

# Loasa - *The Newsletter*

Feb. 2007 – Celebrating Native Plants!



On a cold, frosty, late-winter morning *Ranunculus glaberrimus* is a harbinger of the spring floral madness soon to come!

Dear Loasa,  
As outgoing newsletter editor, I am usurping the normal Presidential missive to remind you, the choir, of a few of the benefits of native plants and healthy native plant communities: oxygen, clean air, increased water quantity, increased water quality, soil building, wildlife, beauty, pharmacology, spiritual inspiration, and of course they often taste great!  
The Loasa chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society has a membership entirely comprised of people. People have

demonstrated abilities to modify environments to suit their needs, often this ability is utilized without long-term understanding of what our needs truly are. Loasa helps to cultivate a knowledge of our local native plants; such that as we grow to know, care and share for native plants, we will also inform what our needs truly are. Conservation is a human process – our values determine conservation outcomes.

Witness for Trout Fishing in America Peace,  
Kent

## Calendar

- Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007    Monthly Meeting – Poisonous Plants – Dylan Levy-Boyd  
Room 258 of the Taylor Building at CSI    7-9 pm
- Feb 13 & 14    Rare Plant Conference – Boise – Go to it! More details will  
be coming in the next issue of Sage Notes.
- Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007    Monthly Meeting – Grasses – Steven Paulsen  
Room 258 of the Taylor Building at CSI    7-9 pm

## ***Eriogonum microthecum* var. *laxiflorum* (Slender Buckwheat)**

A Species account by Dylan Levy-Boyd, Editor of Sage Notes

As a recent transplant to south central Idaho, I made many new (to me) discoveries this field season. One of my favorites was the identification of the shrubby, pink flowered wild buckwheat, *Eriogonum microthecum* Nutt. var. *laxiflorum* Hook.

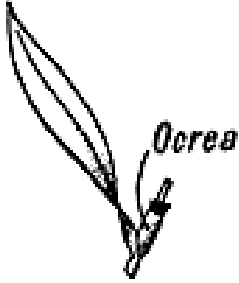
To the native plant savvy, the diversity and splendor of spring wildflowers is anticipated and expected. Spring is for wildflowers, given! Summer is for, well, sweating. As the summer sun grows ever warmer, the soft yellows, bright blues, dark violets, stunning reds and shining white hues of the basins and hillsides, morph into browns and tans. Well that's not entirely true; late summer has it's share of wildflowers; most of them just happen to be yellow composites. So, it was with a certain amount of surprise and admiration, that in very late summer, fall practically, I made the acquaintance of a sturdy, delicately flowered, wild buckwheat.

The family Polygonaceae is well defined and represented by about 48 genera and over 1200 species (Flora of North America). Genus *Eriogonum*, wild buckwheats, are members of the subfamily Eriogonoideae and are ubiquitous throughout western landscapes.

The root name of the genus Polygonum, for which the family is named, translates to many 'kneed' or 'jointed,' referring to the swollen nodes found in most members of the Polygonaceae. In the Polygonaceae the stipules take the form of a membranous sheath, called an ocrea, which covers the vegetative nodes. Historically the term ocrea dates back to Greek and Roman times and refers to a piece of metal armor lined with cloth or leather.



*Eriogonum microthecum* var. *laxiflorum* from the South Hills 6 Oct. 2006



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Of course it wouldn't be botany if there weren't some exceptions to the rules. And right you are, the genus *Eriogonum*, lacks ocrea, namesake feature of the family. Commonalities in the the Polygonaceae are floral structure which are generally small and tightly clustered. The perianth consists of two whorls of three tepals each (a tepal is combination sepal-petal that is not differentiated into calyx and corolla). Tepal color ranges from green to white, yellow, rose or purple. There are generally 3-9 stamens that are inserted at or above the base of perianth. Each flower houses a single ovary which forms a hard one seeded fruit called an achene (a sunflower seed is an achene).

The genus *Eriogonum* contains about 250 species of which all but two are endemic to North America (Anderson 2006). The majority of these species are distributed throughout the Rocky Mountains and Intermountain West. Over 30 species of *Eriogonum* have been documented in Idaho (USDA 2006). If one includes subspecies and varieties then this number is even greater.

My October beauty, *E. m. var. laxiflorum* is quite common really, and can be found from the East Cascades south to California and east to Montana, growing in rocky, well drained shrub steppe habits. *E. m. var. laxiflorum* is the more common variety, though the yellow flowered *E. m. var. microthecum* is known to occur in southwest Idaho, but is better known from the John Day Valley, Oregon. Where I first saw *E. m. var. laxiflorum* I can't quite recall, but the discovery was odd. I was tagging along on some sort of Kent Fothergill net swinging extravaganza, and Kent who did the (re)discovering of the plant in question seemed excited by his find, like he had tamed a formidable beast. This was strange. For those of you not familiar with the Fothergill method, he reads like the Encyclopedia Shrub Steppe-ica. Which brings me to oddity numero two; I have since seen *E. m. var. laxiflorum* pretty much everywhere: in the Cotterell Mountains, all over the South Hills, throughout the Shoshone BLM and on and on. It's out there. Just look for a pretty little rose-pink shrub late next summer and you'll know what I'm talking about.

Knowing this plant is quite satisfying as it seems to be a fixture of our south-central Idaho landscape. Unfortunately knowledge only breeds more questions. Like, how does this little shrub persist in this well trodden desert environment? Why pink flowers when most other species are putting out yellow ones (corollary: why so many yellow flower in late summer?)? Does this buckwheat attract pollinators as many other buckweats do? Could these pollinators be butterflies? Can I get one for my yard? Maybe next summer I will learn more about this slender buckwheat's secrets.

## A Letter From The President

Loasa Members,

I wish this note came after our meeting on the 18th, but it's not a perfect world. I would like the members to consider the following proposal for scheduled field trips during the summer of 2007. This does not mean that we can't do others as people suggest them. Long range I propose that Loasa take an area of Southern Idaho and take at least two field trips into the area. The purpose of the field trips would be as follows:

1. Learn plant identification and how to photograph plants.
2. From your identified plant photos, create a CD.
3. Last, but not least, get out and learn new areas and have fun.

For the first year I propose the following areas:

1. Little City of Rocks, north of Gooding. This would be the first trip. Not only will you find a diversity of plants, but also wildlife, archaeological sites and a few interesting historical sites.
2. Bliss to Centennial Marsh. This is a trip that encompasses not only high desert plants, but also plants in a more aquatic environment. We should also see lots of wildlife, including many different birds.
3. Minidoka to Craters of the Moon.

Once again I extend an open invitation to members, to visit the desert north of where we live, as this is part of the same complex as the proposed field trips. Just give me a call at 886-7051.

The meeting on the 18th is important as we will try to set an agenda for the coming year. I also need members to think about serving on the nominating committee, for the upcoming elections. We also need to discuss whether or not we will continue to meet at CSI. It seems they are going to impose a fee of ten dollars per hour, to use the rooms.

Last but not least, there seems to be a lot of confusion about plants that are poisonous in our area. Dylan's program for the evening will resolve these issues. So please come prepared to make decisions, volunteer, and learn.



Prairie Star, *Lithophragma* Salmon Falls Creek  
8-April-06

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### **A Newsletter in STILL Search of an Editor...**

Quite frankly the constant adoration, complementary meals, international travel, and general jet-setter lifestyle wore thin: smoking undescribed herbs with tribal chieftains on tropical beaches, keying plants in smoky Berlin discotheques, and meeting with despotic third-world leaders in their ill-gotten, pleasure palaces to enact rare plant protections has become tiresome and old hat. The current editor has stepped down from the lofty pinnacle of editorial power that is the Loasa newsletter to pursue new challenges. You too can be elevated far beyond mortal and enjoy the view from atop Mount Olympus (plus don't forget partying 'til dawn with other hard rockin', plant-minded fun-bots) and step up to the editorial challenge that is Loasa.

On another note, please check out the way cool vibe in this newsletter. That is because many people wrote articles for it AND BECAME FAMOUS, SEXY, AND COOL IN THE PROCESS!! So even if you can't be an international star (like the ex-editor) maybe you can increase your attractiveness by writing about a cool trip, your favorite plant, or maybe even that bean seed you planted in a Dixie® cup when you were in grade four that never grew... Please send articles for the newsletter to: jonesatkelvin.myrf.net (jonesat = jones@, this to confuse evil web-bots – not you...) until a new mega-star editor arises to wield ultimate power!!

# Project Timelines for Landscaping

Article by Julie Regula, Landscape Designer, Conservation Seeding and Restoration, Inc.

Whether poised to begin a massive reconstruction or small landscape project, you may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work you've undertaken! Here's a basic timeline to help you schedule your project.

## **Step 1, Anytime:**

*Inspiration.* What kinds of landscapes do you prefer? English vs. Chinese, formal vs. informal, native vs. exotic, dry vs. water... find pictures of styles/features you like in gardening & home magazines & save the clippings.

*Funding.* How much are you willing to spend?

*Status.* What's currently existing that you might need/want to remove, relocate, or amend to have a successful project, like an old shed or bad soil? What surrounds your site? Is there a style you'd like to match or disregard? Are there items you really want/need in your project like a new patio or hot tub? Write these down with ideas for locations. Also consider how much landscape maintenance you can handle.

*Photos.* Before & after pictures are great ways to show off your achievements as well as help a designer see what exists at other times of the year.

## **Step 2, Late Fall:**

*Seeding.* If you're adding seed to an existing landscape for a large-scale restoration project, install seed now. The seed will lie dormant over winter & sprout in spring.

## **Step 3, Winter before installation:**

*Planning, Design, Consultation.* Enlist help from a planner/designer, provide them all your information, answer thoroughly all questions they ask, & walk them through the site. If you're designing, compile reference materials to help you understand basic concepts & ideas then meet with local plant & material suppliers. Have irrigation & lighting plans designed by someone with previous experience. Be prepared to go through multiple drafts, ideas, & be open!

*Review.* Finalize plans, materials & plants desired, as well as quantities.

*Estimate.* How much will it cost? Your designer/planner may figure this or you can put your project out to 'bid' at various landscape construction companies. Provide them all information regarding materials, quantities, & a plan so they can make an informed estimate. Request references & portfolio of previous works done by each company for quality control if desired.

*Phasing.* If you can't afford the whole, talk to the installer about breaking the project into smaller pieces, or phasing. Don't be discouraged, this IS a common practice! Complete a whole piece each phase so you don't have to rip up what you did last year to install this year's phase.

*Contract & Schedule.* If not installing yourself, sign on with the Landscape Construction company of your choice & schedule a date to begin. Get that contract signed as early ahead of spring as possible!

*Maintenance, Stewardship.* If you're not hands-on, look into a maintenance or stewardship company for landscape upkeep after install, & consult your budget.

#### **Step 4, Early Spring:**

*Rough Grading.* If your site needs earthwork, do so first. At this time you may also amend the soil. Grading is ill-advised when the ground is wet & not firm.

*Irrigation.* Irrigation pipe & materials can be installed while the ground is still slightly frozen. However, do not turn on your water to the system until the ground has thawed for the warmer months, in case water gets in the pipes and freezes, cracking them.

*Lighting.* Install wiring for any lighting in your landscape. Test to make sure each wire for lighting & irrigation control valves carries the correct amount of current & voltage BEFORE backfilling your wire trenches. Don't leave wire ends exposed to the elements, & flag all irrigation heads & wire tails so you can find them later!

*Final Grading.* Carefully smooth off areas to have hardscape, plants, & seed. Again, grading is NOT recommended when the ground is not firm. Amend the soil if necessary.

#### **Step 5, Spring:**

*Irrigation & Lighting.* Start up your system and make sure it works! NOW is the time to fix any mistakes. Flag items you don't want destroyed by heavy equipment.

*Hardscapes.* Install your patio, paths, walls, water features, and boulders after researching the correct manner for each. Make sure drains needed to redirect water are installed correctly & lawfully.

*Planting.* Install your landscape plants following instructions from experienced installers. Make sure to provide supplementary water for the first growing season as you'll have a lower fatality rate than if you don't water, but be sure not to over water! Fertilize if necessary and apply mulch desired.

*Seeding.* Re-final grade if necessary to smooth off any disturbances caused then seed per supplier's instructions. If necessary, rake, water, and/or apply mulch over the seed. If possible, it is best to install seed in fall and early spring.

*Maintenance, Stewardship.* Touch base and sign contracts for landscape upkeep; schedule dates & actions.

#### **Step 6, Before & After Establishment**

*Photos.* Take 'after' photos to show your friends & document your accomplishment!

Editors note: The joy of native plants in the landscape is well worth the time and effort. I personally encourage each of you to resolve to add at least one native plant to your home landscape in the coming year – you won't regret it!



This depiction of the second Cotterels field trip by Ausha Messman should make it clear to everyone why you want to attend Loasa field trips



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