



Native Plant Society of Oregon, July 2024

Why Legislate a Native Plant Appreciation Month? (Background)

A native plant is one which has established in the landscape independently from direct or indirect human intervention and existed prior to European arrival (<https://oregonflora.org/pages/mission.php>). They have adapted to and evolved in the local environment.

There are over 4,700 plant taxa that grow in our state in the wild and without cultivation. 72.5% of these are native (<https://oregonflora.org>) including 115 endemic taxa. There are native plants in all counties. These form the foundation of our state's food chain and provide habitat and food for birds, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles and insects. Native plants are essential for healthy, diverse and sustainable ecosystems and are critical for cleaning air, filtering water and stabilizing soil. Further, our native plants are already established in balanced, local ecosystems, so they have minimal potential to become invasive pests in our wild and natural areas. Gardens and landscapes composed of native plants, being well suited to Oregon's climate and soil, require far fewer fertilizers, soil amendments, or pesticides, and use less water than conventional landscapes.

Native plants are also part of our Oregon natural heritage, providing aesthetic, cultural, economic and ecological benefits. Native Americans have lived and thrived by their knowledge of native plants, which has provided them with food, clothing, baskets, shelter, dyes, tools, medicines, and fuel for centuries. Oregon grape, *Berberis aquifolium*, has been the state flower since 1899. Douglas fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, has been the state tree since 1939.

Oregon currently contends with over 1,300 wild non-native plants including more than 150 invasive species (including noxious weeds) growing in our wild areas. While some of these are benign, invasive species can be problematic. Noxious weeds "[d]isplace and compete with native and desirable economic plants; impact agricultural, forest economies and resources such as fish, wildlife, recreation, and overall watershed health; threaten cultural resources and first foods; can contribute to extreme wildfire behavior" (Oregon Department of Agriculture <https://tinyurl.com/2cfebbdtd>). Some native plants can compete with and reduce the risk of invasive species establishment but other natives are threatened by invasives. Unfortunately, some of our native plants are at risk. The Oregon Biodiversity Information Center ranks 633 of Oregon's native vascular plants as uncommon, threatened, vulnerable, imperiled or critically imperiled in Oregon (<https://tinyurl.com/2wunsdub>). Therefore, we need to actively protect native plants to sustain our vibrant ecosystems.

How can Native Plant Appreciation Month Help? Actions:

1. Encourage community groups, schools, and citizens to sponsor activities to learn about Oregon's native plants and to promote the conservation, restoration, and appreciation of Oregon's native plants.
2. Encourage planting native plant home gardens or adopting a backyard habitat program using native plants and natural gardening solutions.
3. Encourage people to volunteer to restore habitats by planting native plants and removing invasive weeds.
4. Support watershed councils and their restoration projects and other similar projects.
5. Encourage people to explore Oregon's wild lands and learn about and document our native plants on iNaturalist.
6. Promote more native plants in the nursery and horticultural industries to make more plants available to the general public.



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Why Legislate a Native Plant Appreciation Month? (Key Points)

What is the significance of native plants?

- Cultivating and protecting our native flora is important within cultural, ecological, and economic perspectives.

What are native plants?

- Native plants are those that are naturally occurring in a region and have adapted and evolved to the local environment.
- Out of Oregon's 4,700 distinct ferns, trees, wildflowers, and grasses that grow in our state in the wild and without cultivation, 72.5% of these are native, 115 endemic, present in all counties. Out of this percentage, 633 of Oregon's native vascular plants rank as uncommon, threatened, vulnerable, imperiled or critically imperiled in Oregon. (oregonflora.org, The Oregon Biodiversity Information Center)

Why is this important?

- Habitat loss, desertification, extreme weather events, climate change, and invasive species have contributed to the decline of native plants.
- Native plants are essential for healthy, diverse and sustainable ecosystems and are critical for cleaning air, filtering water and stabilizing soil.
- Native plants are more fire resilient and resistant than many non-natives
- Gardens and landscapes composed of native plants, being suited to Oregon's climate and soil, require far fewer fertilizers, soil amendments, or pesticides.
- Native plants require less water than most non-natives once they are established.
- Native plants are co-adapted with native pollinators to support each other.

Actions from Native Plant Appreciation Month: Encourage growing native plants and a sense of stewardship!

- Encourage community groups, schools, and citizens to undertake appropriate activities to learn about Oregon's native plants and to promote the conservation, restoration, and appreciation of Oregon's native plants.
- Encourage the public to plant natives in gardens.
- Encourage involvement with local watershed councils and similar entities.
- Encourage learning about who's nation's land you are on and their first foods and stewardship practices.
- Encourage volunteering! Pull invasives and plant natives with your local environmental conservation groups .
- Encourage becoming a certified backyard habitat
- Encourage exploration of Oregon's wild lands to learn about and document our native plants on iNaturalist.
- Promote more native plants in the nursery and horticultural industries to make more plants available to the general public.