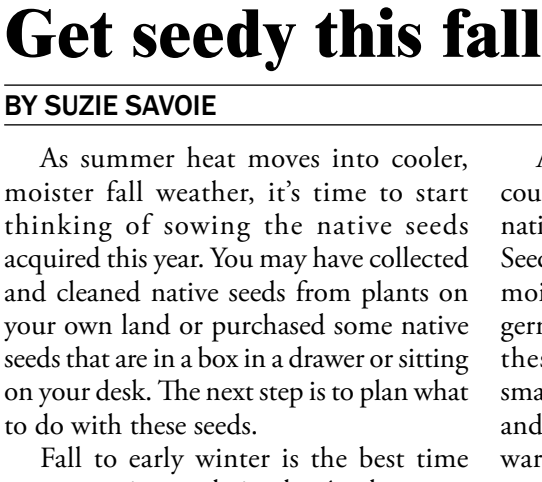
Get seedy this fall

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

As summer heat moves into cooler, moister fall weather, it's time to start thinking of sowing the native seeds acquired this year. You may have collected and cleaned native seeds from plants on your own land or purchased some native seeds that are in a box in a drawer or sitting on your desk. The next step is to plan what to do with these seeds.

Fall to early winter is the best time to sow native seeds in the Applegate to help restore native plant communities, increase floral biodiversity for pollinators, and reduce invasive species. Native plants are known to support a greater abundance and diversity of bees, butterflies, and other wildlife compared to nonnative plants.

More and more people in the Applegate are wanting to increase the quantity of native species on their land both for higher quality wildlife habitat and for community and cultural benefits such as native plant medicine, traditional foods, basketry materials, or simply a more attractive and colorful landscape. With the right species selection, native plants also require much less watering.



Above: Bluehead gilia with foraging yellow-faced bumblebee. Below: Diamond clarkia.

Although it seems counterintuitive, the seeds of many native species germinate in the fall. Seeds respond to fall rain or dew that moistens the soil and triggers fall germination. This strategy enables these species to overwinter as a small rosette of leaves, ready to bolt and flower as soon as the weather warms in the spring. These cool-season species get a jump-start on growth in the fall, putting energy into underground root systems and basal leaves through the winter.

In nature, wildflowers disperse their seeds onto the ground or into the air in the summer, and as fall rains begin, some of these seeds can germinate and grow rapidly during cool, rainy fall and winter conditions. Annual wildflowers are more likely to germinate and grow in the fall, but some perennial wildflowers and native grasses will as well.

In order to help these species achieve fall germination, the seeds must be sown outside just before the first fall rain to mimic the natural cycles of seed drop and germination in the wild. The warm fall soil temperatures and rain trigger seed germination. Sowing the seeds before the first significant fall rain enables them to have enough moisture to germinate before the temperatures turn colder in early winter.

The following are examples of native species whose seeds can germinate in the fall.

Annuals

- Diamond clarkia *(Clarkia rhomboidea)*
- Blue-eyed mary *(Collinsia grandiflora)*
- Bluehead gilia *(Gilia capitata)*
- Bicolor lupine *(Lupinus bicolor)*
- Shortspur seablush *(Plectritis congesta)*

Perennials

- Woodland madia *(Anisocarpus madioides)*
- Western thistle *(Cirsium occidentale)*
- California poppy *(Eschscholzia californica)*
- Western buttercup *(Ranunculus occidentalis)*

Grasses

- California brome *(Bromus carinatus)*
- Tufted hairgrass *(Deschampsia cespitosa)*
- Blue wildrye *(Elymus glaucus)*
- Junegrass *(Koeleria macrantha)*

Moth on shortspur seablush.

Shortspur seablush seedlings.

To prepare a spot for sowing native seeds, first remove existing weeds or grass without digging or tilling any deeper than a few inches. Deeper digging may unearth dormant weed seeds and encourage them to germinate, thereby increasing weed growth, which you don't want. It is best to leave the deeply buried weed seeds undisturbed in a dormant state beneath the soil. If you have weedy rhizomatous grasses (e.g., crabgrass) or groundcovers (e.g., vinca or ivy), you will need to either solarize or tarp the area for at least one summer before seeding to clear the area of invasive plants.

For optimal results, sow seeds on a cleared area of soil, lightly rake the seeds into the soil, and then gently water. Since seeds need light and air, as well as contact with bare soil to germinate well, they won't succeed if scattered directly over thick mulch or buried too deeply. The rule of thumb is to sow seeds as deeply as they are thick. You can cover seeds with a very light dusting of sifted potting soil, but keep in mind some seeds need light to germinate.

If there is a dry spell between rains in the fall, be sure to water! Seeds must receive regular moisture for optimal fall germination. Keep the soil consistently moist, but not waterlogged, as that can cause the seeds to rot.

Other native plant seeds that don't germinate in the fall should still be sown outside in fall to early winter to achieve the varying lengths of "cold-moist stratification" required for them to germinate in late winter to early spring.

For more information on native seed germination, including seeding into burn pile areas, check out Klamath-Siskiyou Native Seed's *Seed Germination and Propagation Reference Guide* at klamathsiskiyouseeds.com/seed-germination-and-propagation.

Happy fall planting!

Suzie Savoie
klamathsiskiyou@gmail.com

Blackberries—the good, the bad (and the ugly?)

BY BARBARA MUMBLO

I like to eat blackberries, blackberry jam, and blackberry pie. I don't really like picking them so much—they grab me with their thorns.

Blackberry bushes provide food and habitat for wild critters and us. Our main large bushy non-native blackberry is Armenian/Himalaya blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*), which was listed some years ago as "noxious" by the Oregon Department of Agriculture because it's invasive along rivers. Not much grows under these bushes so soil easily erodes into rivers. A large patch of this blackberry can produce a lot of dead woody material underneath, making it quite flammable as we saw in the Almeda Fire along the Bear Creek Greenway.

Another non-native blackberry is the evergreen/cutleaf blackberry (*Rubus laciniatus*), which is not as pervasive as the Armenian. We have a few native blackberries: trailing/California blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*), waxleaf blackberry (*Rubus glaucifolius*), and wild raspberry (*Rubus leucodermis*). These do not cause fire danger as much since they don't produce such large amounts of woody material.

I noticed this spring that people were working to get rid of their blackberries. It's good to get rid of accumulations of woody material at a time that is not so hazardous for fire, but usually plants will sprout back soon after. One thing I've seen over the years is that if you treat blackberries in late August-September they don't grow back as easily. One summer at Star Ranger Station, Albert Rametes, assistant fire management officer, wanted to cut the hedge of blackberries growing along an abandoned irrigation ditch on the compound. I didn't really want to get rid of them because they provided habitat for a flock of quail. I did realize they should be cut back so we decided to cut a patch and then let it grow back before cutting another patch. Turns out that by cutting at that time of year in that location, they didn't grow back. Unfortunately, the quail left too.

We've also seen that treating with herbicides works best at this time of year when nutrients are going to the roots. Timing seems to be everything—reduce the woody material in winter-spring and cut sprouts in late summer-early fall. Work smarter—not harder.

Enjoy your blackberries where it's okay to leave them and eradicate them where it's important to do so. It's good to reduce fire danger and reclaim land while providing some wildlife food and habitat.

Barbara Mumblo
bamumblo@gmail.com