

# Thinking Small, Thinking Big

It's been a hobbling sort of winter at the farm. Usually it's the sheep that limp around on sore feet, but the dry cold weather kept them sound. Meanwhile, I crept around with sciatica until well after New Years. Chuck's horse Angie developed a hoof abscess, now cured, and a horrid cough, which she still has. Worst of all, our big dog Fen tore the crucifer ligaments of both his knees and had to have surgery. The limited exercise, no running, recovery period is going to be four months long. So what is a person who loves to be outdoors roaming about with the dogs to do? Well, besides moping and fuming, I have started doing a lot more reading and letter writing to politicians, and I spend time looking out the windows at the bits of nature that are very close, making plans for the future.

The view to the east from the kitchen and living room windows is the most woodsy and wild. Though the line of shrubs and trees along the little creek is quite narrow, it is sufficient to provide lots of shelter and connectivity with the real woods on the property behind our house. The recent cold weather brought us a whole flock of varied thrushes. Not for them the pleasures of the bird feeders, they forage instead in the deep oak leaf litter mulch under the shrubs, vigorously kicking up the duff like tiny chickens while they search for juicy worms and insects.

Of course we have song sparrows and chickadees, black capped, chestnut sided and mountain, at the feeder all winter long, and cheeky nuthatches grabbing sunflower seeds and hiding them in the bark of the oak tree just outside the kitchen window. The good news for the squirrels and chipmunks is that that the warmer weather has brought the return of those messy greedy house finches. Once again, we had a winter when not a single bush tit visited us. We have what seems the perfect habitat, and they are not a shy species. What am I doing wrong? Several days ago, I finally had an idea. Our suet feeder is in a very exposed place, safe from raccoons and squirrels, but perhaps not welcoming. I am going to buy another mammal proof metal pole, and erect it in the shrubbiest part of our little "wild area." I will suspend suet from this pole in the woods, and see if the bush tits will be tempted.

All winter long a male song sparrow has been cheering us with his song. His preferred stance is in the flower garden, so I have an idea where he plans to make the nest. The shrubs beneath his singing post are junipers with very dense foliage. If the sparrows build their nest there it will be very well protected indeed. Our junipers and *Chamaecyparis* bushes of course are not native. Their tolerance of shaping and pruning make them perfect ornaments for year round color and texture in a small garden, but the dense evergreen foliage also offers wonderful protection from the elements and from predators.

Last winter when I was cleaning up the old foliage in a variegated cedar in our yard, I came upon a tiny perfect nest. It must have been a hummingbird's. I had knocked it loose, but I replaced it. Nests provide good shelter even in the non-

breeding seasons. But when I think about new plantings, much as I love the exotic evergreens, I will look for natives, tolerant of our dry summers and providers of cover for wildlife. Both species of Oregon grape (*Berberis nervosa* and *B. aquifolium*), evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*), and Oregon boxwood (*Pachistima myrsinites*), though all slow growing, make wonderful garden plants, dense and protective. In addition, Oregon grape and huckleberry have desirable flowers and berries.

In February, Chuck and I attended both Daphne Stone's lichen walk and Dave Wagner's moss walk at the Arboretum. We had a wonderful time appreciating the ancient, minute and wonderful plants that glorify our winter landscape in Western Oregon. Winter is in no way dark and dull for us. We learned so much. Now Chuck has been excitedly showing off the lovely little red female flowers on the filbert bushes. He marvels that he has lived here so long and never noticed the existence of these diminutive beauties before. My favorite cheerful take home lesson was Dave's explanation of the life cycle of licorice ferns. We have these ferns on mossy rocks at the north and most wooded part of our property and increasingly, they have been appearing on the mossy banks of our little creek and on the trees near the creek. But, sadly, the ferns kept dying. I was so disappointed to lose them every year, and blamed drought and global warming. Dave explained that the ferns were not dying at all, that they are a summer dormant deciduous plant, our only fern with this life cycle. Live and learn.

As for thinking big, I am mulling over a huge and terrific idea. As soon as I get it well reasoned and articulated, I will send my thoughts by mail to the Forest Service, the BLM, and whichever politicians might actually listen. At present polluting industries can buy carbon credits from less polluting industries, and thus buy their way out of actually cleaning up their acts. At present, also, we have logged all but five percent or less of our precious temperate rainforest, and are continuing to log the remainder. Old growth forests are tremendous carbon sinks. In addition, the trees, mosses, lichens, ferns and all the understory plants are actively sequestering untold masses of carbon every day. What if the Federal government were paid by industries to put the remaining old growth forests in perpetual protection in exchange for carbon credits? This could be a win-win situation for industry and the financially strapped Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Now if only I could figure out how to appease Weyerhaeuser and all the others clambering for our federally owned forests.

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