Fire-resistant plants versus chocolate cake

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Looking for a short tutorial about fire-resistant plants, I consulted the website of Wasco County, Oregon (http://co.wasco.or.us/). There, I gleaned a list of fire-resistant plants. Before I share that list with you, though, let's cover a few basics about *fire-resistant*.

According to Fire-resistant Plants for Home Landscapes, *"Homeowners should take active steps to minimize...the fuel and fire hazard around their homes...[in order to] create a fuel break and help protect their home by blocking intense heat."*

Fire-resistant plants must be alive to do their job. If a plant is listed as fire-resistant but is not also deer-resistant, there could be a conflict of interest.

Planting fire-resistant plants and then interspersing them with highly flammable plants negates the first. This reminds me of my mother who ate huge slices of double-decker chocolate cake with a small glass of nonfat milk. Didn't work—she was stout.

Planting fire-resistant plants close to decorative flammable objects—maybe a wonderful old wooden ladder with flowerpots hanging from it—is bad news, except for the fire. "Oh goodie," says the fire. "Now I have an easy way to climb up to the roof."

If you are planting trees chosen from the fire-resistant list—actually all trees—remember to plan ahead. At maturity, the canopy (the spread of the tree) should be at least 10 feet away from a structure's roof. Even better if it's 30 feet away. The trees should also be at least 10 to 30 feet away from each other, based on their predicted mature size.

"Resistant" is different from "retardant," so don't confuse the two words. Resistant is like trying not to eat that big piece of cake. Retardant is when the dentist sutures your lips closed. No way can you eat the cake.

According to *Fire-resistant Plants for Home Landscapes*, a Pacific Northwest Extension publication, plants that are *fire-resistant* have the following characteristics:

- Leaves are moist and supple.
- Plants have very little dead wood and tend not to accumulate dry, dead material.
- Sap is water-like and does not have a strong odor.

In contrast, plants that are *highly flammable* have these general characteristics:

- Contain fine, dry or dead material, such as twigs, needles, and leaves.
- Leaves, twigs, and stems contain volatile waxes, terpenes (e.g., essential oil from conifers), or oils.
- Leaves are aromatic (strong smell when crushed).
- Sap is gummy, resinous and has a strong odor.
- May have loose or papery bark.

Avoid planting both ornamental and native plants like ornamental juniper, bitterbrush, manzanita, sagebrush, and ceanothus around your home. They can be highly flammable.

Bark mulch is often used in home landscapes. If you landscape with bark mulch, keep it at least 30 feet away from buildings.

Below, I have excerpted from the Wasco County list of fire-resistant plants, to include only plants that I am very familiar with. These are plants I know grow just dandy in southwest Oregon. The list for "Trees—Deciduous" was extremely long, so I listed a mere few.

The bottom line: keep dry plants and volatile plants far away from your house. Deciduous plants, i.e., ones that drop their leaves, must be removed. *No* dry or dead material next to a house.

Perhaps this information will help, or maybe you find lists boring and long. No matter— safety first. Fire-safe property is up to you.

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— Fire-resistant plants —

Ground covers
Carpet bugleweed
Creeping phlox
Creeping thyme
Hens and chicks
Kinnikinnick
Sedum or stonecrops
Snow-in-summer
Wild strawberry

Perennials
Chives
Coralbells
Coreopsis
Cranesbill geranium
Daylilies
Evening primrose
Hostas
Iris
Lamb's ear
Lupine
Red-hot poker
Yarrow

Shrubs and broadleaf evergreen
Cotoneaster
Lilac
Oregon boxwood
Oregon grape holly
Privet
Rhododendron
Snowberry
Western azalea
Western spirea

Shrubs—deciduous
Blue mist spirea
Flowering currant
Goldflame spirea
Pacific serviceberry
Red osier dogwood
Wood's rose

Trees—conifers
Lodgepole pine
Ponderosa pine
Sugar pine

Trees—deciduous
Alder birch
Ash
Aspen
Beech
Black locust
Horse chestnut
Maples
Oaks
Walnut

This is a partial list of fire-resistant plants from http://co.wasco.or.us/.

Dyer's woad—unwanted in the Applegate Valley

BY BARBARA MUMBLO

For several years, I've been noticing Dyer's woad plants (*Isatis tinctoria*) in the Provolt area. Dyer's woad is a major noxious weed (invasive species) of concern around Yreka and is found in smaller amounts in southwest Oregon. Around Yreka, it covers some fields much like our yellow star thistle does here.

Dyer's woad is in the mustard family. It can resemble some of our weedy mustards—tall with yellow flowers, but if you look more carefully you'll notice that the leaves are pointed and have a blue-green tint with a white mid-vein. To me the plant looks like a bouquet of lighter yellow flowers.

The feature that really distinguishes it, though, is the fruit. When the pods are mature they hang down and turn a dark brown. This species produces lots of tiny seeds and can grow near water (or not). It can easily move down the river…or along a road if the soil is moved.

I've seen these plants off Highway 238 in the area where the old bridge is on Powell Creek. I'm thinking this weed may have been brought in when Highway 238 was rerouted away from the old bridge. There are also some plants located in the fenced areas where the road relocation occurred, as well as at the Provolt Seed Orchard. The Bureau of Land Management has been working on controlling this weed and will do so again this year.

While you are out and about, let us know if you see some Dyer's woad in different locations. Recently some was spotted near the Applegate River downstream of the site on Highway 238. We'd like to get rid of this species before it becomes more widespread and more difficult to control.

Give me a call if you find some.

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Photo left: Dyer's woad plant.
Photo bottom: Mature Dyer's woad pods.
Photos by Barbara Mumblo.

Applegate Partnership throws its weight around

BY BARBARA SUMMERHAWK

Having acquired the use of a medium-sized Caterpillar excavator, the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC) is taking out stubborn, hard-to-remove blackberry bushes that suppress the regeneration of young trees and shrubs. The big machine is needed to extract the invasive berries along Thompson Creek so that native trees and shrubs can be planted in their place along the stream, to provide shade and cool water temperatures for returning salmon.

Part of the larger Thompson Creek restoration project, blackberry removal is an ongoing riparian restoration project partially sponsored by the Oregon Water Enhancement Board (OWEB) and private funders, according to Jakob Shockey, riparian program manager for the APWC.

In the near future, the APWC hopes that the Caterpillar excavator along with an operator can be contracted out to local landowners in need of large-scale blackberry extraction. Blackberry pie and jam may be sweet, but the bushes are invasive and destructive.

Watch the *Applegater* Facebook page or check out the APWC home page at www.applegatepartnershipwc.org for updates on the possibility of contracting the big machine from the APWC.

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HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!