

# Whoa to woad

BY BARBARA MUMBLO

We have another noxious weed of concern in our valley—dyer's woad (*Isatis tinctoria*). In the Yreka area, where it is prolific, this plant is also called Marlahan mustard, reportedly due to the person who received the piano, around which the mustard weed was wrapped, that came to Yreka from Scotland in the 1800s.

Dyer's woad is a native of Europe and Central Asia but has been found in the lower reaches of Williams Creek and down the Applegate River. It's also found on the Rogue River from Shady Cove downstream to west of Grants Pass. It spreads along rivers and roads and can cover dry fields and rocky bars along the river.

Dyer's woad is in the mustard family but differs from our common mustards by having arrow-shaped leaves (with more of a blue-green color) that clasp around the stem. The inflorescence reminds me of a bouquet in shape, and the flowers are a little lighter yellow than the common mustard. Another identification feature is the dark brown to black capsules that hang on the plant when it's in fruit.

This plant has been used as a dye (blue, from leaves), thus the name Dyer's woad. Although it does have a use, the invasive nature of this plant makes it undesirable. It has low palatability for grazing, is allelopathic (suppresses other plants), and is highly competitive. The Oregon Department of Agriculture rates it as a



Dyer's woad in bloom.

list B noxious weed—weed of economic importance that is regionally abundant but may have limited distribution in some counties (which includes Jackson and Josephine counties).

Some of us have been working on controlling this noxious weed, and, to me, it appears to respond well to digging. We're seeing a good decrease in plants following treatments. It will take a few years to get rid of it, but with persistence I think we can get it done. If you have this plant, let me know. We'd like to remove it from southwest Oregon. Thanks.

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## ■ LAVENDER

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English lavender essential oil. We have come across several medicinal uses for lavender and recommend it for those applications that we have personally experienced.

### Bee's stings

Having kept bees for years, we have been stung by honeybees and bumblebees. There is only one remedy we would ever recommend: lavender essential oil. A drop of oil applied to a bee's sting is like an instant off switch for pain. It doesn't lessen the pain, it doesn't make it more comfortable—it turns the pain off instantly!

### Insect bites

Some of us are barely affected by mosquitoes and the like. I get a tiny red dot that itches for a minute or two and then disappears. My wife, though, gets a solid red lump that itches for days. I am reliably informed that a drop of lavender essential oil applied to the bite eases the itch considerably.

### Minor burns

A minor burn is that red line on the back of your hand that appears when you reach into a hot oven and touch the wire shelf above. A few drops of lavender essential oil rubbed gently onto a minor burn will not only diminish the pain, but also reduce scarring. If your skin is broken or blistered, I would strongly recommend a medical professional instead.

### Sleep aid

If you are someone who finds sleep elusive on occasion, then lavender might be for you. Studies by the universities in Southampton (UK) and Miami, Florida, and many others have proven that the smell of lavender does indeed promote alpha waves in the brain, which can lead to easier and more restful sleep. While I don't use this personally, I have heard a huge amount of anecdotal evidence of this,

and the studies simply back up this very reasonable claim.

### Manage stress

Given the number of clinical studies that show changes in brain chemistry when lavender is introduced into the environment, I would have to say that this claim holds water. Aromatherapists use lavender as their go-to scent for stress relief. Of all the claims I have heard about lavender, this one seems to be the most readily accepted.

### Keep bugs at bay

A gentleman came to the farm some years ago and asked for two bunches of lavender. As I was wrapping them, he mentioned that they were to hang in his home because he had an issue with flies. He said that he had read that flies were deterred by hanging lavender. I was compelled to explain that there were around two thousand bunches of lavender hanging in the barn at the time and that I, too, suffered with an abundance of flies. Flies, spiders, and all other manner of bugs may indeed dislike the smell of lavender, but in my experience, they don't dislike it enough to stay away from it.

### Fix for menopausal hot flashes

To the best of my knowledge there have been two clinical trials where lavender essential oil was used to mitigate hot flashes. Both reported benefits for the test subjects and both recommended inhaling lavender oil placed on a tissue held in front



Lavender essential oil.

# Native thistles are good for hummingbirds, bees, butterflies, birds

BY SUZIE SAVOIE



Native thistles in the dakubetede roadless area in the Little Applegate foothills.

never aggressive and won't spread rapidly like their nonnative and invasive relatives. If you currently have native thistles growing on your land, please don't pull them!

True thistles belong to the genus *Cirsium*. California has 19 native species of thistle in the genus *Cirsium*, while Oregon has 14. Some of these species have multiple subspecies as well, making for a lot of diversity in color, leaf shape, size, and spininess. Thistles are in the sunflower family (Asteraceae), with many individual flowers packed within each flower head, protected by a spiny whorl of modified leaves called bracts.

Nutritious thistle seeds are highly prized by birds such as the lesser or American goldfinch. According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, "Their diet is composed almost entirely of seeds, with those of the sunflower family, particularly thistles, strongly preferred." Birds also use the fluffy thistle chaff to line their nests.

The Applegate Valley is home to several species of native thistles. Despite their beauty and value for pollinators and birds, native thistle species have long been undervalued. I often hear people make disparaging comments about thistles when I talk about growing native thistles for the benefit of wildlife. They say, "Thistles are horrible. Why would you want those?" What they don't realize, however, is that native thistles play a critical role in native ecosystems. Native thistles get a bad rap simply because of the association with their weedy, invasive relatives like bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).

Bull thistle was introduced into Oregon in the late 1800s, and it now occurs in every county in the state. Canada thistle has been around for about the same time, and once established, it is a fierce competitor, exuding allelopathic chemicals that inhibit the growth and survival of neighboring native plants. Just the mere mention of yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*)—a knapweed, not a true thistle—makes the blood boil of those who live in an area with a heavy infestation. These are highly invasive plants that are a real threat to native ecosystems as well as to economic interests in agricultural areas.

So why does the justified distaste for nonnative invasive thistles seep into some people's psyche, affecting their perception of native thistles? Is it simply because thistles are spiny? Is it because people only associate thistles with weeds? It's hard to say for certain why this is, but what we can say, with certainty, is that native thistles deserve a spot in your pollinator garden or a site on your land with good drainage, good sun, and little competition. Native thistles are

The list of butterfly species that use native thistles for nectar is too numerous to list here. It is common to see butterflies nectaring on native thistles in the wild. Several butterfly species use native thistles as a larval host plant, including painted lady (*Vanessa cardui*), Mylitta crescent (*Phyciodes mylitta*), and the California crescent (*Phyciodes orseis*).

Hummingbirds are especially fond of thistle nectar, often spending a considerable amount of time around a thistle patch while sipping nectar in between aerial acrobatics. Additionally, native bees and pollinating flies and beetles also forage on and pollinate native thistles.

Native thistles inhabit a variety of habitat types. The showy and beautiful red-flowered Western or cobweb thistle (*Cirsium occidentale*) is found on poor soil with good drainage with harsh sun, in open grassland, and in chaparral or rocky areas with very little surrounding competition from other plants. It is a biennial plant that forms a rosette the first year, flowering the second year before producing seed and dying out. The elegant white-flowered Ashland thistle (*Cirsium ciliolatum*) can be found in full sun to part shade on the edge of oak woodlands or mixed conifer forests. Ashland thistle is a rare and endemic thistle that grows only in southwest Oregon and extreme northwest California.

When hiking around this summer, if you see a thistle in the wild, think twice before assuming it's an invasive, nonnative thistle. And if you see a native thistle, consider yourself lucky and enjoy the pollinator show!

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of the nose. Before you reach for your lavender essential oil and a handkerchief, I should point out that all of the test subjects in the trials held the lavender under their nose for two 20-minute sessions each day. It may well be worth it, but it's a serious commitment!

Most people, myself included, find the scent of lavender to be calming, perhaps even comforting. It is the scent of summer and, for many of us, transports us back to the parlor of an aunt or grandmother and recollections of our youth.

Whatever your own applications for this delightful herb, I hope you continue to

use it and enjoy that moment of calm and tranquility that lavender seems to bring.

We hope to see you during the Lavender Festival weekends in June and July. For more information, visit [southernoregonlavendertrail.com](http://southernoregonlavendertrail.com) and [englishlavenderfarm.com](http://englishlavenderfarm.com).

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The English Lavender Farm is located at 8040 Thompson Creek Road in Applegate. In addition to the lavender festival days, their farm and gift shop are open to visitors on Fridays through Mondays in June and July from 10 am - 4 pm.