

What a year for starthistle!

BY BARBARA MUMBLO

This past year provided great conditions for yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*). The late spring rains and hot, dry summer helped to create lots of plants, many that were tall.

For those of you who may be new to this plant, starthistle is an aggressive noxious and invasive weed that does especially well in the Applegate Valley. It seems to love bare soil, dry conditions, and sun. Originally from the Mediterranean area, this plant moved into southern Oregon in the early 1900s but really began to spread in the past 30 years. It often gets moved along roadsides and then spreads off roads. It's primarily an annual whose seed is thought to remain viable for 10 years. So if you can keep it from seeding for 10 years or so you should be able to get rid of it. I've seen this on several sites I've worked on.

Prevention: The best thing (and cheapest) is to try and keep it from coming to your property in the first place. It's been known to show up in the seed, soil, or rock brought to a site. It comes attached to heavy equipment as plants or seed in soil. Driving over plants can cause them to get attached under a car. One time I parked by some plants and unknowingly closed a plant in my door which dropped out when I got home.

Control and eradication: It can be hard work to get rid of large areas of starthistle, but if you have a small patch you can

hand-pull it and keep it from spreading. Irrigating, as long as you have other plants growing, will help crowd out starthistle. Sheep (and maybe goat) grazing seems to help (cows don't appear to eat it down enough). It is dangerous for horses to feed on. They can get "chewing disease," which causes an inability to swallow. This can accumulate in them over time. If horses have something else to eat it is not as bad as if it is the main thing in the field and they get a taste for it (it really tastes bad).

If you are okay with herbicides, you can spot-spray individual starthistle plants, trying to keep other species remaining for competition. If you cut below the bottom leaves, it won't come back. If you mow above the bottom leaves, it will still flower and seed and become a carpet of starthistle. If you bring soil or rock to your property, ask if it is free of starthistle (and noxious weed). If you are going to have work done with heavy equipment, ask the operator to clean the soil off the equipment before coming to your property. (Federal agencies ask this of contractors so it should not be a surprise request.)

Some folks in the valley have been working on the starthistle problem for years with success. Unfortunately, there are quite a few who are not working on it. Be aware, your lack of effort could cause your neighbor's land to become infested.



A yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*).
Photo: Franco Folini/Wikimedia Commons.

I worked for many years on invasive species on the Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District. After I retired, my friend Evelyn Williams continued on her daily walk to pull starthistle plants along Palmer Creek Road. Because she is well into her 90s, I can really appreciate her dedication. She has helped recruit other neighbors in her efforts too. Hopefully her inspiration will help

you to work on your property. If we all "pull together" we can get amazing things done.

For more information about noxious weeds, check out Oregon Department of Agriculture's noxious weed site. Feel free to email me if you have questions or ideas that have worked for eradication.

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Put your old homestead apple tree on some new roots

BY BRAD SMITH

If an old apple tree gives not-so-good apples, one might not think the tree is worth any attention, and so the tree is ignored.

Many of these old apple trees would give better quality apples if we actually cared for them, showing them love with watering in summer, pruning seasonally, feeding, applying tonic sprays like compost tea, thinning fruits early, and breaking pest cycles by removing the old fruits from the ground.

If your old tree looks like a pile of half-rotten wood and you are wondering how it is still alive, it might be worth putting it on some fresh roots and giving it another chance somewhere else.

To do this, start by taking six-to-eight-inch cuttings of the tree's newest growth (called "scion") after the trees have dropped their leaves and gone into dormancy. Bundle, label, and store the sticks in a plastic bag in a fridge. Keep them moist but not sitting in water.

Waiting until January or so to collect your scion will avoid extra time in the fridge, leaving you with fresher scion and some room in the fridge for actual food.

When the trees wake up in spring, it is time to do the grafting. Either study up and graft your scion onto an existing apple tree yourself, or bring it to the 2023 Propagation Fair on March 12 at SCA (Sugarloaf Community Association) Park



in Williams from noon-4 pm. There you can buy rootstock (baby bare-root trees) for \$3 each, and the on-site grafting team can graft it with your scion while you watch and ask questions—unless you wish to take it home and graft it yourself.

By now the Agrarian Sharing Network (ASN) is good at using these events to distribute a diverse array of food-producing plant genetics for free to the public, while also making a perennial space for townfolk to talk to each other in real life about seeds and plants that produce food and medicine. ASN events cater to home orchardists and the community, rather than commercial orchards.

We are not political, and we don't make money doing this. We sell rootstock at the events to cover costs and to demonstrate fruit tree grafting. This is a good opportunity to bring your cuttings of any food-producing or medicinal plants to share with your community, as well as your scion varieties.

Of course, you don't need to bring anything. It is free to enter. For more information, email scion@fastmail.com. Consider giving your old heirloom fruit tree some good attention.

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