energy go unnoticed! Relaxing in the garden is ever so much more entertaining than television could hope to be. Never will you see a rerun. It's all live and happening just for you right now.



# Mystery plant puzzle



This photo appeared in our photo library labeled "Native American Plum." Anybody want to hazard a guess as to its real moniker?

Test your native plant knowledge-- identify this northwest native. The reward is simple but very satisfying: You will be included in our list of Official Plant Detectives.

Send me an email (NativePlantLady@nwplants.com) with the correct botanical name of this plant.

**Good luck!**

**P.S. Do you have a plant you'd like to identify? Email it to us and we'll show it here on our Mystery Plant Puzzle page.**

## Official Plant Detectives

Jerry Murray

Sabrina Kis

Carol Hiler

Mike Burns

Nancy Whitehead

Pat Opdyke

Luke Kishpaugh



# Sparky's Corner

## A special message from our frisky contributor



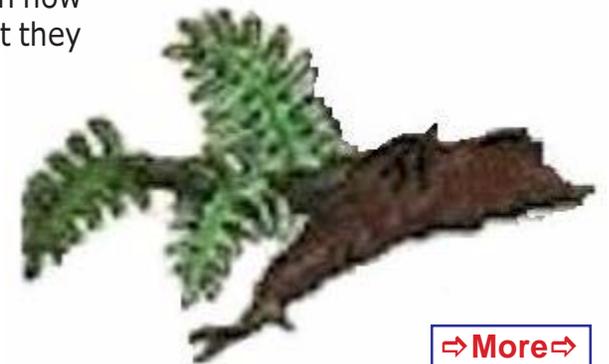
Sparky has come home! He is mostly resting at this point as he says the journey and activities severely drained his young body. However, he has not lost his ability to talk, and tales of the adventure are, well, plentiful.

We are probably all aware of the diminished numbers of western gray squirrels in recent times. Causes of this change are obvious-- loss of habitat and decreased food sources--but another factor is growing and is even more serious than previously thought. It is the continued invasion of introduced species of squirrels into areas historically dominated by our western grays.

Such competition naturally comes from native tree squirrels including Douglas' squirrels (*Tamiasciurus douglasii*), red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) and northern flying squirrels which sometimes impact western gray squirrels because they have similar diets and nest sites.

However, it is the California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), a more recent potential competitor first seen in Washington in 1912. It is not known how they arrived in the area but they seem to have increased in number with the construc-

tion of new dams and bridges on the Columbia River, according to a Washington Department of Wildlife report dated 1993. This species has expanded rapidly along the eastern Cascade Mountains, consuming many of the same foods as the western gray. But the California ground squirrel is considered more aggressive than the western gray and that is where Sparky's activities comes into play.



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# Sparky's Corner, continued

According to what Sparky disclosed during our first chat since his return, the community has begun taking defensive steps to prevent further encroachment by these invaders. Specifically, they are actively working to make themselves as strong and healthy as possible. The maturing generation of which Sparky is a part have banded together to thwart the tide of intruding aliens and send them back to where they came from. Apparently, Sparky and his 'buds' are quite serious about the situation. He told me that they carefully considered the options available to them and chose the path they thought would do the most good immediately and in the long run.

We have to applaud their decision to take this route. At the very least they will be better off for what they are doing, and it may be the best strategy in the long run.

As to the specifics about what exactly went on at the squirrel clambake, Sparky said it was a rendezvous with destiny. He brought back some photographs of the hazardous obstacle course they were each required to run several times a day. He called the course a 'pick-me-up.' I don't know if that is what they did for each other after running the course or a bravado-flavored name they gave it.

Sparky plans to resume his column in time for our next issue.

Welcome home, Sparky! We wish you and your buds good luck in this very important task you have undertaken.



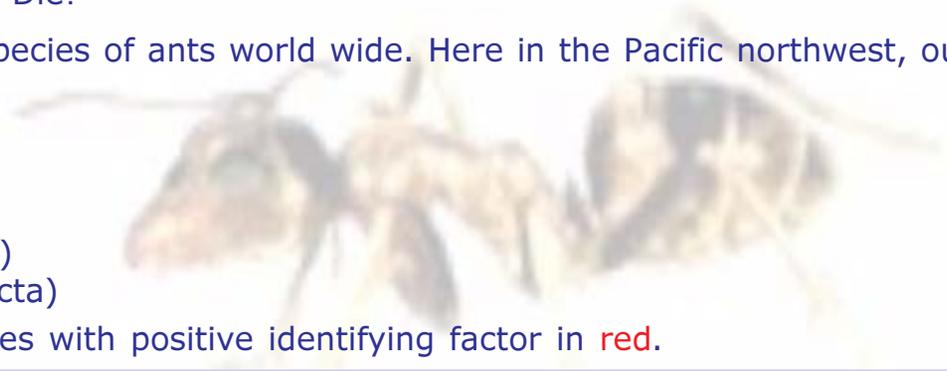
# Ants in the garden!

## Evil, angelic or somewhere in between?

A gardener's perception of ants seems to depend on the ant pedigree, where encountered and what the ants are doing at the time. We give them points in the 'pro' column for being outside, extra 'pro' points for not being on a plant. If they have ventured indoors, we object irregardless of what they're doing. After all, what good could ants do when trailing across the kitchen cabinets or scouting out the dog food bowl. The ant pedigree is the trump card. Carpenter ant? Off with their heads! Fire ant? Die!

There are reported to be more than 12,000 species of ants world wide. Here in the Pacific northwest, our ants are likely one of these:

- Argentine Ant (*Linepithema humile*)
- Carpenter Ant (*Camponothus*)
- Odorous House Ants (*Tapinoma sessile*)
- Pavement Ants (*Tetramorium caespitum*)
- Red Imported Fire Ants (*Solenopsis invicta*)



Let's look at a short description of each species with positive identifying factor in red.

### **Argentine Ant (Species: *Linepithema humile*)**

This species of ant is native to Argentina and Brazil, probably introduced to United States in ships around 1890's. Now migrated to southern states, California, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Oregon and Washington.

**Size:** 1/16" to 1/4"

**Color:** Dark brown to black and shiny

**Wings:** Varies

**Diet:** Prefer sweets, will eat almost anything including meat, egg, oil and fat. When foraging for food, Argentine ants leave pheromone trails everywhere they go, instead of just from nest to food source. This habit ensures they do not waste time visiting the same area twice. The norm in other ant species, worker ants are primarily responsible for gather food. But in this species, Argentine queens also assist with foraging for food.

**Habitat:** Wet environments near a food source. These colonies can grow to monumental size, sometimes covering entire habitats, such as an entire garden or your whole back yard.

**Impact:** No health threat, but can contaminate food by leaving their bodily waste behind.

**Shape:** Segmented, Oval

**Legs:** 6

**Antenna:** Yes



[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Ants in the garden! continued

## **Carpenter Ants (Species: Camponotus)**

Named because they **build their nests in wood which may cause significant damage to the wood in your house**. There are nine types of carpenters throughout the U.S. ranging in size from one-quarter inch workers to three-quarters of an inch for a queen. Colonies are established by a single, fertilized queen building her nest in a cavity in wood, where she raises first workers. She feeds them saliva and does not leave the nest or feed herself during this time. When ready, workers gathering food to feed the next generation. Once mature, this first generation of worker ants work to increase the food supply for the colony. The colony population grows very rapidly. A colony can eventually produce 2,000 or more workers.

**Size:** 5/8"

**Color:** Range in color from red to black

**Wings:** Varies

**Diet:** Living and dead insects, meat, fats and sugary foods of all kinds, including honeydew and nectar from plants.

**Habitat:** Build nests anywhere they can find water and moldy or damp wood, such as tree stumps, firewood or in the plants around your house. Also build nests inside, usually entering buildings through wet, damaged wood, although it isn't uncommon for them to adapt to drier environments.

**Impact:** **Do not carry disease, but when building a nest inside a home, they dig smooth tunnels inside the wood which weaken the wood and potentially damage the wood that keeps the house standing. This kind of damage can be very expensive to fix.**



**Shape:** Oval

**Legs:** 6

**Antenna:** Yes

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## **Odorous House Ants (Species: Tapinoma sessile)**

Name for strong, **rotten smells it gives off when crushed** and because they commonly nest in or around houses. Native to the United States, these ants are very social, living in colonies of up to 100,000 members.

**Size:** 1/16" to 1/8"

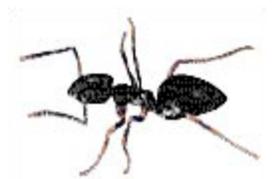
**Color:** Brown or Black

**Wings:** Varies

**Diet:** **Dead insects and sugary sweets, especially melon.**

**Habitat:** Commonly make homes in exposed soil, under stones, logs, mulch, debris and other items. Also nest in wall and floor cracks.

**Impact:** Odorous House ants **do not pose a health threat, but they can contaminate food by leaving waste behind.**



**Shape:** Segmented, Oval

**Legs:** 6

**Antenna:** Yes

[⇨ More ⇨](#)

# Ants in the garden! continued

## **Pavement Ants (Species: *Tetramorium caespitum*)**

Can live inside but, as their name implies, they **nest in or under cracks in pavement**. Typically found in the eastern half of the United States, California and Washington. Pavement ant colonies average 3,000 to 4,000 members and have several queens.

**Size:** 1/8"

**Color:** Dark Brown to Black

**Wings:** Varies

**Diet:** **Eat almost anything, including insects, grease, seeds, honeydew, honey, bread, meats, nuts and cheese.**

**Habitat:** Named because it usually **nest in soil next to and beneath slabs, sidewalks, patios, and driveways**. Indoors, pavement ants nest under a building's foundation and within hollow foundation walls.

**Impact:** Pavement ants **do not pose a health threat, but they can contaminate food by leaving waste behind.**

**Shape:** Segmented, Oval

**Legs:** 6

**Antenna:** Yes



## **Red Imported Fire Ants (Species: *Solenopsis invicta*)**

More **aggressive** than other ant species and have a **painful sting**. Mound nests should be actively avoided. Can adapt to many climates and conditions. If the colony senses increased water levels in their nests, they will come together and form a huge ball or raft that is able to float on the water!

**Size:** 1/8" to 3/8"

**Color:** Dark Reddish Brown

**Wings:** Varies

**Diet:** They primarily feed on vegetation.

**Habitat:** Will build nests in mounds of soil outdoors, in landscape or near a building's foundation. Occasionally enter buildings through holes or cracks in walls and foundations.

**Impact:** Their sting **painful and often results in a raised welt that becomes a white blister**. Persons allergic to insect stings will react more severely. Mound-building activity **can damage plant roots and lead to loss of crops.**

**Shape:** Segmented, Oval

**Legs:** 6

**Antenna:** Yes



[⇨ More ⇨](#)

# Ants in the garden! continued

After discovering which ant species are common in the northwest, we visited several online garden forums to see ant behaviours others observed. Here's what they reported:

## **Sightings and/or symptoms:**

- tons of ants in the garden that seem not to be bothering the plants.
- ants especially favoring the sunflowers.
- perennial rock garden with ants enjoying it too much.
- carrying little white egg-like things while they were walking around on the ground. I turned over a leaf of the plant where they were congregating. Behind it there were hundreds of ants on the top of one leaf, and lots and lots of little white things. After about 5 minutes, the ants were gone, as were the white things. Ants had carried the white things away. A week later, I noticed the same behavior on a different plant. They don't seem to hang out on these plants, just swarm and then leave. Other kinds of plants have loads of ants just hanging out, especially in and around the flowers.
- aphids covering several of the flowers and leaves. I sprayed them with soap water. Now I see ants and aphids there.
- in a wooded area, we have LOTS of ant colonies. If they stay outside, I let them be. Ants are vital to the reproduction of some woodland plants such as trillium and other spring plants...the ants take the seeds underground to store for food..and what they don't eat sometimes germinate..and for those delightful surprizes of "how did that get here?" I'll let them stay!
- I have a big nest of black and red ants. They are about 1/2 inch long, and always climbing up and down one of my conifers. I'm not sure what they are doing, but the tree does not seem to be harmed, so I leave them alone.
- I have huge anthills everywhere! They're coming out of the splits between cement panels in the driveway, surrounding the trees, and are in the flower beds.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## **Ants and Trilliums**

Mature trillium seeds have an appendage, covering about 1/2 of the seed, called the elaiosome, which is rich in oil. The elaiosome attracts ants — they go crazy for it.

The busy ants grab the seeds with the delicious elaiosome and carry them off to their nests which are usually 1-2 feet away from the mother trillium.

They then eat the elaiosome but leave the seeds to germinate.



*Trillium ovatum*  
(Western Trillium)  
Photo by JoAnn Onstott

# Ants in the garden! continued

—I have been digging in my backyard, found a million small black ants back there. I just planted a couple hundred dollars worth of bushes and perennials. Will the ants hurt them?

—I have a number of ant hills at the base of trees - conifers, fruit and deciduous trees. I've been afraid to pour boiling water over them in case I injure the trees. My husband says that the ants won't injure the trees, but I have seen a number of trees die that were home to ants. So, are the ants attracted to dying trees or do the ants kill the trees?? I need to do something about these ants because we put a lot of money into planting these trees.

—We gave our veggie patch a year to replenish the nutrients in the soil. Now colony of ants have moved in.

—We are in the south and fireants are taking over. Just recently, after a big storm, the ants moved indoors.... into my 3 year old's bed. He had 53 fire ant bites all over him. This is not a "live and let live" situation.

The reports of ant behaviour are definitely interesting. Other gardeners shared theories as to why the ants are performing these actions, including some that could have their roots in old wives tales.

## **Theories:**

—You'll never fully get rid of ants, they always come back. The best you can hope for is to force them to nest some where else. The more you fight them, the more plentiful they become.

—90% of all insects are beneficial to your garden. So long as your plants are healthy I wouldn't worry. Most ants are pollinators.

—They can be both good and bad.

—Ants are spreading wilt.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## **Ants and Trilliums, contd**

The seeds sprout in a couple of years, expanding the trillium population in new clumps and patches. Quite a plan!

It takes 8-10 years from germination to get a bloom, and even more years to produce multiple blooms on a single corm.

There's a guy in New Zealand who is successfully doing tissue culture on trilliums, including the purple kurabayashi. His main goal is to produce mature plants faster than 8 - 10 years!



*Trillium ovatum*  
(Western Trillium)  
Photo by Jennifer Rehm

# Ants in the garden! continued

—Ants themselves generally have no harmful effects - fire ants & carpenter ants being the exception. For the most part, they control other insects, and clean up debris.

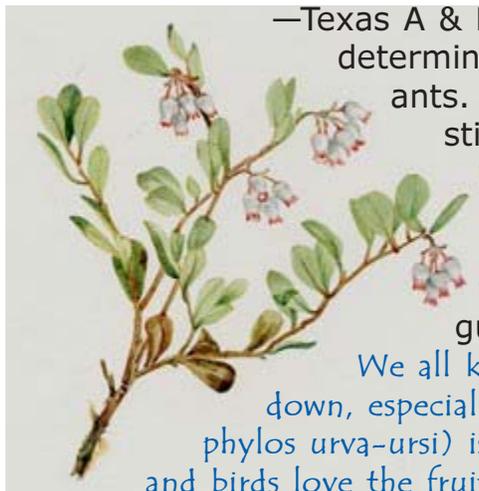
—Ants should be controlled before any beneficial insects are set loose.

—Ants are bad for plants, especially if the plant is in a pot. Ants ruin the roots of a plant.

—Ants will protect the aphids from predator insects and move them from plant to plant. Get rid of the aphids and the ants will disappear as well.

—Like all other soil critters they recycle and clean up dead bugs and things, but they also have symbiotic relationships with mealy bugs, aphids and scale insects. They can bring these bugs into your garden and infest the plants with them.

—I understand why people want to get rid of fire ants or any other ant species that's actually aggressive. I even understand objecting to a big mound-type ant nest in the middle of a flowerbed. But otherwise, why bother? You'll just end up doing yourself and your garden a disservice. Ants (except tropical leafcutter ants) don't damage healthy vegetation—they're beneficial insects.



—Texas A & M has been studying fire ants for a while and have determined that the more bermuda grass you have, the more fire ants. This is because the legless mealy bug, after it is born and still has legs, loves the roots of bermuda grass. They attach themselves to the roots and live there until they die. The mealy bug makes some sort of secretion that fire ants LOVE. In fact, once the fire ants get hooked on this stuff they can't live without it. Kind of a fire ant heroin, I guess. So, my sympathies for bermuda grass lawn owners.

We all know that a good native groundcover beats a grass lawn hands down, especially lawns of bermuda grass. For instance, Kinnikinnik (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) is beautiful, easy to care for, requires no mowing and birds love the fruit. Can't say that about bermuda grass.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## Fire Ant Benefits

No, that's not an oxymoron. According to an article titled "Beneficials in the Garden" by Trish McDaniel for the Galveston County Master Gardeners, in the spirit of finding something good about everything fire ants actually do some good in the garden.

They are voracious feeders and devour fleas, ticks, termites, cockroaches, chinch bugs, mosquito eggs and larva, and scorpions. Fire ants also eat a lot of boll weevils in cotton fields and stinkbugs in soybean fields.

They aerate and break up soil so that more water and nutrients are available to the plants.

However, Texas spends over one billion dollars a year to control these bugs. They bite with their powerful jaws in order to sting people, cattle, and wildlife.

Lastly, they "interrupt our God given right to walk barefoot in our grass."

# Ants in the garden! continued

Finally, we gathered a wide selection of ways to get rid of ants that gardeners have shared on the forums.

## Treatments:

- If the plants are outside use Ant Sand to get rid of them. If the ants are in your potted plant change the soil or apply Ant Sand.
- Killing the aphids alone is not effective, since ants will just bring more from elsewhere. In such cases, use of an ant bait will kill the nest, and end the spread. Then the aphids can be killed by a soap spray.
- Cinnamon or chile pepper will do it.
- Find the colony's hill and pour cornmeal (from grocery or feed store) on it. They eat the cornmeal, it expands in their stomachs and blows them up without spreading insecticide or harming other good insects.
- Coffee grounds. Since they're such an excellent fertilizer/mulch anyway, go to Starbuck's and get enough grounds to mulch your garden, especially on any anthills you see. Make sure you get some on all the rest of the garden too, to discourage formation of new hills. If they do make new hills, spot treat with more coffee grounds.
- I DO have fireants. I've tried boiling water and it killed the ones I poured it on obviously, but the rest seemed to just move their mound over a foot....
- Bluepepper's Super Bug Death Tea! You could add stuff like curry or orange oil after boiling the tea.

8-10 cloves garlic

A couple spoons of Murphy's Oil Soap

Habanero sauce

7 or so Tabasco Peppers

A couple spoons Canola Oil

a couple spoons dishsoap

Mix the ingredients with just a little water, then mix with 1 quart hot water (which was noted further down in the thread). Let it steep. Strain the pepper and garlic bits out with cheesecloth to make sure your spritzer bottle doesn't get gunked up.

Then go to town on the bugs. This is said to work on fire ants.



## Common Ant Benefits

The Old Farmer's Almanac states that "generally ants are beneficial."

Ant nests and tunnels are superior aeration tools.

Leaves and insects that ants take into their nests compost well to provide nutrients to surrounding plants.

As they go about their daily business, they often accidentally pollinate flowers and distribute seeds.

If you see an ant highway being used heavily, they are harvesting the honeydew from aphids, mealybugs and other sap-sucking insects that damage the plants.

Ants are considered delicacies in some cultures. The repletes (specialized worker ants) gather large amounts of nectar and hold it in their bellies until they get back to the nest. These ants are particularly sweet at this point and are said to be quite tasty.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Ants in the garden! continued

—Human urine. It really works. Either male or female, the human hormones kills the queen and without queen the colony disappears. I didn't believe it when I first heard it but of course since it's free I had to try it and it really does work.

—Applying urine will kill only a few of the surface ants. The nests are so deep (sometimes 10 feet) and so well protected against liquid getting in (so that they don't drown when it rains) that a mere few fluid ounces of urine won't do more than annoy them. If they get annoyed enough, they will move the nest somewhere else.

—I have killed fireant mounds with d-limonene, the active ingredient in orange oil. Use 1 tablespoon or a little more in a gallon of water. You can add a little molasses or compost tea, sometimes I do if it's handy. Pour the entire gallon over the UNDISTURBED mound. If you disturb it, the little devils will rescue a few eggs & make more queens. I've heard it's most effective on a hot sunny day, but I've never had it to fail.

—We have used instant grits on ants, they eat the grits then they drink water and the grits swell up in them and kill them.

—Try Nicotine Tea

pros: 1—it's free  
2—it works

cons: 1—it's poisonous  
2—it's gross

Take an empty milk jug, fill with water and cigarette butts. Leave it out in the sun to "brew". When it's the color of tea, dump it on the mound. Obviously this will only work if you know a smoker, but it does work, and unlike citrus oil/d-limone it won't burn young plants. I might hesitate to use it in a veggie garden, though...



[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## **More Good Ant Deeds**

Plants with discreet flowers, particularly if they are sticky, often benefit from garden ants.

Some ants eat caterpillars, and many of them eat the eggs of other insects.

In tropical climates, many plants have nectar outside the flowers to draw ants because ants will protect them by biting and stinging other insects including those who rob the nectar. It's a delicate balance though. The plants are so magically engineered that their outside nectar attracts ants who set up guard systems, but the inner nectar is protected from maurading ants by a chemical deterrent inside the bloom.

In the Pacific Northwest, a mutualism exists in some fruit trees, such as peaches and cherries, that have extra-floral nectaries supporting ants. It may be wise to tolerate a few aphids elsewhere in the garden, as they will be an alternative food source for many valuable garden predators, in addition to ants.

# Ants in the garden! continued

—Nurseries and stores around here sell a product called Amdro. It goes for about \$10 or \$15. Some folks say it works quite well for her in getting rid of fireants.

—I have used Amdro. The ants just move. I have never tried urine, orange oil, or cornmeal.

—I know that orange oil stuff works. I had an ant problem in a house i was renting. I sprayed them with the orange clean and watched as they squirmed.

—I've heard they don't like rue or pennyroyal.

—I had to respond because someone mentioned using 'OVER N OUT.' This stuff is toxic, not intended for edible garden use and not approved for this purpose. It takes one full year for this stuff to be gone. Yes it'll get rid of fire ants but at what cost?

—I've been putting cornmeal around my roses for blackspot this year. I watched the tiny black ants carry it back to their nests and thought how nice they are taking it underground for me. I never thought about them eating it and exploding.....I will go look tomorrow and see how many are left.

—Grits do not make ants explode. Adult ants can not consume solids, unless the solids are microscopic in size. Adults feed solids to their larvae which ingest the solids. Then the adults feed off liquid secretions from the larvae.



—Borax and sugar water are great to kill ants!

—I do not like to kill all the good bugs and the lizard and toads and birds with broad spectrum poisons. I have successfully used "ant wars" with the fire ants, but the carpenter ants, the black ants that hold their back ends over their backs and the tiny little black sugar and little red piss ants are driving me totally crazy. Boric acid (100%) and Terro help in the house but outside I have a constant battle. I could care less what the real names of these little pests are, just tell me how to get rid of them without harm to the enviroment and other creatures.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## Restoring Fire to the Sequoias

For their size, ants play many critical roles in the world of botany. An excerpt from this curious story by Bruce Kilgore gives a surprising depth of wilderness reactions caused by human actions inadvertently changing the delicate balance of nature.

*"A unique problem with fire overtones has been identified in recent years by a naturalist at Giant Forest. He finds what seems to be correlation between increased numbers of a small insect, the carpenter ant, and numbers of people visiting sequoia groves.*

*Although the ant always may have been a member of the sequoia-mixed conifer forest eco- system, its role of establishing galleries in the heartwood of the sequoia has been noted only in recent years.*



# Ants in the garden! continued

—Cooking oil! I save used vegetable cooking oil and pour about half a gallon very slowly over a fire ant nest. Their nests are made to withstand water, but not oil. The oil seeps in and “glues” them to the sand; the mound dies, does not move. The grass does not die, in fact it’s way longer now in that spot than in the rest of the lawn. I have tried every ant bait/poison in the market and the mounds only move a couple of feet. This worked. Wish I had known about it before they killed my persimmon tree. I know that since this is edible oil it will breakdown and I think it is more eco friendly than poisons, certainly didn’t hurt the grass at all.

—The new Over ‘n Out has worked for me, and I still have toads, tree frogs, and lizards, hummingbirds galore. I did not use it in my veggie beds, just broadcast it in my play area. Have not seen any ants in over a year. Still get those pesky snakes showing up, skeeters, dragonflies (beautiful), it seems not to harm the ones I love.

—I was skeptical of the urine treatment, but got my husband to treat 2 hills that had responded to nothing. After treating twice no more fire ants. (He is still laughing about getting to go in the yard.)

—Texas A & M Two-Step FIRE ANT Control

#1 Apply broadcast bait with active ingredient spinosad while ants are foraging. Use Safer Brand Fire Ant Bait and Green Light Fire Ant Control with Conserve.

#2 Treat mounds around foundation and in high traffic areas with D-Limonene (orange oil). Commercial organic treatments include Safer Brand Fire Ant Mound Drench and Garden-Ville Anti-Fuego Soil Conditioner.

—Howard Garrett’s Two-Step Ant Control

#1 Use beneficial nematodes for treatment of larger areas. There are thousands of different species of nematodes. The nematode for fire ant control is sold under the name ANTidote from Gulf Coast Biolotic Technology (1-800-524-1958). It attacks the fire ants at the larval stage. It is very effective and can last for years.



## **Restoring Fire, contd**

*The researcher believes that artificially high numbers of ants and consequently of ant chambers in giant sequoias have been stimulated by the special food materials provided by visitors to the groves.*

*The possible management significance of the chambering of these ants was made clear in August 1969 when a sequoia fell in the Hazelwood Picnic Area of Giant Forest.*

*On close examination, it was noted that six factors probably were involved in the tree’s falling one of them being extensive chambering by the carpenter ant at the point of breakage. The other five factors may have been of equal or greater significance.*

*There is a definite possibility that fire*



*suppression activities have played a role in allowing an abnormal build-up of carpenter ants in certain sequoia groves.*

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Ants in the garden! continued



#2 Use a mound treatment that consists of compost tea, molasses, and orange oil. You can buy concentrates of this. Look for Garden-Ville's Auntie Fuego Soil Conditioner, or you can buy Garden-Ville's Garrett Juice and add the orange oil to it. You can also make your own by making compost tea and adding orange oil and molasses to your homemade tea. To this tea, add 4-6 ounces of orange oil and 4 teaspoons of molasses, per gallon, to make your own mound control juice.

—Fire ants can be controlled with organics. First of all to help the soil and run the fire ants out of your yard you can use Liquid molasses or spread dry molasses over your yard. Fire ants hate molasses and will move there mounds over night. After this first step, you can use two ounces of orange oil to one gallon of water and treat all the mounds you come across. It may take more than one treatment to get rid of the little suckers. You can also buy some already mixed-up fire ant killers at most feed stores and organic nurseries in our area. The good thing to all of the above is, it will not hurt anything in your yard or lake

—Often ants are attracted to urine because nitrogen is usually scarce in the environment and it is needed by ants to make proteins. So, the ants will thank you for uric acid and any other nitrogenous wastes you might give them.

—I simply made a massacre of the fire ants (after they stung me a few dozen times when I went to pick up a pot they had made into a mound without my knowing) by doing the following:

1. Boil a nice large pan of water
2. Pour it on top of ant pile
3. Follow up immediately with apple cider vinegar
4. Feel good about amount of death incurred?
5. No, go to step 1
6. Exit program

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## Restoring Fire, contd

*The National Park Service hopes to support a study of the role of these ants in the sequoia ecosystem so that we can learn more about the ecological relationships that may exist between numbers of humans, sandwiches, carpenter ants, woodpeckers (which prey on the ants), fire suppression activities, and giant sequoias.*



Originally published in *National Parks & Conservation Magazine*, Vol. 44, No. 277, Oct. 1970: 16-22

Note from Jennifer: This reminds me of a song about something similar:

"....an ant, can't move a rubber tree plant but he's got high hopes....."

# Ants in the garden! continued

—For ordinary ants, use mint plants to protect something like my rose bush from aphids and cayenne pepper to move ants from a place where I don't want them. I buy a new bottle of cayenne pepper sauce and sprinkle the whole thing around where they are and they move farther away from the house.



—My Grandma used to use cucumber peelings. For some reason they don't like them. I just take a walk outside in my yard while making salad and peel the cukes right where the pesky critters hang out. I'm sure to my neighbors I looked like a nut. Seemed to work though...

## **Outdoor Ant Control**

Supplies: 1 to 2 gallons water  
Stove or barbecue grill

Instructions: Heat water to 160 to 170 degrees. Quietly sneak up to the mounds of ants and pour the boiling water down the hole. Note: I normally try to do this between 11am and 2 pm.

## **Indoor Ant Control**

Supplies: 1 tbsp. boric acid  
1 tbsp. mint jelly or peanut butter  
1 cracker  
Small cardboard box

Instructions: Mix the boric acid and mint jelly; spread mixture on a cracker. Punch pinholes in a cardboard box; place cracker inside. Place box in an area where ants cause problems, but away from children and pets. Note: The mint jelly or peanut butter lures the ants in and the boric acid kills them.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## **Benefits and Roles of Ant-Plant Mutualism**

Alex Peck published this article on April 18, 2001. See complete text at [www.colostate.edu/Depts/Entomology/courses/en507/papers\\_2001/peck.htm](http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Entomology/courses/en507/papers_2001/peck.htm).

*Ants play a vital role in rainforest ecology. They have developed mutual relationships with many types of trees and other plants, some so important that without one another they would not be able to survive.*

*By developing these relationships, both ant and plant create an optimal environment for each other in which they can avoid predation, provide protection, and cycle nutrients and waste products with each other. Some plants have even developed ways to not only provide a habitat, but they also secrete food products specifically for the ants living with them. In turn, the ants give an amazing amount of protection not only from herbivores, but also from certain types of plant diseases.*

# Ants in the garden! continued

## **Indoor and Outdoor Ant Control**

Supplies: Diatomaceous earth

Instructions: Dust food-grade diatomaceous earth along the ant's pathways. Note: The white powder will cut through their exoskeleton and they will dehydrate and die.

## **Indoor and Outdoor Ant Control Supplies:**

1 1/2 cup Cream of Wheat

Instructions: Place a dish of Cream of Wheat where the ants can access it. Note: After they eat it, the cereal expands and the ants will explode.

—No, ants don't explode. But the foragers may bring the wheat back to the nest to feed their larvae. The larvae will not explode either.

—Hot water will kill ants, but it is a dangerous way to do it. A sweet aqueous solution of a borate is often used. It works.

—I don't care if what I do makes the ants move as long as they are not in my yard. I tried the granular molasses this year and I have no ants. The bag cost 4.00. I used one bag in the front and one in the back. Easy to apply with a spreader... Of course, I'll have to reapply at least once a year, but I would have to do the same with poison. Don't know if one bag would have taken care of everything, I wanted every square inch to have a granule.

—Soapy water will kill and repel ants. However, it will only kill the ones you actually spray. I used to have patio made from 2 x 2 concrete squares. In between the squares was sand and the ants (all kinds) just loved to build mounds in that sand. I drenched the patio with soapy water 4 times. The ants left and didn't come back. I lived there for two years.

—If you use soapy water be careful of the kind you use. Some types of soap will kill your plants.



[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## **Ants as Allies**

Ironically, the earliest known use of biological control, practiced for over 1,700 years, employed ants to protect citrus from pest insects. Bamboo bridges were provided so that ants could go from tree to tree. The Chinese introduced weaver ants to the citrus orchards to protect the trees from herbivores, a technique also in use in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam.

Testing results of using weaver ants reveals a strong influence of the presence of the weaver ant on external shine, juiciness, and overall appeal for each of the citrus fruits, but particularly for mandarin.

Studies on biological control by ants have also been conducted in coconut and cacao plantations. Native fire ants are major predators of cotton pests. California gray ants are known to prey on peach twig borer.

# Ants in the garden! continued

—An organic solution would be to buy a product called “Diatomaceous earth.” It is the crushed remains of tiny organisms. It is very sharp, and when poured around an ant mound, the ants crawl over it, and are cut to pieces. Caution should be taken while applying to not inhale it, or apply it during a breezy day.

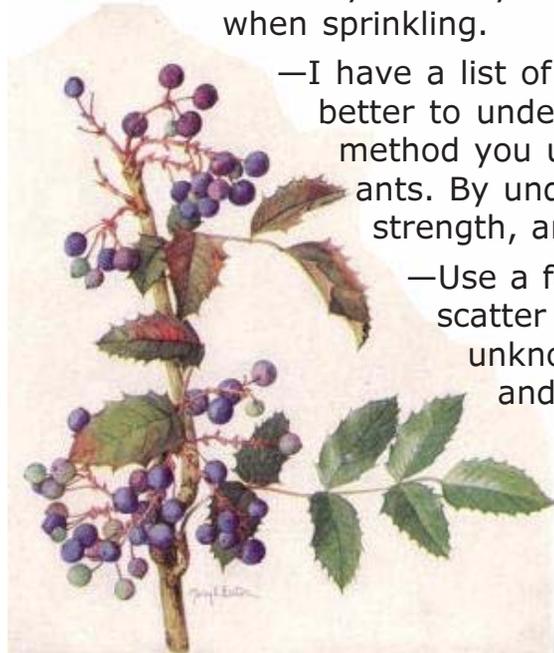
—Here in Alabama, the only thing I’ve ever found to work well is Amdro. The secret is to apply it the way the instructions tell you to. Do not sprinkle it directly on the bed! I treated 3 acres two years ago. I used to have 40 or more beds of fire ants, beds so large they would choke down my riding mower. After I applied Amdro, I’ve only seen 2 beds since.

—Diatomaceous earth is inorganic.

—I recently sprinkled a mix of cinnamon, black pepper and ground coffee over my garden, not on the plants but on the soil, edges of my garden and on the ant mounds. The ants moved away but they are not in my garden which is great! Be Generous when sprinkling.

—I have a list of different ways I used to kill ants, I believe that it’s better to understand some facts about ants first, so that whatever method you use to control will be based upon some facts about ants. By understanding, you will know their weakness and strength, and you will know what will work and what won’t.

—Use a food processor to grind up any citrus peels and scatter in your “anty” areas. This worked for me when, for unknown reasons, ants decided to set up a subdivision and dine on the ripening blueberries. The ants were clever and pierced the berries, ate the innards and then went to another berry. Amazing how the hollowed skin of the berry was usually not shriveled. These ants never bothered the red raspberries that were only a few yards away. I never took the time to determine which species of ant these were.



## Ants as Allies, contd

When ants behave as garden pests, management may require a combination of methods. Do all you can to prevent the arrival of Argentine ants, as it will be impossible to eliminate them once they have invaded your garden. Check all potted plants for ant colonies before bringing them home; this is especially important in Oregon and north, where Argentine ants are not currently a problem. Avoid planting trees that attract homopterans next to buildings. Concentrate control efforts in the late winter and early spring, when they will have the greatest effect.

Above all, I try to follow the advice, perhaps apocryphal, of biologist EO Wilson of Harvard, who has devoted his life to the study of ants. When asked his opinion on what to do about ants in the house, he is reputed to have answered: “provide some crumbs and get out a magnifying glass!”

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# Ants in the garden! continued

—Put a handful of ground orange peels in a 2.5' diameter circle at the base of each bush. During the year, save peels or processed peels in the freezer for the ants. If you do not have freezer space, simply dry the peels as they accumulate. To use them, soak a few hours, process, etc. Sometimes, I scattered peels around cole plants to reduce the cabbage moths. The citrus oils are believed to alter the coles' attractive odors.

—Cornmeal does not make fireants explode but it does something to occupy them, move them, until your corn seeds can start growing. Also helps to keep them off the ears of corn until you can harvest. Yes, they do damage crops! I sprinkle cornmeal all over the garden.

--Not sure if this is urban legend but someone said sprinkle Equal around, that the Aspartame kills them.

## **Internet resources suggested by forum participants:**

Toxicities of some commonly used pesticides compared to a few household chemicals, [www.shalompest.homestead.com/Common\\_pesticide\\_toxicities.pdf](http://www.shalompest.homestead.com/Common_pesticide_toxicities.pdf)

Understand and kill ants the smart way, [http://shalompest.homestead.com/Common\\_pesticide\\_toxicities.pdf](http://shalompest.homestead.com/Common_pesticide_toxicities.pdf)

Getting Rid of Ants, [www.thefrugallife.com/ants.html](http://www.thefrugallife.com/ants.html)

## **A few words from a 'qualified entomologist':**

Many times people think the things they used on the ants worked, because they no longer see the ants, when in reality the ants just moved to another spot or are resting underground after eating all the grits and things the humans gave them.

I've always heard that human urine kills fire ants. Don't know if it's true, but guess you could collect some and pour it on the ant hill to find out. The worst it could do is attract every dog in the county.

John Warner, PhD qualified entomologist, University of Florida, Ant Lab

[⇒More⇒](#)

## **Ants as Allies, contd**

More Information:

To learn more about the fascinating lives of the gardeners, weavers, drivers, army ants, and especially the wonderful honeypot ants, see Hölldobler and Wilson's Journey to the Ants. The University of California IPM site at [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu), is a wonderful source for gardeners throughout the West Coast. Great pictures can be found at [www.myrmecos.net](http://www.myrmecos.net) and [www.antweb.org](http://www.antweb.org).

From Pacific Horticulture: Garden Allies. Ants . . . As Allies by Frédérique Lavoipierre, Garden Ecologist. Read the complete essay at [www.pacifichorticulture.org/garden-allies/68/4/](http://www.pacifichorticulture.org/garden-allies/68/4/)



# Ants in the garden! continued

## **What I know for sure:**

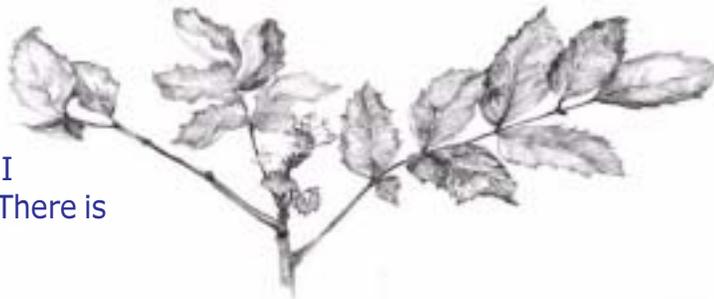
About 15 years ago I bought a nice little house in the suburbs. It was freshly painted and carpeted and passed inspection with flying colors. I noticed a couple of things that were curious but did not seem serious:

1. There were tiny little black ants, dead, all around the edges of the new carpet right next to the baseboards.
2. In the spanking clean garage there was a black spot about 1 foot in diameter, and on close inspection the spot was made entirely of dead little black ants.

After moving in, on occasion a little ant or two would be snooping around on the kitchen counter. Years ago when I was a new bride I had developed the habit of enclosing anything edible in glass jars with tightly fitting lids. I left no food crumbs on the counter, always washing up religiously. These habits left nothing to attract ants (or any other uninvited visitors), so it was no surprise to me that the few ants who came to visit left without any booty.

As time went on, sometimes there were a lot of ants visiting for no apparent reason and without any reward to attract them. The ant visits escalated. Each time I saw them I'd spray the counter with dish soap and wipe them away.

Finally, one day an exterminator came, introduced himself as having a contract with the previous owners of the house. He said he sprayed once a month, and that there were 3-4 months left in the contract. Then I asked him what he had been spraying and what for. His answer stunned me: he was using an industrial strength poison inside and outside of the house and his main target was the ant population! After much discussion and consideration of the products he had available to him, I ultimately cancelled the contract and assumed responsibility for removing my own ants. I steadfastly refuse to allow poisons for any reason. There is always an alternative route that does not kill.



## **Mark Twain on Ants**

Science has recently discovered that the ant does not lay up anything for winter use. This will knock him out of literature, to some extent.

He does not work, except when people are looking, and only then when the observer has a green, naturalistic look, and seems to be taking notes. This amounts to deception, and will injure him for the Sunday schools.

He has not judgment enough to know what is good to eat from what isn't. This amounts to ignorance, and will impair the world's respect for him.

He cannot stroll around a stump and find his way home again. This amounts to idiocy, and once the damaging fact is established, thoughtful people will cease to look up to him, the sentimental will cease to fondle him.

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Ants in the garden! continued

Since that time, I have used mixtures containing borax (this is poison but a natural one--I put it inside old salt shakers laid on their side so none of my furred friends could be endangered). I have used other home remedies concocted with salt, dish soap, pennyroyal, and other ingredients. Some of these treatments were thought to kill the ants outright and some were supposed to be carried back to the nest where they would either explode or contaminate the nest.

I learned quite a bit about ant life during this time. The first couple of ants were scouting for food. If they found any they would go back and tell their troops and the whole army would march in, grab a crumb and march back to the nest. So, I thought killing the scouts was OK as long as I removed any smell (I believed other scouts would come and declare war if they found dead scouts.) When I was using mixtures that were supposed to be carried back to the nest, I fiercely protected the scouts and ensuing groups of living ants because I thought they were being used to convoy the mixtures back home to decimate the nest.

This method seemed to be working well. I'd set out the mixture du jour when invasion seemed imminent, allow ants to do their dance and in a few days they'd all be gone. No ants whatsoever. Eureka!

But one day I was fresh out of supplies, had no ingredients for mixture, no ideas at all. The ants marched in, found nothing to eat, marched out and in a few days there would be no ants. **What?** The very same behaviour occurred whether or not I put out bait? Remarkable! And, needless to say, confusing.

I wasted no more time with homemade baits or salt shakers. I wiped up any ants I found on the counters with a damp rag and washed them down the drain. It seemed to make no difference in their behaviour. However, I did notice a correlation between the weather and the number of ant visitors. Just before it rains and all during a rainy period, the ants run indoors. When the rain stops, any ants that are not dead run back outside. Any dirty dishes or food crumbs will attract ants, so rinsing and putting them in the dishwasher removes the attraction. Sometimes an ant will get stuck in the dishwasher but I've not seen one come out alive after the dishes are clean.

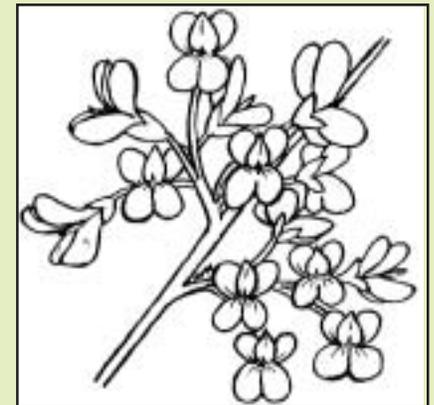
[⇒ More ⇒](#)

## Mark Twain, contd

His vaunted industry is but a vanity and of no effect, since he never gets home with anything he starts with. This disposes of the last remnant of his reputation and wholly destroys his main usefulness as a moral agent, since it will make the sluggard hesitate to go to him any more.

It is strange beyond comprehension, that so manifest a humbug as the ant has been able to fool so many nations and keep it up so many ages without being found out.

- A Tramp Abroad



# Ants in the garden! continued

Keeping the kitchen spotless is the best defense against these little soldiers. Any that escape the wipe down go outside on their own. I do not leave the pet's food in their dishes. I feed twice a day, just the amount each one needs and they usually eat every bite. Anything left over goes back in the airtight containers for next time.

One curious fact I have learned: ants can live through cooking in the microwave. They run around in circles very fast when they come out but they don't die. They may need psychiatric counselling though. And no, I did not test this on purpose. One of them hitchhiked on the bottom of a dish of food I was heating up. I was totally shocked when I opened the little door to take out my food. That ant was circling the turntable at an amazingly quick pace. I'd have figured ants would explode in there but such was not the case. I occasionally cook a couple if they are in the wrong place at the wrong time but never intentionally. So far they have all lived. Bet they have tall tales to tell when they go back home!



I've found more information about ants and more ideas for treatment but we'll talk about that another time.

Meanwhile, the section at the right of these pages lists the good deeds ants perform in nature. Many plants rely totally on ants to reproduce.

One more thing about little black stinky ants that I know for sure: **they will bite!**

The ant drawings and descriptions on pages 21 - 23 are from Drawings and Information from the Pest World for Kids, [www.pestworldforkids/ants.html](http://www.pestworldforkids/ants.html).



## Mark Twain on Ants

The several principles and mechanisms involved in the construction of an ant are as follows — that is a good ant, an ant that is made right:

First, the antennae — so called because they are part of the ant. Butterflies have antennae, too, but that's a plagiarism.

Next, the legs, six in number — one on each corner, and two in the middle. They are not all needed for general business — some are to get home on when the others have been chewed off; ants are always chewing each others legs off, in arranging details connected with politics and theology.

- Mark Twain's Notebook



# Ceanothus

## Hard working northwest native shrubs

Ceanothus is a genus of shrubs from the rhamnaceae (Buckthorn) family.

Most ceanothus are evergreen. The few that have adapted to cold winters are deciduous.

### Common characteristics

The leaves are either opposite or alternate, small, simple, and most have serrated margins to some degree. An identifying factor of this genus is the unique vein structure of the leaves. Each leaf has three prominent veins from the base to the very tip and are oval shaped. The leaf tops are shiny and feel sticky when pinched. Roots of most species have a red inner root bark.

Blooming in May through July, the tiny flowers are white, greenish-white, blue, pale purple or pink and bloom in large, dense clusters. Some are very fragrant.

### Ecology

Most members of this genus form a symbiotic relationship with soil micro-organisms, forming root nodules which fix atmospheric nitrogen. This nitrogen is available to other adjacent plants, and may play an important role in forest regeneration as it creates nutrient-rich patches in forest habitats.

Ceanothus shrubs included in the landscape pay their way by providing continuous nutrients to nearby plants with no effort on the part of the gardener.



Deer Brush (*Ceanothus integerrimus*)

Photo by Dawn Endico at Menlo Park, CA

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# Ceanothus, continued

## **Ceanothus cuneatus var. cuneatus (Buck Brush)**

This is one of the taller forms of ceanothus.

The small rounded leaves are grayish green and deeply veined.

It is found in dry USDA zone 8-10 regions of Oregon and on down through Baja California.

Its main requirements are full sun, dry soil with perfect drainage, and no additional water once established.

This shrub will be covered in white fragrant flower clusters in early Spring.

The flowers are later followed by 3 horned fruit capsules.

This is a great ceanothus for naturalizing dry slopes in mild climate areas.

Ceanothus cuneatus is known for its nitrogen fixing abilities, valuable in areas needing regeneration.



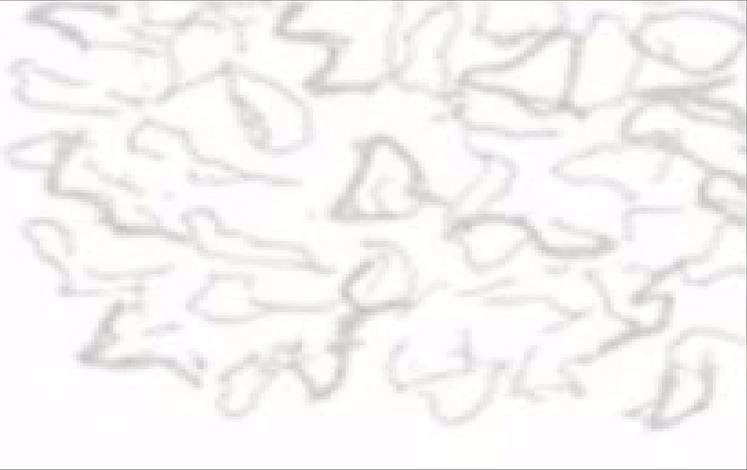
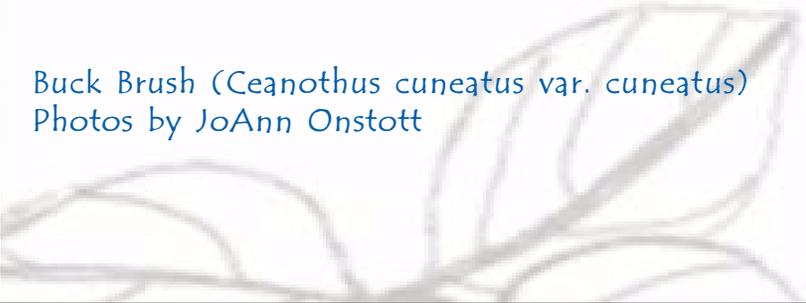
Buck Brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *cuneatus*)  
Flowers on a mature plant  
Leaves on a young plant  
Photos by JoAnn Onstott

[⇨ More ⇨](#)

# Ceanothus, continued



Buck Brush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *cuneatus*)  
Photos by JoAnn Onstott



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# Ceanothus, continued

## **Ceanothus integerrimus (Deerbrush, Mountain Lilac)**

A most beautiful 6-15' shrub for large groupings.

The late Spring lilac like flower clusters are found in shades of white, blue, lavender, and occasionally pink.

A truly drought tolerant plant which requires very little water once established but demands good drainage and part to full sun exposure.

It is found growing in S. Washington, Oregon, West of the Cascade Mountains in California and even desert regions of New Mexico and Arizona. Deerbrush is cold hardy to USDA zones 5-9 but will handle temperatures as low as -10F in a perfect cultural environment.

It is a semi-deciduous open shrub with large glossy leaves that can act as an evergreen at lower elevations and completely deciduous in high elevations.

It is a wonderful shrub for mass planting on dry banks, and though the deer will nibble, planting several will likely assure survival.



*Ceanothus integerrimus* (Deerbrush or Mountain Lilac)  
Photo by JoAnn Onstott

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# Ceanothus, continued

Photos by Dawn Endico at Menlo Park, CA  
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# Ceanothus, continued

## **Ceanothus prostratus (Mahala Mat)**

It is unusual for a ceanothus to be found growing at subalpine levels, but Mahala Mat is most comfortable there providing it receives an insulating layer of snow in winter.

High winds and high temperatures are not favorable for this low growing evergreen groundcover; it needs a partial sun situation with good drainage.

When content Mahala Mat will form a dense mat of glossy serrated leaves and produce pale blue flower clusters and bright red horned fruit.

Ceanothus prostratus is native to the dry mountainous regions of Washington, Oregon and California and can be occasionally found in Idaho and Nevada, USDA zones 5-8.

This is a very attractive plant given the proper growing conditions. It has gained favor as a ground cover in many commercial situations.

*Ceanothus prostratus (Mahala Mat)*  
Photo by JoAnn Onstott



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# Ceanothus, continued



*Ceanothus prostratus* (Mahala Mat)  
Photos by JoAnn Onstott



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# Ceanothus, continued

## **Ceanothus sanguineus (Red Stem Ceanothus)**

This attractive little shrub is excellent in a site that has been burned, disturbed or suffers very low fertility, where other shrubs would fail. In fact, all members of the Ceanothus genus are symbiotic with nitrogen-fixing bacteria and improve the soil for future and neighbouring plants.

Growing in an erect and loosely branched form, Red Stem Ceanothus reaches 5 – 10.'

The thin, dark green leaves fall, revealing the slender, purple-red stems.

In spring, small, white flowers in dense 4" clusters erupt in glorious scent at the ends of the branches.

This shrub is highly adaptable, tolerating sun or shade, dry or moist sites, as long as the drainage is good.

It is found along the Pacific Coast and is hardy between USDA zones 6-10.



Red Stem Ceanothus  
(*Ceanothus sanguineus*)  
Photo by Walter Seigmund

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# Ceanothus, continued



Red Stem Ceanothus  
(*Ceanothus sanguineus*)  
Photos by JoAnn Onstott

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# Ceanothus, continued

## **Ceanothus thrysiflorus (Blueblossom, California Lilac)**

The queen of wild evergreen lilacs, Blueblossom reigns with grace and majesty from southwestern Oregon to southern California (USDA zones 8-10).

The flowers resemble the top of the “thyrsus” - the staff of Dionysus, that unruly Greek God of wine.

This particular variety is a selected compact form which grows rapidly to about 6' tall and 5' wide - ideal for gardens close to buildings.



It is covered with bright, evergreen leaves and beautiful, deep lilac blue flowers in the spring which are intense—vibrant!

Blueblossom does well in sun or shade and requires minimum care or water.

Blueblossom is a must for west side gardens.

Blueblossom, California Lilac  
(*Ceanothus thrysiflorus*)

Flower photo at left by Wally Hansen

Leaf photo above right by JoAnn Onstott

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# Ceanothus, continued



Blueblossom, California Lilac  
(*Ceanothus thrysiflorus*)  
Above, honey bees sampling bountiful flowers  
At left, mature plants just inside the nursery gates  
Photos by Jennifer Rehm



[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Ceanothus, continued

## **Ceanothus velutinus (Snowbrush)**

This evergreen shrub will greet you with an intoxicating, spicy fragrance when you brush against it or on hot summer days.

It reaches heights of 2-8,' with dark green, sticky leaves and small white flowers in tidy 5" 'pom poms.'

Found widely in the West, from British Columbia down through the Western United States in USDA zones 7-10.

Snowbrush is a pioneer following fire as the fire stimulates seed germination: another example of Nature's supreme sagacity, as the Snowbrush "fixes" nitrogen and nitrogen is much in demand after the devastation of fire!

Snowbrush  
(*Ceanothus velutinus*)  
Photo by Walter Seigmund



# Ceanothus, continued

Snowbrush  
(*Ceanothus velutinus*)

Leaf photo at left by JoAnn Onstott

Below, thriving in preferred habitat, photo by Walter Seigmund



# This & That

## Notes from Jennifer

It seems to me, as human beings living on a planet presumably quite isolated (as far as we know) from other living things in the universe, that we are astonishingly cavalier in our habits and treatment of the terra firma on which we reside. That is, it seems that way until I take an unveiled look at what we were doing just a century ago.

Back in those days we took possession of the land. We changed it to suit our whims. We picked out the spaces we wanted for our homes and our gardens, and we 'cleared' that land to remove anything that did not fit our plans. We gave no thought to flora or fauna that preceded our arrival. If we considered them at all, we tagged them 'weeds' and 'varmint.' Some of this old school belief carries on to current times. Some does not.

Understand then the following excerpt from *A Woman's Hardy Gardena* written by Helena Rutherford Ely, published in 1903.

*I should not advise making all the borders around a house alike. The easterly one will be most lovely if planted with tall ferns or brakes, taken from near some stream in early April, before they begin to grow. These will become about four feet high if you get good roots and keep them wet. Plant in among them everywhere Auratum Lilies, and you will have a border that will fill your heart with joy. On the north side of the house it is not possible to have much success with vines, as they need the sun. They will grow, but not with great luxuriance. Here plant two rows of the common Rhododendron maximum, which grows in our woods. I crave pardon for calling it "common," since none that grows is more beautiful.*



Illustration from Ms. Ely's book, a photo taken by Professor C.F. Chandler of the eastern seaboard native *Rhododendron maximum*

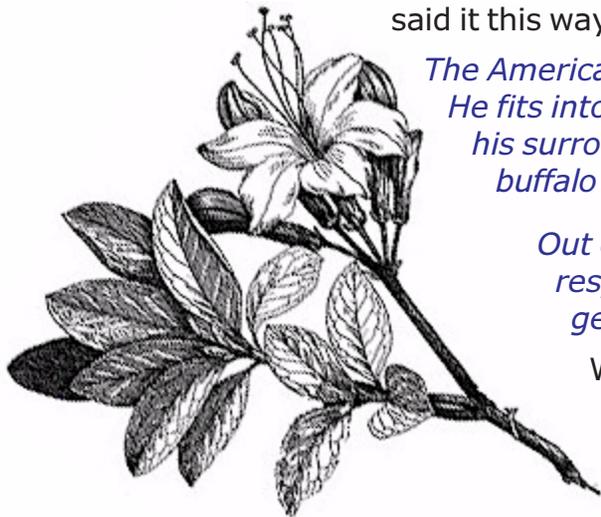
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# This & That, continued

*In front of these plant ferns of all kinds from the woods, and edge the border with Columbines. If these Rhododendrons do not grow in your vicinity, they can be ordered from a florist. In the hills, about five miles from us, acres of them grow wild, and twice a year I send my men with wagons to dig them up. They stand transplanting perfectly if care is taken to get all the roots, which is not difficult, as they do not grow deep. Keep them quite wet for a week after planting, and never let them get very dry. A good plan is to mulch them in early June to the depth of six inches or more with the clippings of the lawn grass, or with old manure. When once well rooted, the Rhododendrons will last a lifetime. They seem to bear transplanting at any season. Some think they do best if taken when in full bloom. I have always done this in April or late October, and, of a wagon-load transplanted last October, all have lived. Many of these were like trees, quite eight feet tall and too large to be satisfactory about the house, so they were set among the evergreens in a shrubbery.*

The suggestion to take ferns and rhododendrons from the wild was in keeping with commonly held attitudes of the times by 'civilized' folk. And, really, what other choice was available then? Were plant nurseries plentiful? The rising popularity of those amazing plants catalogued by the Corps of Discovery, growing wild and there for the harvesting, seemed the logical choice. But there is a difference between taking plants for one's own garden and taking for profit, and there lies the rub. Is that more wrong than laying waste acres of plants and animals because they were in our way?

In relatively recent times, as we finally see clearly what our rampant destruction has cost, we slowly but surely continue the circle back to the beginning. We understand at last what those whose husbandry of all things living have told us all along. We truly do not own the earth, we borrow it from our children. Luther Standing Bear, Oglala Sioux, 1868-1937, said it this way:



*The American Indian is of the soil, whether it be the region of forests, plains, pueblos, or mesas. He fits into the landscape, for the hand that fashioned the continent also fashioned the man for his surroundings. He once grew as naturally as the wild sunflowers, he belongs just as the buffalo belonged....*

*Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom, an intense and absorbing respect for life, enriching faith in a Supreme Power, and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations.*

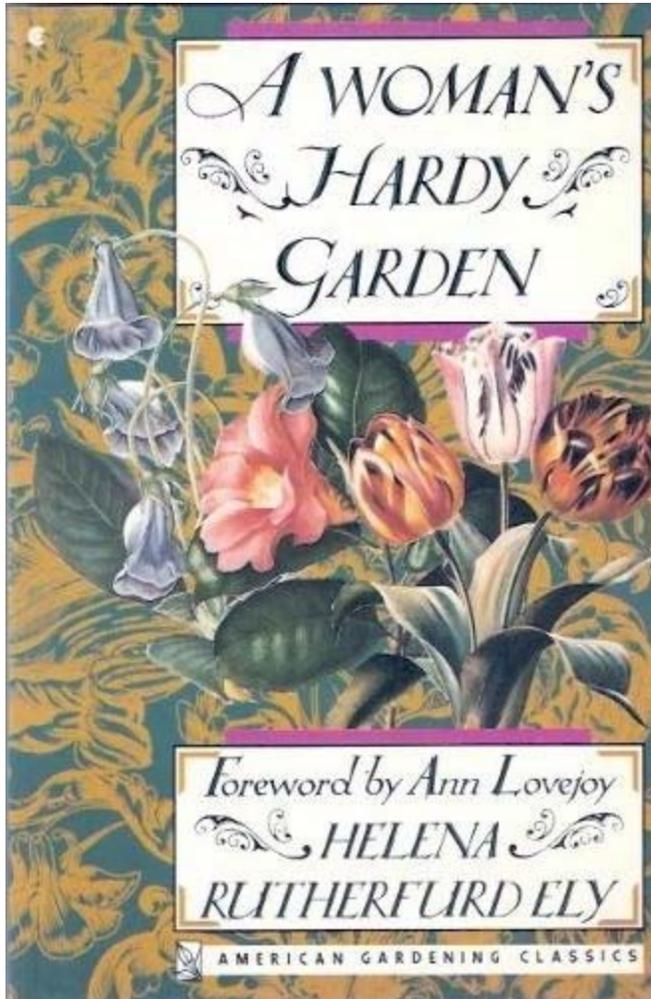
We can learn this. We can see the power of living with the earth instead of trampling it.

Until next time,  
*Jennifer*



# On my desk right now

## What resources we are currently using



A Woman's Hardy Garden written by Helena Rutherford Ely, with illustrations from photographs taken in the author's garden by Professor C.F. Chandler, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1903.

I mentioned this book a few minutes ago. It is quaint and charming though the plant gathering ethics of the author are a bit over the top in today's line of thinking (and Oregon Law agrees!). My copy has been shipped but has not yet arrived. According to the tracking provision, it got to Louisville, Kentucky, yesterday. The previews are whetting my appetite!

This author has a second installment titled Another Hardy Garden Book dated 1905 that will be on my next order. It looks as sweet as the first one.

My copy of Bringing Nature Home by Douglas W. Tallamy came a couple of days ago. Have not cracked it open yet, saving it for a little vacation later in the summer. I received an email last week that the Case book on Trilliums is on backorder and will ship sometime next month, hopefully.



# Useful Native Plant Resources on the Web

Here is a good collection of web data bases and other gardening topics that will be useful to professional growers and all native plant gardeners. This list began from a flyer Lawyer Nursery published in 2002 grew from there.

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## **American Bonsai Society**

The bonsai organization for North America, including Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

[www.absbonsai.org/](http://www.absbonsai.org/)

## **Birdchick**

Hundreds of photos of birds, bees, butterflies and other friendlies. Sharon Stiteler shares the joys of birding as well as insights on rabbits.

[www.birdchick.com/](http://www.birdchick.com/)

## **CalPhotos**

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

[www.elib.cs.berkeley.edu/photos/](http://www.elib.cs.berkeley.edu/photos/)

## **Cornell University online grafting course**

From the Dept. of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at Cornell U. Kenneth W. Mudge, Assoc. Professor of Horticulture

[www.instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hort494/graftage/hort494.index.html](http://www.instruct1.cit.cornell.edu/courses/hort494/graftage/hort494.index.html)

## **E-Flora BC: Electronic Atlas of the Plants of British Columbia**

Beautiful site, volunteer-driven. "A comprehensive picture of the plant and fungal biodiversity of British Columbia." Many thanks to Mary Sanseverino for suggesting this site be included in our list of botanical web resources. (See her photos on Flickr and her website at [www.webhome.csc.uvic.ca/~msanseve/](http://www.webhome.csc.uvic.ca/~msanseve/))

[www.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/eflora/](http://www.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/eflora/)

## **Fire effects on plant species**

USDA, Forest Service site summarizes and synthesizes research about living organisms in the United States—their biology, ecology, and relationship to fire.

[www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/](http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/)



Pacific Rhododendron  
(*Rhododendron macrophyllum*)  
Photo by JoAnn Onstott

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Useful Native Plant Resources, continued

## **Flora of North America Web Site**

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

## **Forest Types of the United States**

Maps of the most common forest types.  
[www.forestry.about.com/library/tree/bltypdex.htm](http://www.forestry.about.com/library/tree/bltypdex.htm)

## **Growit.com Rooting Database**

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

## **Julie's Backyard Journal**

Blog by insightful gardener  
[www.backyardjournal.wordpress.com/](http://www.backyardjournal.wordpress.com/)

## **ModernBackyard**

Landscape architecture provides exceptional, affordable landscape design online.  
[www.modernbackyard.com](http://www.modernbackyard.com)

## **The Native Plant Network**

[www.nativeplants.for.uidaho.edu/network/](http://www.nativeplants.for.uidaho.edu/network/)

## **Northwest Plants Database System**

From Washington State University and WSU Clark County Extension PNW Plants, this database has 481 categorized plants and 1458 images.  
[www.pnwplants.wsu.edu](http://www.pnwplants.wsu.edu)

## **Noxious Weed Control**

Search function, can be shown in text only  
[www.oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/statelist2.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/statelist2.shtml)

## **Oregon Invasive Species Council**

Invasive list, how to report invasives  
[www.oregon.gov/OISC/](http://www.oregon.gov/OISC/)



Western Azalea  
(*Rhododendron occidentale*)  
Photo by Professor Wilbur Bluhm

[⇒ More ⇒](#)

# Useful Native Plant Resources, continued

## **Portland Bureau of Environmental Services**

Information about caring for our earth. Download their Native Plant Poster, plant list and brochure on removing invasive plants.

[www.portlandonline.com/bes/index.cfm?c=29323](http://www.portlandonline.com/bes/index.cfm?c=29323)

## **River Corridor and Wetland Restoration**

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) site

[www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/](http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/)

## **Soil Science Society of America**

Website for soil science professionals. Offers information and links.

[www.soils.org/](http://www.soils.org/)

## **Starflower Foundation**

Founded in 1996 by Ann Lennart to assist with creation, rehabilitation, and stewardship of Pacific Northwest native plant communities.

[www.wnps.org/landscaping/herbarium/#starflower](http://www.wnps.org/landscaping/herbarium/#starflower)

## **USDA PLANTS Database**

Searchable for common or botanical name, shows origin, range and status

[www.plants.usda.gov/](http://www.plants.usda.gov/)

## **Washington Native Plant Society**

Appreciate, conserve and study our native plants and habitats

[www.wnps.org](http://www.wnps.org)

## **Wildflower Trails of the San Francisco Bay Area**

Excellent photography and trail guides.

[www.westernwildflower.com/](http://www.westernwildflower.com/)

## **Woody Plant Seed Manual**

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.

[www.nsl.fs.fed.us/wpsm/](http://www.nsl.fs.fed.us/wpsm/)



Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*)  
Photo by Professor Wilbur Bluhm



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# Wallace W Hansen Native Plants of the Northwest



Photo by JoAnn Instott

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eMail: [nwplants@gmail.com](mailto:nwplants@gmail.com)

## **Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*)**

For many years this northwest native shrub was dug up in the woods and transplanted to gardens. Some were offered for sale by opportunistic entrepreneurs. Oregon Law Chapter 564 now prohibits this activity. Fortunately for Rhodie lovers, this plant is now available from legitimate nurseries who grow the plants for sale in accordance with the law.

**If you need plants native to the pacific northwest, please contact us. We CAN help you—any quantity, anytime, anywhere! We are flexible, and we have successfully responded quickly to emergency requests. And we ship throughout the USA, and beyond.**

# Wallace W Hansen

## Native Plants of the Northwest



Photo by Professor Wilbur Blum

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**E-Mail: [nwplants@gmail.com](mailto:nwplants@gmail.com)**

**2158 Bower Court SE  
Salem OR 97317-9216  
Phone 503-581-2638  
FAX 503-549-8739**

### **Western Azalea (*Rhododendron occidentale*)**

Truly one of the Pacific northwest's most exotic shrubs, this relative of our Pacific Rhodie smells as good as it looks. Blooming each year in mid-summer, this native azalea is sure to be a favorite in your landscape.

## ADVERTISEMENT

# WALLACE W HANSEN

Grower – Pacific Northwest Native Plants  
NATIVE PLANT NURSERY & GARDEN  
TREES – SHRUBS – PERENNIALS

Over 200 Species Available Year-Round Including Wetland & Restoration Plants  
A UNIQUE RESOURCE OF NATIVE PLANTS OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

I offer a unique resource – probably the largest collection of native plants in one location in the Northwest. Over 200 species in containers are available 12 months of the year, plus Bare-Root and “Balled & Burlapped” plants in the Fall & Winter. You can create a wonderful native plant garden on a small city lot or on a larger acreage. Use natives for specimen and demonstration gardens in parks and around schools and large buildings. Natives are tough, often drought resistant – this is their home – they love it here! Many have delicious fruit – many attract wildlife – animals, birds, and butterflies.

### A NURSERY TRIP – WELL WORTHWHILE!

This delightful, peaceful Native Plant Nursery/Garden is located about five miles East of Salem, Oregon, on five acres of Doug Firs, Cedar, Pine, and ancient Garry Oaks. This central Willamette Valley location is an easy drive from anywhere in the Northwest. If you are interested in Natives, a tour of the Nursery/Gardens is well worthwhile (improve your plant identification skills). My nursery and gardens have often been referred to as an “Arboretum” of plants of the Pacific Northwest. You will be inspired and encouraged in your own gardening.

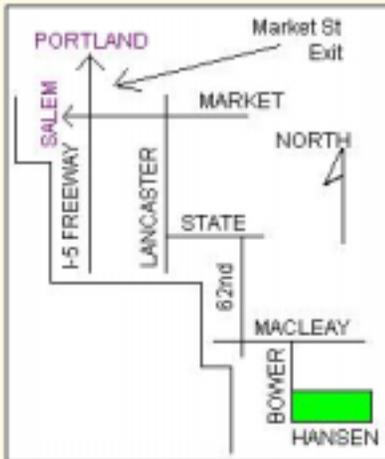
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We are open by  
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during July and  
August 2010. Give  
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Get off at the Market Street  
Exit & follow above map.

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Contractors, Government  
Agencies & Nurseries. Large  
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