

## Homegrown National Park & Tips for Establishing Fall Native Plants

Penny Morgan and Debbie Kadlec



Photos by Debbie Kadlec from her yard

- Welcome!
- This presentation is in two parts:
- First a discussion of the Homegrown National Park. We asked you to watch a recorded presentation before the meeting. [Palouse Conservation District, Educational Archive, Networks for Life with Doug Tallamy](#).
- Second, we will follow with tips for establishing native plants in the fall from seeds and transplants. We will have native plant seeds for you to spread in your yard.
- NOTE: We had a very active discussion that we unfortunately weren't able to record. Instead, we are giving you this PDF of our slides and notes and a short recording of the second half.
- Our speakers:
  - Penny Morgan loves native plants and fostering biodiversity. She is a retired professor of fire ecology at the University of Idaho.
  - Debbie Kadlec is a landscape planner with years of experience working with people to create beautiful, healthy yards and gardens with both native and non-native plants.
- We hope you come away with better understanding of "why native plants?", and with a specific commitment for action.

## Discussion



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- Thanks for the very active and engaged discussion we had in person!
- PENNY: HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK (HNP): Replace ½ of the 44 million acres of lawn (about 20 million acres, larger than largest 14 national parks combined).
- DEBBIE: Do you have lawn you aren't using purposefully?
- DEBBIE: WHY HNP? Insect and songbird decline, lawns are “deserts” with high input of chemicals, fossil fuels, and time. Adding native plants to or in place of lawns could increase biodiversity and habitat connectivity.
- PENNY: WHY NOT HNP? Change is difficult. Native plants can look messy (our plantings need to look intentional to be socially and culturally accepted).
- DEBBIE: IS IT DOABLE?
- PENNY: SOURCES OF NATIVE PLANTS AND SEEDS: HNP native plant finder for 83843 lists multiple non-native plants and doesn't clarify which will do well in what kinds of yards (elevation, shade, soil, size, tendency to spread, etc.)
- DEBBIE: NEED NOT BE 100% NATIVE
- PENNY: HOW BIG DOES OUR NATIVE PLANTING NEED TO BE TO MAKE AN IMPACT? Use clumps of 3-5 plants of same species. Only do what you can manage
- DEBBIE: BEYOND OUR OWN YARDS: We can do much in our communities. Talk with neighbors. Work with local government and organizations. Encourage connectivity across yards is important for many pollinators.

## What can each of us do?

1. Shrink your lawn: Add native plants to our yards and communities
2. Change outdoor lights
3. Welcome insects with a pollinator garden
4. Leave litter as much as and for as long as possible
5. Avoid using neonics and other systemic pesticides, spot instead of broadcast spray if you must spray
6. Manage your 'natural areas' so they look intentional
7. Even very small areas of native plants can help, especially if connected across neighborhoods
8. Volunteer with conservation organizations

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- PENNY: Thanks for you many great ideas. Here are some additional ones based on what Doug Tallamy suggested in his video.
- DEBBIE: Understand roles of and celebrate insects
- DEBBIE: Make this look intentional: signs, design (Doug Tallamy suggest mowed path through areas of native plants, and to focus on our backyards). Make it look purposeful (not just a vacant area left to "weeds") by framing plantings with fences and mowed areas, use signs, etc.
- PENNY: Even a few native plants can help. Many pollinator insects don't fly far. Clumps of the same native plants will make foraging for pollen more efficient. Pollinator pathways

## How will you “convert hope into action”?



- PENNY: Doug Tallamy asks us to convert hope into action.
- DEBBIE: Every landscape has 4 ecological responsibilities: 1) support foodwebs, 2) sequester carbon, 3) clean and manage water, 4) support pollinators. I am working on all of these. I can change my lights.
- PENNY: I commit to continuing to expand native plants here in our community. Steve and I are converting part of our remaining lawn into native plants. We include native grasses in our plantings that we hope resemble the native Palouse Prairie community (many of you have seen our yard in town; we are now expanding at our cabin near Deary). And I commit to keep learning.
- Best wishes with your native plant projects – we hope HNP discussion inspires you.
  
- PENNY: TRANSITION TO NEXT PART OF THE TALK: To accomplish our ongoing project to plant native shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers in Memory of Marjory Stage at Idler’s Rest this year, I’ve had gotten to learn lots about establishing native plants in the fall. My original plan was to plant in early summer, right after our plant sale. Instead, it was mid-October when we planted more than 100 native plants of more than 25 different species at 4 places along trails at Idler’s Rest. This meant I had to care for these plants in pots all summer long, but I didn’t have to haul water to them up the hill at Idlers Rest.
- I’d like to share with you what I’ve learned, for you too may want to plant in the fall and sow seeds to grow next spring.

## Establishing Native Plants in the Fall From Transplants

- **Sources:** Nurseries, local yards and gardens
- **Divide large clumps**
- **Transplant seedlings**
  - Choose small plants, as many have deep taproots
- **Considerations**
  - Move the plants with some of the soil where they are growing
  - Soil needs to be warm enough for root growth after transplanting
  - Frost-heaving is a risk. Mulch will help.
  - Be sure when you transplant that roots aren't exposed to air, the soil is packed around the roots, and the roots are not bent (Avoid "J-root")
  - Deep water: put water in the hole and let it soak in before you plant, then add soil and plant, then water more



Prairie smoke (*Geum triflorum*) can be divided and will transplant readily

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- This may require you to keep plants in pots over the summer as I did rather than plant in early summer and haul water to transplants all summer. To help the plants through the summer, I watered every 3 or 4 days, had them in partial shade under our oak tree (curious squirrels dug up some). I moved the plants that were in small tubes and 4-inch pots into 6-Inch pots. I watered them from the bottom when I could.
- I waited until after fall rains moistened the soil enough to dig holes. Ask permission and advice, and then be willing to try things.
- Know what you're getting (some aggressive non-native plants look quite similar to desirable native species)
- We don't recommend transplanting from wild places so that you don't impact populations of native plants.
- Some plants, such as prairie smoke, are better to divide than to start from seed. Most of the prairie smoke sold at our plant sale comes not from seed but from dividing – placing rhizome, roots, and top into pots. Prairie smoke is a favorite plant – it blooms early enough to provide nectar for queen bees coming out of winter and provisioning for their nests. The foliage is pretty, the flowers are interesting and the seed heads look like they all have a bad case of bedhead. Charming!
- How late in the fall? Transplants will resist frost heaving if they have had a chance to grow roots that will help hold them in their new home against the soil movement of freezing and thawing. Late October is OK, especially on warm falls like this one and on warm sites, such as the south-facing slopes we are planting at Idler's Rest.
- Treat the plant roots kindly – roots not "J", not exposed to air, soil packed around, ample water. Dig the hole, fill with water, let the water be absorbed, then plant, then gently but firmly pack soil around the roots. Water again. Air bubbles? Then use your soil knife or spade to gently firm the soil in around the plant.



## Establishing Native Plants in the Fall From Seed

### Seed sources

- Consider getting seed from commercial growers
- Collect seed from your own or your neighbor's yard
- If you collect your own seed in the wild, leave LOTS. Only collect 1/20th of the seed from any plant, and only 1/20<sup>th</sup> of all the plants
- We strongly discourage collecting in prairie remnants due to concerns about weeds
- Consider making a voucher garden (useful source for seeds and transplants, and you'll know what plants look like as seedlings and small plants)

### Stratifying seed for growing in the spring

- Let nature do it: Sow seeds on soil
- Hold the seeds in a dark, cool place
- Requirements vary by species

### Sowing seeds

- **Seed-to-soil contact is important**
  - Before snow (rain can also work)
  - Cover with VERY THIN layer of soil
  - Rake them into the soil
- **Be generous with seed**



I just harvested these sticky geranium (*Geranium viscosissimum*) seeds from my yard to sow in pots to try overwintering

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- SOWING: We also sowed seed at our Idler's Rest planting sites.
- Thanks to Trish Heekin and Jacie Jensen, we sowed Oregon sunshine as it promises to provide some blooms next summer. Most of the perennials will sleep before they creep before they leap. In other words, the perennials will not look very impressive at first while their roots grow before their tops expand. Some will take multiple years before they bloom. Trish and Jacie brought seeds of other species to sow as well.
- The hope is that by sowing seeds in the fall, they will get whatever they need of cool moist stratification, and then be ready to germinate next spring or summer (some may germinate after that).
- SEED SOURCES
  - Consider getting seed from commercial growers or from yards of members.
  - If you collect seed in the wild, take only 5%. For some species, 80% or more of seeds will get eaten; we need to leave some for that.
  - Consider making a voucher garden (useful source for seeds and you'll know what plants look like as seedlings or larger plants)
  - If you purchased plants and/or grow out plants from purchased/donated seed, you can take most/all the seed from their home-based plants to spread around on their property. . . the one-in-twenty rule doesn't apply when the site is not a remnant and the seed is staying "on-site".
- STRATIFICATION (try natural). Otherwise, use the table (see our web page) developed by Trish Heekin and Brenda Erhardt building on Dave Skinner's work. Requirements are usually expressed in numbers of days – may be multiple weeks or months. The seeds will need air (they are alive), and moist, cool air. Many of us have paper envelopes of seed in our refrigerator or in a mouse-proof plastic tub in an outdoor shed.
- What other ideas and experiences do you have to share?

## Always, Always, Always

- **Choose plants that fit the site and soil conditions**
- **Maintain and water as needed**
- **Plant in clumps (3-5 or more individual plants)**
  - **More attractive to our eye**
  - **More efficient for pollinators to forage and spread pollen**

Balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*) blooming in our yard.  
Plants were grown from “tublings” bought at a local nursery



- Site and soil conditions can determine whether your planting is successful. Sun, partial shade or shade; dry, moist or wet; well-drained vs. rocky or heavy clay soils – Plants, like people, are particular. Being observant about where you see plants growing well in natural settings or yards is key.
- Once established, native plants will need less water. They will need extra water in their first year, and they may be more robust and colorful if you give them a little water during very long, hot, dry spells.
- They are low maintenance, but not no maintenance.
- Plan for how big plants will eventually be.
- When working in an old field (e.g., CRP) or orchard or similar area, consider making multiple small islands. Then, if you must, you can mow or use herbicide around the islands.

## What native plants will thrive here?

- White Pine Chapter of INPS: website, expertise, native plant sale
- Palouse Prairie Foundation: website, pollinator kits
- Latah Soil and Water Conservation District and Palouse Conservation District
- Some local nurseries sell native plants and seed
- Rose Creek Native Seed Farms
- Tallamy recommends <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>

Plants ready for our May 2023 native plant sale



- How do you figure out what native plants to encourage?
- There are lots of local sources of plants and information.
- For our native plant sale, we purchase plants from 4 local nurseries, including
- Pleasant Hill Farms (Troy), Plants of the Wild (Tekoa, WA), Twin Peaks (McCall), and Plant Natives Nursery (Lewiston)
- Also try Fiddler's Ridge and Wildlife Habitat Nursery (<http://whn-online.com/>)
- Consider planting drought-tolerant plants to accommodate our changing climate.
- Doug Tallamy recommended the Native Plant Finder site, and it does include the number of different butterfly species supported. Unfortunately, the site is very general – not specific to habitat or to species, includes many non-native species



Thank you!



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- We welcome further discussion
- White Pine chapter members have many native seeds to share with you. We hope to hear they have been sown!