

Virtual Hortlandia 2020

Humble Roots Nursery

www.humblerootsnursery.com

This week, Joanne Fuller interviewed Drew Merritt from Humble Roots Nursery and edited the interview for this article.

Drew, tell me about some of the plants you currently have available for sale?

We grow so many great underused native plants. For full sun, Columbia Desert Parsley (*Lomatium columbianum*) has grey green foliage that is so finely dissected that it looks like a lump of coral. The pink flower head is so striking held above the grey foliage. We grow a lot of native buckwheats (*Eriogonum*) that are beautiful in the full sun garden.

The Streambank Globe Mallow (*Iliamna rivularis*) gets to five feet tall with lovely classic mallow flowers in shell pink. It likes some supplemental water. We also grow *Paeonia brownii*. The small brownish-red flowers are not very showy, but elongated seed pods develop from the center of the flower and hang on for a long time. And, *Clematis hirsutissima* with little furry cupped purple flowers making a mound of nice foliage.

Balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza careyana*) is one of the Columbia River Gorge's most iconic natives. When we brought it to Hortlandia, people snapped them up. Gardeners need to know, it takes ten years before they bloom, and Balsamroot can live for 100 years. So, it is like buying a tree.

How did you get started?

When I met my wife Kristin Currin, she had already started the nursery. She has a lifelong love of native plants and doing things like making blackcap berry jam as a kid. It just grew as we got established in our site at Mosier.

You specialize in Oregon native plants; do you collect them from the wild?

We sell ethically grown native plants. That means that we grow all of our plants from seed and cuttings, never uprooting plants from the wild. Maintaining biodiversity and restoring native plant habitat is important to us.

Do you have plants available for bird and pollinator friendly gardens?

Many of the natives we grow will attract pollinators. We have a gallery of photos on our website specifically depicting butterfly and pollinator plants.

If you want to support birds and pollinators, it takes more than growing plants. You have to get the whole garden ecology going. People have to get used to having their plants eaten by insects. You need the insects to attract the birds. And sometimes, you have to give up your berries to the birds. Today, I watched all of our Black Twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*) berries get eaten by the Cedar Waxwings. We were going to propagate those plants, but that's just the way it goes.

If you want to attract butterflies, you need to understand the plants they require. We grow the native tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculoides*) which is the host plant for the Oregon Swallowtail butterfly. This is an east side of the Cascades species. Of course, we grow milkweeds (*Asclepias*) which are the food for the larva of the Monarch Butterfly. When Monarchs showed up in Portland a few years ago, folks

got more interested in the milkweeds. *Asclepias fascicularis* and *Asclepias speciosa* are good ones with nice flowers, but they need some room to grow.

Do you have shade natives available?

We offer some of the more common shade natives. The fringe cup (*Tellima grandiflora*), the inside-out flower (*Vancouveria hexandra*) and native wild ginger (*Asarum caudatum*) which all make nice shade ground cover with small interesting flowers. Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*) with its sweet little flowers. These woodland plants can be challenging to grow in containers due to their soil and water requirements. If gardeners buy them in containers, they should be planted as soon as possible into a permanent site to get established.

What advice do you have for gardeners who want to be successful growing native plants?

Proper plant selection for your site is key for most gardening, but it is critical with native plants. Gardeners tend to misunderstand the water needs of natives and over water them. The first year in the ground they may require more water, after that if they are sited properly, they don't need much supplemental water. Native shrubs can use a good deep soak in July or early August to get them through to fall rain. Also, natives don't need a lot of fertilizer. Too much fertility will weaken the plant, and it will decline over time.

What is it like to visit and shop?

We are open by appointment. Customers can call 503-449-3694 or email us at humblerootsnursery@gmail.com. We have the available plants listed on the website at www.humblerootsnursery.com. The website also has an extensive picture gallery of our plants. If customers know what they want, they can call or email and come for curbside pickup. We will also do delivery to customers in the Columbia River Gorge area.

Visitors usually have the place to themselves. We are available to answer questions and talk about the plants. We want to provide visitors with the best information about growing native plants. Our growing space is all outdoors under native oak trees at the edge of the forest. It feels like just a bunch of plants under the trees. It is a great way for folks to spend some time outside.