DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Not so sweet pea

BY SIOUX ROGERS

I wish I would often have the good fortune to find a topic of both importance and interest, along with a well spoken writer, willing to "do" my column. I lucked out for this issue. The following article is written by one of our very own neighbors. It is of significance, not only to this area, but in the ramifications of any introduced/imported species anywhere, whether it be an animal or a plant.

Daryl Jackson is a third generation Southern Oregonian. He helped initiate the Applegate and Williams Watershed Council riparian tree planting programs. Now a Williams resident, he is the biologist/coordinator of the Williams Waterway project which is a statewide model for maintaining roadside vegetation without the use of herbicides.

Not So Sweet Pea

Don't you just love those pink wild pea vine covered fence lines, the glorious expanses of roadside bursting in color? Well, I've grown to hate them! It's true, we do have a native pea vine. Places like Peavine Mountain are likely the setting for the native species. The Peavine Mountain pea vines seem to be staying on the mountain. Our local Applegate pea vines, on the other hand, seem to be the nasty invasive kind and they aren't staying put.

The vast network of rodent habitat, miles of collapsed fence lines, explosive fire potential in the fall and oddly barren ground under them suggest all is not so sweet in the pea world. The "no such thing as a weed" philosophy doesn't cut it when it comes to invasive plants like the pea. Pea vine, star thistle, blackberry, and knapweed all may be purveyors of biodiversity but so may certain S.T.D's. Once you have them, you probably won't get rid of them.

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I'm having problems seeing any redeeming qualities of the wild pea vine. A common name is "everlasting pea" and therein lies the problem. Once they get started, they are almost impossible to eradicate. *Lathyrus latifolius,* the introduced wild pea, was foisted upon us like the Starling, Star Thistle and Gorse. All seemed to be great ideas, in someone's mind. Starlings evoke poetic Shakespearean references but drive away our native song birds. Star Thistle makes great honey but wipes out thousands of acres of agricultural land. Gorse was thought to be a fine way to prevent coastal sand movement but its thorns do an even better job of preventing people movement.

The lesson here seems to be that we should be extremely careful when planting anything that is not a locally native plant. This is not to say you should rush out and dig up your non-native grass lawn or yank up the tomatoes, but you should seriously consider invasive potential of new types of plants.

So what can we do to reduce these types of invasive species? Years ago we would have said "poison them, kill them all." This is about as realistic as using those odd purple-glowing bug zappers folks used to put around the patio. First of all, aren't all your other lights attracting bugs too? Secondly, the zappers don't attract or kill mosquitoes. The same goes for poisons. In theory, they might make some sense, but in reality, they do very little to address the core issue.

Nature hates a void and in most cases finds some way to fill it. Disturb the soil and nature will introduce some plant to fill the bare ground. Invasive plants are usually the first to appear. Minimize ground disturbance and be sure to introduce the right species to fill the gap. Using poison just results in selecting the plants that can survive the toxin. What you end up with are "monster" weeds that require the "new and improved" chemicals. Sounds like a perfect marketing scenario, doesn't it?

The best way to reduce and sometimes eliminate entirely these noxious pests involves an unpopular option. You have to work at it, not for just one season, but sometimes several years. Most plants share a reproductive process that involves pollination and the production of seed. Interrupt, or reduce the development of seed and you will begin to see results.

Mow blackberries and you will see several feet of re-growth almost instantaneously. Mow them several times in a season and each time they grow back less because you have depleted the leaf mass necessary for growth. The roots are starved

Sioux Rogers—And the beet goes on.

and the next year you will see progress but don't think for a minute you can win the battle in one year.

Mow the star thistle and it has the infuriating habit of producing a shorter version of the plant and a more vigorous seed crop. If you can mow before the seeds form, you can effectively reduce seed production. Get lazy and leave a patch or even one big plant and the seed can move about 300 feet to reseed next years "crop."

Mow the pea vine and it re-sprouts back from the roots but seems to produce far fewer seed pods for the year. Repeated mowing reduces growth somewhat and after mid summer they seem to weaken a little. But like the blackberry and thistle, simply mowing does little to eliminate the plant. The best process I have found for all three of these plant scourges is to pull the early stages of growth while soil is moist and before seeds mature. You need to be careful to act early in the year but not too early or you simply have germination of seed remaining in the soil..

The aggravating characteristic of all these plants is that they form "banks" of seed that can persist in the soil for years. To make matters worse several species of rodents collect pea seed and store (effectively planting) thousands of seeds. Similarly, the old timers told me the Applegate was once blackberry free, but once introduced the birds air-mailed the seeds (and fertilizer) all along the fence rows.

The key to winning the invasive weed struggle is to plant something in the place of the invader. If you do not, the void filling tendency of nature will simply result in one form of invasive or another, filling the space. So, may peas not be with you. Go yank 'em.

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