



Explorer's gentian (*Gentiana calycosa*) blooming on Big Red Mountain on the Siskiyou Crest.



Rubber rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*) blooming above the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail.

Late-blooming wildflowers in the Applegate

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

We still find some late-season native wildflowers in bloom in the Applegate even as we approach the fall equinox on September 22. Although peak wildflower blooms in the Applegate occur in the spring at lower elevations and midsummer at higher elevations, the late summer to early fall wildflowers are critically important because they provide nectar and pollen for pollinator species at a time when most other plants have dried up and gone to seed.

In the beginning of August most of the high-country wildflowers that had their peak bloom in July are still producing flowers, but toward the end of the month the blooms are definitely winding down. However, nature compensates for the dwindling floral resources with a few spectacular species that wait almost to the end to come into their glory, including some dazzling species such as deep, rich blue gentians, cheerful asters, and bright yellow rubber rabbitbrush.

In September, as the color spectrum on the landscape becomes more muted with browns and golds, a few of the plants that started blooming in August may still be in their last phases of blooming, and some continue blooming even after the first hard frost.

Late-blooming asters

Because available forage for pollinators is diminished in the fall, asters, which provide good late-summer

color, are also key components of wildland plant communities, habitat restoration projects, and pollinator gardens.

Late-blooming asters that grow at lower elevations

Roughleaf aster (*Eurybia radulina*) is documented in numerous locations in the Applegate. I have observed it flowering in dry madrone woodlands in the Williams valley.

Oregon goldenaster (*Heterotheca oregona*) generally grows in dry, rocky cobbles along the Applegate River and has been documented along the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail.

Eaton's aster (*Symphyotrichum bracteolatum*) grows in moist soil along the edge of the Applegate River.

Late-blooming asters that grow at higher elevations

Leafybract aster (*Symphyotrichum foliaceum*) grows in moist meadows and along streams and in wetlands in the Applegate high country.

Thickstem aster (*Eurybia integrifolia*), Brewer's aster (*Eucephalus breweri*), and Siskiyou aster (*Eucephalus glabratus*) grow on rocky ridgelines or on dry slopes or sunny openings in forest or chaparral in the Applegate high country.

Some aster species, such as Oregon whitetop aster (*Sericocarpus oregonensis*),

will grow at varying elevations and habitat types. Populations of Oregon whitetop aster exploded in the fire footprint following the 2017 Abney Fire at higher elevations, but it also grows at lower elevations in the Applegate and in the Cathedral Hills outside Grants Pass.

Gentians

Four species of native gentians—some rare, some common—grow in the Applegate high country, putting on an elegant display of deep blue flowers in late summer to early fall: Explorer's gentian (*Gentiana calycosa*), Newberry's gentian (*Gentiana newberryi*), Klamath gentian (*Gentiana plurisetosa*), and Mendocino gentian (*Gentiana setigera*). Large populations of explorer's gentian can easily be observed along the Pacific Crest Trail on Big Red Mountain on the Siskiyou Crest.

Rubber rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*)

Because it blooms so late and is a common species, rubber rabbitbrush is considered the most important native nectar plant for western monarch butterflies on their southward migration. It provides important fuel for the monarchs' long journey to overwintering sites along the California coast. This extremely drought-tolerant shrub grows throughout the Applegate in exposed sites with well-drained or rocky soils.

Western joeiweed (*Ageratina occidentalis*)

Western joeiweed is an uncommon, pink-flowered species that grows in rocky locations throughout the Applegate. At low elevations it tends to bloom on rock cobble along streams in early summer, but at higher elevations it blooms in rocky locations in late summer to fall.

West coast Canada goldenrod (*Solidago elongata*)

West coast Canada goldenrod has impressive and striking, late-season, yellow flowers that are attractive to many pollinators. In the Applegate, goldenrod is found in dry meadows, wet meadows, on streams and ponds, in sunny forest openings, and in random places where it can find a niche, mostly at higher elevations.

Pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)

Pearly everlasting is a tall perennial wildflower that likes moist soil with good drainage but can tolerate drought once established. The pure white flowers are often used in dried flower arrangements. Besides providing nectar, it is a host plant for painted lady and skipper butterflies.

Suzie Savoie

klamathsiskiyou@gmail.com



Eaton's aster (*Symphyotrichum bracteolatum*) blooming along the Applegate River. Photos: Suzie Savoie.



Leafybract aster (*Symphyotrichum foliaceum*) grows in moist meadows in the Applegate high country.