

TREE TIME

THE NEWSLETTER OF MOUNT PISGAH ARBORETUM



Fireweed: Symbol of Resilience

by Katherine Darrow, Guest Writer from Washington Native Plant Society



Photo by Katherine Darrow

Chances are you've witnessed brilliant displays of hot pink fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) blooming or going to seed in late summer and fall, especially along roadsides. These bright spots are often a welcome shot of color amid the many shades of green that dominate highway corridors, especially on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. Also known as rosebay or great willow herb, this plant is one of the few native species of wildflower that thrives in the challenging roadside environment where only the toughest pioneers persist.

In wilder, undeveloped places fireweed is often one of the first plants to appear after natural disturbances. Not only wildfire, but landslides, avalanches, volcanic eruptions, and floods create the open, sunny environment that fireweed prefers. Fireweed often leads the march of plant succession at the front of receding glaciers.

Areas that have been dramatically changed by not-so-natural disturbances, such as clear-cut forests, sometimes stimulate exuberant fields of fireweed, as we can easily see on recent cuts on the Olympic Peninsula along Highway 104. Railways, mining sites, and war zones are also commonly colonized by fireweed. Following WWII, parts of England that endured the infamous Blitz

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bombing campaigns of 1940-41 rapidly grew fields of fireweed, from which the plant earned the nickname “bombweed.”

Equally magnificent is the species’ widespread distribution around the globe. Fireweed is a circumboreal species, meaning that it is common all around the northern hemisphere, especially at latitudes above 40 degrees north. If you are a world traveler, you may have seen fireweed in any country in Europe, the Himalayas, or in the vast expanse of Russia, as well as across North America.



Photo by Katherine Darrow

Combined with the ability to thrive in a broad altitudinal range, from sea level to more than 15,000 feet in the Himalayas, fireweed is one of the hardiest pioneering plants on the planet.

Part of fireweed’s secret is its prolific seed production. Each of the long narrow fruits (capsules) curls open to release up to 400 tiny seeds, each equipped with a downy parachute. With more than 100 capsules per plant, that multiplies out to more than 40,000 seeds per stem that can travel far and high on the lightest breeze. Multiply this by the number of stems that

grow in just one bright patch along the road, and you’ve literally got a cloud of seeds ready to germinate if they are lucky to land in just the right spot.

The most robust part of the plant though, is a long, deeply rooted, underground stem or rhizome. This root system, combined with those of pioneering grasses, sedges and shrubs, are important elements of landscape restoration and help prevent soil erosion. Fireweed can wait out long periods of forest cover and be available to sprout after a fire or other disturbance opens the area up to sun.

This is good news, not only for vehicle-bound travelers whose day might be brightened by a little color in the landscape, but more importantly for wildlife that eat the plants. Bears, moose, elk, and deer are among the many kinds of wildlife that feast on fireweed. Hummingbirds sip its nectar. Some beekeepers will jump at the chance to place hives in a field of fireweed in order to harvest what is considered gourmet honey that commands twice the price of your run-of-the-mill wildflower honey. Although fireweed is not recorded as a major food source for Indigenous people, some northern cultures dry the leaves to brew for tea. Tender leaves and young stems are sometimes harvested as edible greens.

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Mount Pisgah Arboretum is a nonprofit organization with a mission to engage people with nature through interactive learning and stewardship.

Facilities include miles of riverside and forest trails, picnic areas and a pavilion for events. We host outdoor programs to foster appreciation of the natural world.

Thank you for being a supporter!

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iNaturalist Wildflower Bioblitz



Photo by August Jackson

May 11th-15th

Upload your photo observations of plants in Lane County to iNaturalist where your photos will be identified by experts! These observations will serve as the floral display for this year's Virtual Wildflower Festival, and help to continue the phenological record. For more information, see our Festival webpage: bit.ly/3dcIG7S



Photo by August Jackson

Despite all of these qualities and more, serious gardeners eschew the plant as unruly, bothersome, aggressive, and pernicious, because they aren't easily controlled or contained. I, however, being a not-so-fastidious gardener, welcome their rosy pink masses, airy seeds, and tough rhizomes to my garden as symbols of resilience, cheer, and abundance. In these times, fireweed may be exactly what we need as an emblem of hope for the future.

Katherine Darrow is a natural history writer and botanist living in Port Townsend, WA. She is currently the Vice Chair of the Olympic Peninsula Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society. This article was previously published in her August 2020 column for the Port Townsend Leader, Nature Notes, which she writes monthly as a representative of WNPS.



Mount Pisgah Arboretum

The Native Plant
Society of Oregon-
Emerald Chapter
& Lane Community
College Present:

2021 Virtual Wildflower Festival

A fundraiser for the Arboretum

Saturday, May 15th & Sunday, May 16th

5PM-7:30PM

Streaming **FREE** online!

Featuring Presentations on:

- Native plant gardening
- Fire ecology
- Botanical illustration
- Plant-pollinator interactions
- Virtual field trips
- Foraging
- And more!

PLUS limited attendance in-person events to be announced soon!

For more information and a full schedule of events, see our Festival webpage: bit.ly/3dcIG7S

Site Report

By Connor Reinecke, Facilities Manager

Spring is in the air and the Arboretum is teaming with life. Birds are finding their nesting cavities, flower buds are bursting open, and visitors are enjoying the warmer, milder weather. Arboretum staff have been hard at work making improvements and getting things ready for summer crowds and events.

They say the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. Well, our trusty time machine stopped working, so we decided that there was no better time than today. With help from our Habitat Committee and volunteers we planted 79 trees in the main parking lot. A mixture of firs, pines, cedars, maples, and oaks will provide welcome summer shade in the future. Look out for the little seedlings in the parking area, as they are especially vulnerable during this first season.

Site staff continues to make headway in organizing our barn and shop. The warmer weather brings roosting Townsend's big-eared bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii*) into our facilities. We welcome these seasonal tenants and will be preparing for their arrival by covering our equipment and minimizing access to the loft in the barn.

The main summit trailhead is a hub of activity. Not only is this one of the most popular trails in the greater Howard Buford Recreation Area, it is also an access point for emergency and maintenance vehicles. Arboretum staff has been hard at work installing a handrail to help visitors navigate this entry point. The handrail will be removable when needed for vehicle access, and will allow us to remove the entry gate.

Other site projects include White Oak Pavilion maintenance, a new shelf on the traffic circle kiosk, the installation of two new bird nesting boxes, planting and weeding in the Patricia Baker Wildflower Garden, and woody-debris check dam construction in the creek.



Photo by Connor Reinecke

*Habitat Manager Patrick Wegner
planting a tree in the parking lot.*



Photo by Patrick Wegner

*A new bollard and handrail system
will replace the gate at the entrance to
Trail 1.*

Now booking for 2022!



Photo by Amanda-Meg Photography

**Picture your special
event at our beautiful
White Oak Pavilion**



Photo by Will Nielsen Photography

Contact Leisha Wood,
Venue Manager

events@mountpishgaharboretum.org

541-747-1504

With an increasing proportion of the community becoming vaccinated against Covid-19, we anticipate group work parties again in the near future. Look out for a welcome back event in the next few weeks. Thank you for your support and we look forward to seeing you on site!

Education Report

by Jenny Laxton, Education Manager



Photo by Jenny Laxton

This spring we are hosting an after-school program for elementary students called Arboretum Exploration. Our staff has really enjoyed getting to know these kids and their families. It's fun to see the same kids week after week and watch them discover Mount Pisgah. We're playing games, learning about plants and animals and doing lots of journaling.

Sign ups are ongoing through mid-June so it's not too late to sign kids up for these programs. We've also restarted nature walks for both adults and families. Advanced sign ups are required and group numbers are still limited. Watch for a list of those walks in our e-newsletter.

Nature Walks Update

by August Jackson, Interpretation Coordinator

After a year-long hiatus, we resumed our in-person nature walks for adults in February with limited attendance and masks required. Staff have led each of these walks so far as part of a trial period to examine the viability of returning to our program of regularly-scheduled volunteer-led walks. All six walks so far have met capacity and been safe and successful events. We're excited to welcome back some of our favorite volunteer walk leaders beginning in May, and plan to explore the possibility of holding small workshops again over the summer. All activities will still operate with attendance limits and safety precautions until such restrictions are lifted by the State of Oregon. We are thrilled to welcome you back to enjoy learning alongside us!

Contributions

Jan. 18 2021 to Apr. 9, 2021

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Photo by Jenny Laxton



Photo by August Jackson



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We're excited to welcome kids back on field trips in the fall of 2021! Many schools can no longer afford these field trips, and the financial impact of the pandemic will make them depend even more on scholarships from people like you. A \$10 donation to Discovery Tours brings out one child. \$250 can bring out a whole classroom!

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