Prairies in California?

Many of us may think of Kansas or Iowa when we hear the term prairie. However, this plant community once dominated most of our state, including much of Solano county. John Muir wrote about this landscape “the floweriest piece of world I ever walked, one vast level, even flower-bed, a sheet of flowers, a smooth sea “.

Dr. Glen Holstein, will present a talk about this plant community which is now called “California Prairie”,

Some of the largest and best areas of prairie habitat in California are found in Solano County. Learn why this plant community is important to more than just California cows, and why we should work towards protecting the “California Prairie.”

Dr. Holstein received a PhD in botany from UC Davis and recently retired. He contributes to causes such as CNPS and Yolo Natural Heritage Program, and serves on the board of Tuleyome, a nonprofit organization that advocates for protecting both the wild and agricultural heritages of the Putah-Cache bioregion.

The public is welcomed to attend this free event. The meeting will begin at 7pm at the Heritage Presbyterian Church, 1400 East 2nd Street in Benicia. Call 745-4675 for more information.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Congratulations! Teamwork is the foundation of a volunteer organization, and we all should be very proud of our teams of volunteers. Our general meetings are well attended thanks to exceptional speakers and advertising that Steve has arranged. Becky and Pam have enabled a partnership with the Mare Island Preserve that is bringing experts to help learn and understand the value of that open space. Alison has created a new version of a flyer about our chapter, and many have helped work events to outreach and provide information to the public.

Three teams especially deserve our thanks for their work that has lead to some recent great successes.

The Propagation Team, for all the great plants available at the plant sales: Becky, Barbara, Belinda, Mary Frances, Steve, Sue M, Sue W and Tiffany.

The Plant Sale Team, for the (four) spring plant sales that brought in the highest number of sales and revenue we have ever attained: Sue W, Barbara, Becky, Dan J, Joni, Linda, Maggie, Mary Frances, Matt, Meg, Norma, Pam, Steve, Sue M and Tiffany.

The Botanic Garden Team, for having an outstanding Earth Day workday with over 80 participants, including Mayor Patterson and Councilman Ioakimedes from Benicia (lead by): Norma, Gary and Tim S and their coordinators Charlie, Betsy, Ranger Dan, Dan J, Dan S, Eric, Joanette, Laurie, Sue M and Tim M.

The next few months are for planning, gardening, propagation and more partner activities. So along with our normal volunteer workdays we have opportunities for you to participate in other ways:

- Contribute ideas for the design of Interpretive Panels for the Botanic Garden, contact Norma or Gary.
- Meet up for a Mare Island Shoreline Heritage Preserve outing, contact Gene.
- Lead a hike to your favorite open space, contact Gene.

(Continued on page 4 – President’s Report)
Summer Watering Advice
(an abridged version of an article by Dan Songster, Orange County Chapter, CNPS)

Advice is always a two edged sword, something that should be dispensed and received with caution. No supposed expert is ever the last word on matters, especially when these issues relate to our wondrous native plants.

Still, here are a few hints on summer watering of natives, a tricky concept to discuss since every gardener has different soils, exposures, techniques, and levels of success that seem to transcend logic. This advice will probably be all right as long as you remember that there are no hard and fast rules that apply in all situations.

Now that you have been warned and have read this disclaimer, let us consider some seemingly disjointed factors that may directly influence watering practices during the hot months.

Where do you live? A Mediterranean climate like ours is mainly affected by proximity to the coast. Close to coast means cooler summer and fall seasons and less evaporation of water. Sometimes that bit of moisture saved is enough to help a plant through the summer. Inland, the need for cautious irrigation increases. The more extreme the climate (hot days and cold nights) the greater the need for picking plants that can take those conditions and still do well, without lots of additional summer water. Plant selection becomes key and local natives have an edge.

Soils. It may not be fair, but clay soils have poor drainage. If you have clay, you may be walking the tightrope that first summer with some plants, trying to water as little as possible and still keep the plant alive. Too little water and the cells breakdown; too much water and root rot pathogens have a chance to attack. With rocky soil, you should be able to water more frequently without trouble. Clay does have some advantages, but better draining soils are almost always preferred.

A few words about Root Rot. Almost everyone’s soil has root rot pathogens swarming around in it. They aid in the decomposition of sick plants, but are also arch enemies of a few of our favorite natives such as Manzanita, Woolly Blue Curls, and Fremontodendron. The pathogen itself can’t do much unless given the right conditions—at which point it can infect and devastate your favorite plant seemingly overnight. What conditions do root rot pathogens need? Warm, moist, heavy soils. Since you cannot change the soil you have, you must try to limit summer water for those natives that are sensitive. Or, plant natives that are not susceptible to the root rot pathogens and can therefore tolerate some summer water.

Root to shoot ratio. Lush growth in late spring can lead to summer trouble. Even if plants are able to handle more water than they need without root rot pathogens attacking, their young root systems may not be able to provide enough water for all those leaves, especially during hot summer months. Most water leaves a plant in one way—evaporation from leaf surfaces. There are other factors to consider, humidity (or lack of), wind, and exposure to sun, but basically, the more foliage there is the more water a plant looses and therefore the more water it must have to stay alive. If that moisture is not provided, cell structure breaks down and leaves and even small stems are abandoned, drying and dying. Often with young plants, that first big shock is too much and the plant never recovers. So, since a rather small root system cannot really support a large amount of foliage easily, you will notice it wilting dramatically on a summer’s afternoon. A moderate rate of growth is a better way to grow a healthy plant.

When did you plant? Hopefully in the late fall or early winter, giving your new native the best possible start towards life in your garden by allowing roots to penetrate surrounding soil just a bit before summer hits. Those small silvery-white root hairs moving outward from the original root ball mean a great deal when considering a new plant’s abilities to gather water. Note: Planting in spring is actually OK for a large number of riparian species, some oak understory material, and many of the cultivars whose origins are the central and north coastline (a surprising number!)

Where did the plant originally come from? Consider what plant community your plant came from and that can sometimes tell you a lot about its watering requirements. Plants from Riparian, Mixed Evergreen Forest, North Oak Woodlands, and even several of the (See Page 3 – Summer Watering continued)
JEPSON CHAPTER UPDATES

BOTANIC GARDEN NEWS

The contract for use of grant funds from Solano County has been finalized, allowing work to begin on the design for eight interpretive panels to be installed in the garden by Summer of 2010. Chapter President, Gene Doherty, will be spearheading a major fundraising effort to obtain the matching funds required for the grant and to begin the next phase of garden expansion.

NATIVE PLANT FOSTER CARE PROGRAM LAUNCHED

In preparation for the fall plant sale, the Plant Sale and Propagation committees want to find fledgling native plants a caring home for the summer. A foster home’s responsibility will be to house, water, feed and groom these 1-gallon newbies and return them in time for the October 2 native plant sale. Call Sue Wickham at 747-4815 or Gene Doherty at 415-609-5653 to learn more about this opportunity.

BOOK SALE FEATURED AT MAY CHAPTER MEETING

The Board agreed to liquidate the Chapter’s inventory of books by selling them at the May 25th Chapter meeting at discounts of 75% or more off retail price. Members and guests will be able to purchase the following books:

- Early Uses of California Plants, E. Balls, 1962, $2.50
- Grasses in Calif, B. Crampton, UC Press, 1974, $2.50
- Introduction to Plant Life, R. Ornduff, 2003, $2.50
- Weather of San Francisco Bay, H. Gilliam, 2002, $3.00
- Desert Giant, B. Bash, $1.50
- Gardening with a Wild Heart, J. Lowry, 1999, $5.00
- California’s Changing Landscape, M. Barbour, 1997, $5.50
- Wild Lilies, Irises & Grasses, N. Harlow, 2002, $5.50
- Conifers of California, R. Lanner, 2002, $4.50
- Common Dragonflies of California, K. Biggs, $2.00
- Spring Wildflowers of San Francisco Bay, H. Sharsmith, 1965, $3.00
- Rare Lilies of California, CNPS, $3.50

BOARD ADOPTS CHAPTER BUDGET

The budget year that begins April 1 and ends March 31, 2010. The budget estimates $22,984 for revenue and $26,482 for expenses. The deficit is covered by transferring $3,498 from the Chapter savings. Details on this budget are posted on the Chapter website.

Summer Watering – cont.

watering. Even many of the Coastal Sage Scrub plants survive summer watering. Some Chaparral plants tolerate some summer water (Mountain Mahogany, Toyon, Ceanothus); while others such as Manzanita, Woolly Blue Curls, or Fremontodendron, are extremely sensitive to fungus pathogens and can perish from a single summer watering. With such plants you should strive to limit summer watering, especially in the heavy clay soils, and after the first year avoid summer water entirely unless they are planted in well-drained soil.

How old is the plant? A plant that has been in the ground for a few years is less likely to need much summer water than a new plant. The root system has grown and is more able to obtain enough moisture from the soil to make it through the summer. That does not mean you would deliberately withhold water from natives that appreciate summer watering. Deergrass, Douglas Iris, Yarrow, and many others can make it through summer without irrigation but look more attractive with that added water. Of course, on becoming familiar with the natives you have, you will find out whether a little summer water keeps your plant looking fresh or if such watering creates problems.

Sun or Shade? Often just the amount of sun a plant gets dictates the water it needs (if it can tolerate it). A plant with high shade from a nearby tall tree or the afternoon shadow of a structure will loose less water through evaporation than the same plant in full sun.

Mulching benefits: As long as it is kept a few inches away from the plant’s main stem or trunk, mulch is highly desired in reducing water evaporation from the soil. There is the added benefit of keeping the soil temperatures somewhat balanced, the mulch acting as an insulating blanket, preventing extremely hot or cold soils. These more moderate soil temperatures mean longer periods of root growth, allowing the plant to gather more of its own water without you needing to water it.

If you must water, what time of day is best? To improve the success rate with watering natives, do it infrequently, at the coolest time of day (early morning is best), on days that are expected to be cool, and as a deep soaking accomplished by a slow drip.

Talk to people: If you read this and are more confused than ever, my apologies. In that case ask someone who also grows natives and you will usually find them willing to share experiences and knowledge. This is perhaps the best way to improve your native garden in many ways.

Fear is the enemy, knowledge your friend: Don’t feel thwarted by the possibility of a plant not doing well if you water too much or too little; learn what you can and give it a try! You won’t be sorry and you will learn as you go with far fewer losses than I may have caused you to envision.
President’s Report – cont.

- Help create a Foster Plant (propagation) program, contact Gene or Sue.
- Become an advocate for Oak Woodlands in Solano County, contact Gene.
- Help plan a possible fundraiser event for October 24 to raise funds for building out the Botanic Garden, contact Gene.

Enjoy your summer. But don’t become too dormant like many of our favorite native plants; we still have much more work to do.

Gene Doherty - President, Willis Linn Jepson Chapter

Garden Soiree in Vacaville

Save the evening of July 22 to attend a Garden Soiree. A member in Vacaville has offered to open their 1.5 acre native plant garden to a potluck and garden tour for Jepson Chapter members. Look for further details in the July newsletter.

Summer Vacation Ideas

It has been a big spring for California flora and many CNPS Chapters have scheduled hikes well into the summer. These hikes are led by locals who know the territory and welcome participation from other chapters. The home page of www.cnps.org has a “local chapter” link where you can find information on the hiking opportunities of other CNPS chapters.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED