



April-June 2021 Member Newsletter

Happy Spring to all Orton Botanical Garden Members!

As you will read below, the Garden's calendar is busily filling with a variety of spring and summertime activities, including:

- **Membership cards.** These wallet-size and durable cards will be mailed to each member by the end of April. Since kicking off our campaign last September, we now have 64 members. Thank you!
- **April 29 - May 6 Idaho Gives Fundraiser.** This year our goal is \$5,000, to help set up an office with off-street parking, an accessible restroom, and establish a meeting-display room in a leased house adjacent to the garden. Our 2020 contributions exceeded \$4,000, so we are optimistic that we can achieve this larger goal.
- **May 13 Pre-Plant Sale Zoom Class.** On Thursday, May 13, from 7-8 pm, we will offer a free Zoom class to whet your appetite for our annual Plant Sale and Open House. **Registration is required for this class** (and for the Zoom link), which will give an overview of some of the fantastic plants we will have available this year. See Plant Sale and Open House details below.
- **May 19 Members-Only Plant Sale.** On Wednesday, May 19th, from 1-6 pm, members can enjoy having first choice of the many great plants that will be available this year. Prepare your list of plants that you cannot live without, as you listen to the May 13th Zoom discussion.
- **May 20-22 Annual Plant Sale & Open House.** From Thursday – Saturday, 9 am to 6 pm. Take a free tour of the garden to view many beautiful, sun-loving plants and maybe take a few home with you. This event will be repeated May 27-29.
- **May 26 Photography Class.** On Wednesday May 26, from 6:30-8 pm, we are offering an in-person class with photographer Drew Nash. Drew will discuss and demonstrate close-up photography, lighting techniques, and compositional guidelines for capturing quality images of drought-tolerant plants. **You can register for this fee required class here:**
<https://ortonbotanicalgarden.com/open-houses%2Fclasses%2Fetc>
- **May 27-29 Plant Sale & Open House.** From Thursday – Saturday, 9 am to 6 pm. See details above for May 20-22.

- **June 5 Post-Plant Sale Tour at the Orton Botanical Garden.** On Saturday, June 5, from 10-noon, we are offering a guided garden tour for those who missed the sale-open house this year. This will be an opportunity to ask questions and tour with a knowledgeable gardener in groups of 12-15. **Registration is required for this event (see OBG website)**, and a \$5 donation is recommended, to be deposited in the Donation Box when you arrive. This tour is free for OBG Members, however all must register before June 5.



June ____. A children's class, **TBD**, will be announced by email to members and posted on the website and on our Facebook page.

- **June 26 Hospice Visions, Inc. Butterfly Release.** On Saturday, June 26, Hospice Visions will hold their annual butterfly release at Orton Botanical Garden. The program will start at 11:00 a.m. and is open to the public.

Other Interesting Developments:

ERIG Grant Received. We received a \$640 grant award from the Idaho Native Plant Society to prepare trifold brochures about the Garden's native plants and native buckwheats. ERIG is the research arm of the Idaho Native Plant Society.

Volunteer Opportunities. With no paid staff, OBG volunteers do garden maintenance from April-October, hang and remove Christmas lights from October-January, greet and guide visitors during May-October on open days, and assist with the May plant sale and open house. If OBG volunteering interests you, please see the website's Volunteer Application form. OBG offers a lovely, quiet work environment, surrounded by wonderful plants and delightful birds.

Volunteer Coordinator Needed. Having a volunteer willing to review other potential volunteer applications, schedule their Garden visit to interview with LaMar Orton, and create a weekly schedule of volunteer assignments would be incredibly helpful for the Ortons. If this appeals to you, please contact LaMar, lorton1@msn.com or 208-734-7959.



Times-News: OBG co-vice president Tom Schwartz’s Garden Wise column from the Twin Falls Times-News is copied below. This 2-part article on the Lewis & Clark Expedition’s Idaho plant discoveries will be of interest to many of you. We think you will enjoy it.

GARDEN WISE

Garden Wise: Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery and Idaho’s botanical past – Part one Tom Schwartz (For the Times-New), Sep 16, 2020

The earliest exploration of Idaho’s plant life began in August 1805, when the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery entered the Bitterroot Range in eastern Idaho. Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and their companions had embarked on what was to be the most daring and consequential exploratory mission in American history. These men had been born in a colonial outpost, had lived through a revolution and were now key players in the growth of a new nation.

Before we get to Idaho and its flora in next week’s column, some historical context might help. This unusual expedition was driven by two events, Thomas Jefferson’s election as president in 1800, and the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which doubled the size of the country, bringing the middle of the continent under American control.

The Corps of Discovery was Thomas Jefferson’s brainchild, and, as president, he turned it into reality. Explorers like Captain James Cook were returning from distant shores with plants never seen before. Cultivating these alien plants was all the rage in Europe and America. Jefferson constantly experimented with new plants and corresponded with leading botanists. Jefferson considered natural science the greatest of all sciences, but he had a special affinity for botany. His contributions to horticultural knowledge, and his garden and landscapes at Monticello bear witness to his passion for plants. “The greatest service which can be rendered any country,” he wrote, “is to add a useful plant to its culture.” He wondered what botanical discoveries lay to the west, beyond the Mississippi.

Americans looked to botany for new sources of food to feed a growing population. They also saw botany as the key to medical advances. Medicine in the 18th century was still in its infancy. Germ theory and antibiotics were decades away, and most Americans relied on the local herbalist, someone well versed in using herbal concoctions, to treat illnesses. As epidemics of yellow fever, cholera, tuberculosis and other diseases ravaged the young nation, doctors looked to botany for cures. Meriwether Lewis shared this interest, having been schooled in the medicinal properties of plants from his mother, Lucy, who was highly regarded in Virginia as an herbalist.

In 1800, the nation was fragile and susceptible to attack from England or other European powers. The port of New Orleans was seen as especially vulnerable as it controlled access to settlements along the Mississippi River. The mid-continent was controlled by France. Jefferson sent James Monroe, Secretary of State, and Robert

Livingston, U.S. Diplomat to France, with an offer to purchase the New Orleans port. Wars with European neighbors had left Napoleon with staggering debt, and the French countered the American offer with an offer to sell the entire area of the Louisiana Purchase for \$15,000,000. The American negotiators quickly accepted, and Jefferson and Monroe convinced Congress to ratify the purchase.

Throughout his presidency, Jefferson demonstrated an uncanny ability to exploit talent. While visiting the plantation of fellow Virginian, William Lewis, he had occasion to interact with Williams's son, Meriwether. Jefferson was struck by Meriwether's unusual powers of observation, attention to detail and voracious desire to understand the natural world.

As president, Jefferson hired Meriwether as his personal assistant and set out to accelerate the young man's education in natural science in preparation for a daunting mission Jefferson had in mind, the exploration of the mid-continent. What lay between the Mississippi and the Pacific was shrouded in mystery. With the Louisiana Purchase, America controlled the land from coast to coast, and Jefferson's greatest hope was to discover a waterway capable of transporting people and cargo across the continent.

Jefferson proposed that Meriwether lead the expedition. Lewis accepted on condition that he could take his old mentor, William Clark, as co-commander. Clark was more seasoned as an explorer and was a master mapmaker. Jefferson agreed. Jefferson tutored Meriwether himself and sent him to Philadelphia to study with major scholars including Dr. Benjamin Rush, who taught him anatomy, and the great botanist, Benjamin Smith Barton, who strengthened Meriwether's skills in plant identification.

Bypassing the preparations and early journey, we find the expedition in August 1805 on the western border of Montana, just south of what is now Dillon. While camping with Hidatsa at a site called Camp Fortunate, Lewis tasted salmon for the first time. This gave him hope that he would soon see the Pacific Ocean.

When the corps ascended the continental divide, the men stared westward across the valley into the daunting Bitterroot Range. Seeing range after range of mountains receding into the west, Lewis was crestfallen. The mental scene he had formed of an easy descent to the Pacific had been a mirage. Crossing Idaho would be the most grueling and dangerous phase of the expedition.

What's truly astounding is that regardless of how dangerous or difficult the situation, both Lewis and Clark continued to keep careful daily notes on terrain, geography, weather, plants, animals, waterways and tribal culture, and always with unusual attention to detail.

In next week's column, I will follow the Corps into Idaho, focusing on some of the remarkable contributions of Lewis and Clark to our understanding of Idaho's native plants.



Statue of Sacajawea in the Lewis and Clark Native Plant Garden, Idaho Botanical Garden in Boise. Tom Schwartz, For the Times-News

Garden Wise: Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery and Idaho's botanical past – Part 2

Tom Schwartz (For the Times-News) Sep 23, 2020

As the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery canoed the Missouri through the summer of 1804, the journey proved arduous. It wasn't the paddling so much as the long portages. Personal gear, scientific equipment, collected plant and animal specimens, and the canoes themselves meant back-breaking work. With the prospect of overland travel, the corps needed horses. Hearing that the Shoshones had horses, the corps determined to find the Shoshones.

In late fall, the corps built a winter encampment called Fort Mandan a few miles from present day Washburn, North Dakota. There were several white fur traders in the area, and the corps pried them for information about what lay ahead. One trader, Toussaint Charbonneau, seemed especially knowledgeable. He spoke French and some Mandan. Several years earlier, Charbonneau had purchased two native American women from the Hidatsa. He made them his wives. One was 13-year-old Sacagawea, a Shoshone, who had been kidnapped at age 12 by a Hidatsa war party. Lewis hired Charbonneau to accompany the corps and to bring his wife, Sacagawea, now 16 and pregnant. Sacagawea's son, Jean Baptiste, was born in February 1805, and in the spring, the group continued west.

Sacagawea was an Idaho-born Limhi-Shoshone from the area around present-day Salmon, Idaho. When the expedition reached a Shoshone village in western Montana, they finally met by a group of Shoshone and their leader, Chief Cameahwait. As the two groups sized each other up, Sacagawea recognized Chief Cameahwait as her brother and threw her arms around him. This personal bond proved invaluable, helping the corps barter effectively for horses and guides.

Sacagawea played a pivotal role in the expedition, facilitating friendly relations with native tribes, showing courage, strength and poise, while all the while caring for her infant son. As she spoke English, Hidatsa and Shoshone, she regularly served as translator.

Crossing the Continental Divide, the corps faced the Bitterroot Range. By the time the corps cleared the Bitterroots, all were starving, some reduced to eating tallow candles. Sacagawea rescued the party by collecting camas roots (*Camassia quamash*), which provided needed nourishment but also caused painful flatulence. Once again, Sacagawea saved the day by gathering roots of western sweet cicely (*Osmorhiza occidentalis*). The roots had a pleasant taste like anise seed, and, as Lewis gratefully acknowledged, "they dispel the wind" caused by the camas roots.

Today, many Idaho residents take a spring drive through the Camas Valley, enjoying the fields of blue camas flowers. It's worth remembering that for the Shoshone, Hidatsa, Nez Perce, Blackfoot and other native peoples, camas has been a major food source.

Following the harrowing trek over the Bitterroots, Lewis and Clark continued westward. Throughout their botanical studies, Sacagawea proved invaluable. She knew what roots, leaves, berries, stems and bark were edible, poisonous, medicinal or useful for baskets, nets, clothing and ornamentation. She knew how to prepare food from many of the plants they encountered.

Lewis and Clark identified almost 150 plants new to science on their expedition, many in Idaho. I will pick a few to represent those contributions, beginning with our state flower, Lewis' Mock orange or Lewis's Syringa (*Philadelphus Lewisii*.) The Latin name honors Meriwether Lewis, who discovered the plant in early May 1806 on the return trip, shortly after the corps had reached the Clearwater. This native shrub is highly adaptable and in late spring produces a profusion of white flowers with a slight orange fragrance. The bloom lasts for several weeks. The flower was chosen as Idaho's state flower as it had been included on the Great Seal of the State of Idaho since the 1890s, where it was depicted, sprouting at the feet of a goddess. Lewis's mock orange had also represented the state at the 1893 World Fair floral display in Chicago.

Other plants first identified in Idaho by Lewis and Clark include the narrow-leaf coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), silky lupine (*Lupinus sericeus*), shrubby penstemon (*Penstemon fruticosus*), bear grass (*Xerophyllum tenax*) and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). Yarrow was not only used regularly by Native tribes for fevers and inflammation but had a long medical history. Its Latin name ties the plant to the Greek hero Achilles. According to legend, Achilles had been taught its medicinal value by the physician/centaur Chiron, and Achilles used it to staunch the wounds of his Greek warriors during the siege of Troy.

Another plant that deserves mention is Sacajawea's bitterroot (*Lewisia sacajawea*), the first plant to be named in honor of this great Idaho native. This rare plant lives only in mountain elevations in central Idaho, blossoming with lovely white flowers shortly after snowmelt. Most of us will never encounter this beautiful flower. I find it a fitting tribute to its namesake, whose contributions to our national and state history have likewise often gone unnoticed. Fortunately, that is changing. More and more historians are bringing Sacajawea's story to life, and tourist sites like the Sacajawea Interpretive, Cultural and Educational Center in Salmon, and the Lewis and Clark Native Plant Garden at the Idaho Botanical Garden in Boise, are drawing much deserved attention to Sacajawea's heroic contributions to the Corps of Discovery.

Garden Wise is presented by the Magic Valley Master Gardener Association. We will try to answer questions of general interest submitted by the community. Email questions to gardenwise@cableone.net.

Thank you for being part of the Orton Botanical Garden. We hope to see you soon!