

# Promoting natives in the garden



Hyacinth cluster-lily, or fool's-onion (*Triteleia hyacinthina*), is a native perennial found throughout Oregon in meadows and on rocky seeps. It is cultivated for use in sunny gardens and landscaping sites. In the lower lefthand corner is a distribution map of hyacinth cluster-lily with represented ecoregions highlighted.

PHOTO BY BRUCE NEWHOUSE, COURTESY OF OREGON FLORA PROJECT

**The Oregon Flora Project educates growers and gardeners alike through books, interactive workshops and its website**

**By Linda K. Hardison**

For two decades, the Oregon Flora Project (OFP) has been developing information about the vascular plants of the state — in all, more than 4,690 ferns, conifers, grasses, herbs and perennials that naturally grow without cultivation.

Through photographs, maps and written descriptions, we help people learn about the plants that occur in Oregon and how to identify them.

One key tool we are preparing as a learning aid is the three-volume *Flora of Oregon*, a comprehensive reference about the plants of the state (see sidebar, Page 47). The OFP website ([www.oregonflora.org](http://www.oregonflora.org)) is another resource.

The OFP is introducing an initiative to bring relevant information about native plants — those that occur naturally in our state and can be propagated — into home gardens, landscaping ▶



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▲ GROWING KNOWLEDGE

and restoration efforts. We are seeking input from the horticultural community to help us meet the needs of both native plant providers and consumers.

Within the nursery industry, “Oregon native plants” refers to a specialty crop drawing from the more than 3,500 vascular plant taxa that were a part of the uncultivated plant life of Oregon before European settlement.

Native plants provide ecological benefits that make their use in gardens and landscapes appealing. Taxa that naturally occur in a region require less water and fertilizer once established; they provide food and habitat for native pollinators, birds and other animals; they are typically not invasive; and they help create biodiversity corridors in urban areas.

Being indigenous to our state, native plants are clearly well adapted to the ecoregion, climate and soils of their original distribution.

Though native species make up 77 percent of Oregon’s plant diversity, only a few hundred species have been adopted and propagated for commercial use.

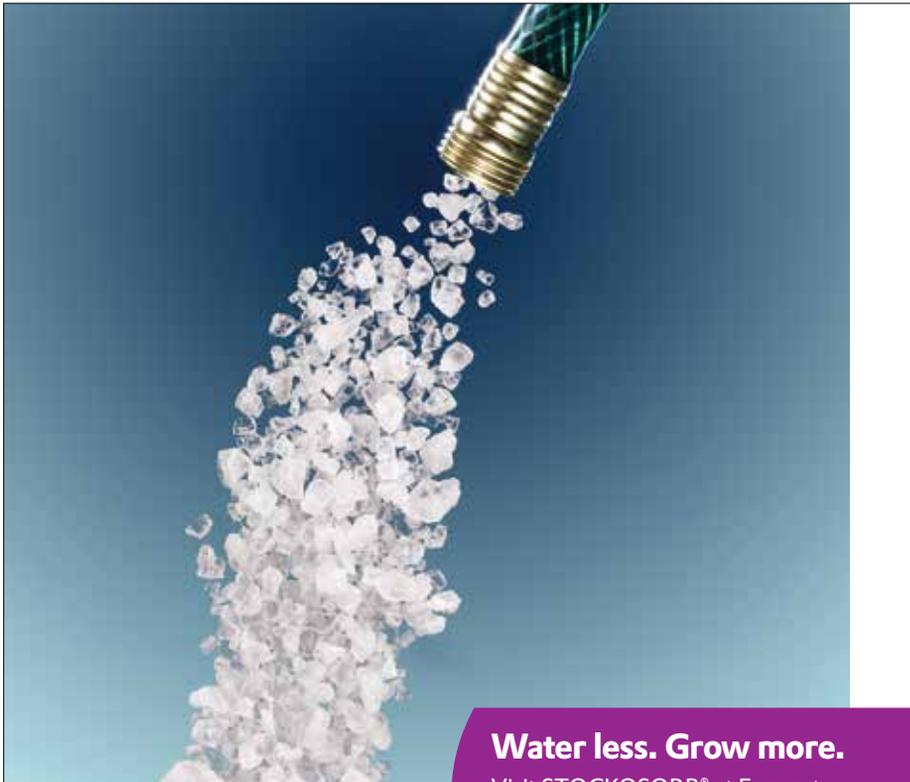
Since the *Flora of Oregon* will provide details about the size, shape, color, habitat and ecoregion of virtually every plant in the state, the OFP dataset represents a treasure chest of information for growers to explore, and presents many new plants to investigate for cultivation possibilities.

**Approach**

The OFP strives to interconnect growers, retailers and customers by offering regionally focused workshops tailored to two groups: growers/retailers are one group, and the other is comprised by gardeners, landscapers and restorationists eager to use native species in their plantings.

For the producers of nursery materials, the interactive workshops will strengthen the regional networks that native plant growers currently have, and present a forum to share the expertise they have developed.

For the consumers, the sessions are an opportunity to gain apprecia- ►



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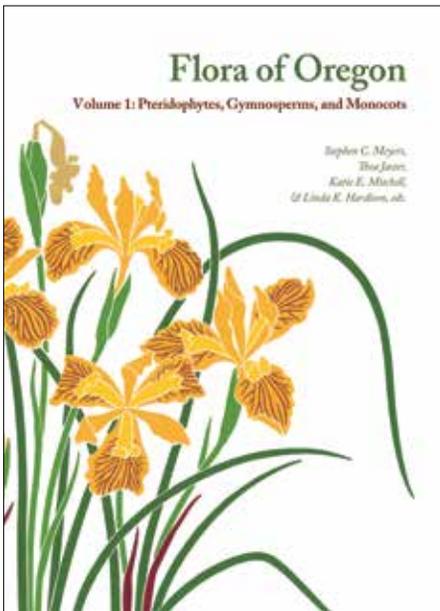
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▲ The three-volume *Flora of Oregon* will be the first comprehensive flora of the state in more than 50 years.

Volume 1 presents treatments of the ferns, gymnosperms and monocots — 1,054 taxa, or 23 percent of the native and naturalized vascular plants of Oregon.

Taxonomic treatments include identification keys and full taxon descriptions with over half of them illustrated. A dot map depicting where in the state each taxon is found and the ecoregions that host it accompany each description.

Color photographs complement chapters describing the state's ecology and sites for exploring botanical diversity. Also included are biographical sketches of notable Oregon botanists and appendices emphasizing plant taxa of interest to conservationists.

The publication date of *Flora of Oregon, Volume 1* is late summer 2015. Copies are available through [shop.brit.org](http://shop.brit.org).

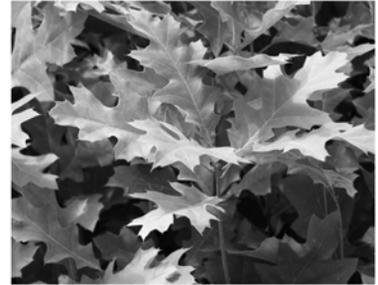


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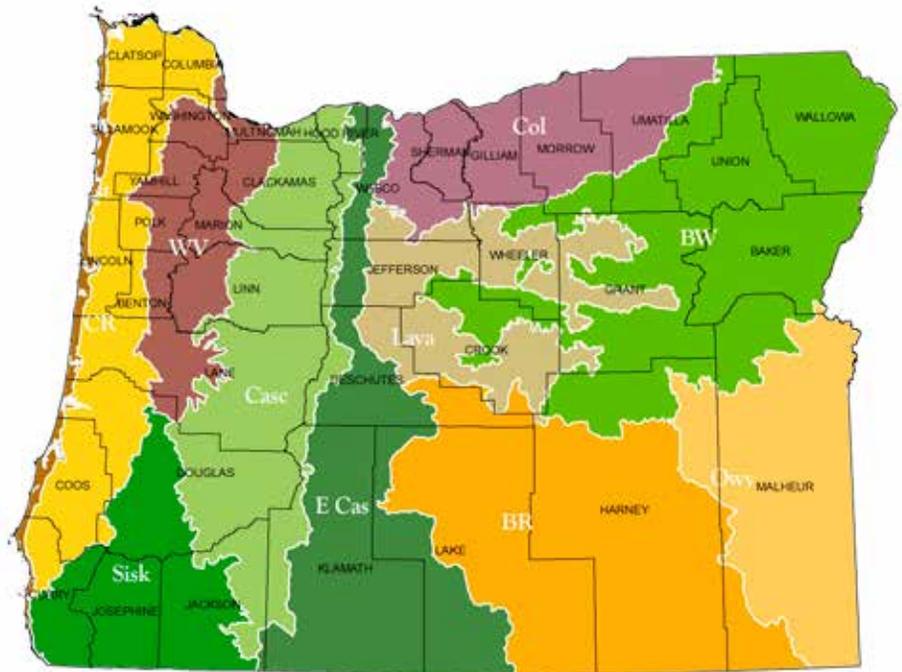
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tion of the ecological benefits of planting natives, as well as knowledge to successfully cultivate their native plant purchases. The OFP will be conducting workshops beginning in Autumn 2015 in the Bend, Medford, Willamette Valley and Portland metropolitan areas.

A second aspect of the OFP initiative is to provide ready information on where consumers can purchase native plants appropriate to their needs. Less than 80 growers are readily identified as providing native plants for wholesale or retail use. We are compiling a list of commercial sources of native plants and the species sold; this resource will be available on our website.

Educational material about the available native species, their cultivation and ecology will also be on the webpage.

A growing interest in landscaping and gardening with native plants raises



The Oregon Flora Project defines 11 ecoregions within the state.

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the need for a reference itemizing these taxa. Based on historical records and research, the OFP designates the origin (native or exotic) of each taxon and further assigns exotic species to one of 11 categories, such as naturalized or invasive. Providing an origin status informs growers and their customers of the connection plants have to our indigenous flora.

An additional effort to support the nursery industry is the Oregon Flora Project's "Verified Native" program. Subscribing wholesalers and retailers receive a reference cataloging the native/exotic status of all Oregon plants, educational materials and signage for point of sale and displays.

The Oregon Flora Project is excited to apply its research-driven data toward the successful integration of native plants into gardens, landscaping and restoration projects. We welcome input from nursery growers and retailers who are or who anticipate bringing the diverse and place-based world of native plants to the Oregon public.

**Information is also online**

The bulk of the information managed by the Oregon Flora Project is also available to the public through its website, [www.oregonflora.org](http://www.oregonflora.org). Below is a summary of its key features:

The **Oregon Plant Atlas** is an interactive mapping tool that uses a database of more than 550,000 plant occurrence records and herbarium specimens to allow users to plot the distribution of plants statewide. Information comes from 39 herbaria, state and federal agencies, and individuals.

The atlas provides users with unparalleled access to information and a context for data that is unavailable when studying each source independently. Click on a map dot, and the details of each record appear.

The **Photo Gallery** contains more than 42,000 images of the state's plants. Field photos capture diagnostic details, flowers and plant habit. Images of herbarium specimens are also available; these serve as a valuable research tool ▶

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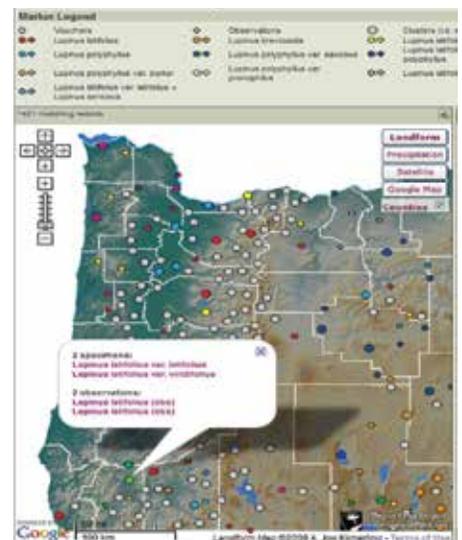
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documenting a plant's occurrence. Many images are geo-referenced, and thus map-able in the atlas. Of the approximately 4,700 taxa in Oregon, 92 percent are represented in the gallery.

Awareness of the plant resources that exist in the state opens the possibility of discovering new commercially viable plants. OFP tools help identify taxa that thrive in novel environments, fulfill particular ecological roles such as pollinator attractors or erosion control, or present alternatives to existing horticultural choices that will reflect the unique biological diversity of our state.

The mission statement of the OFP is "to serve as a comprehensive resource for the vascular plants of Oregon that grow without cultivation, and to foster effective use of this knowledge by all citizens." Exploring the OFP website will hopefully give readers fresh insights into how this information can inform and expand their interactions with the plants that surround us. ☺

*Linda K. Hardison is assistant professor (senior research) in the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology at Oregon State University, and director of the Oregon Flora Project. She can be reached at [hardisol@science.oregonstate.edu](mailto:hardisol@science.oregonstate.edu).*



When users log on to the online Oregon Flora, clicking on any dot reveals the details of that plant's occurrence.