



Problems for early spring 2014

We have been experiencing a very peculiar winter; our coldest days were back in December, and we are already seeing some trees come into flower very early in February! As long as we do not have a terrible freeze over the next few weeks, we might have some very early crops.

These changes in climate are critical on a planet-wide scale, but we may find ourselves with some unexpected issues on a local level. For instance, I generally tell people to consider doing their winter pruning at the end of January into mid-February. This year, it is already too late.

Another problem that might arise before normal is the appearance of weeds. While they are described as “plants out of place”, that label might be far too innocuous, considering the problems they cause.

We gardeners tend to think we already know about weeds, but what do we really know? Dandelions and crabgrass plague lawns and gardens everywhere, but there are so many more pesky plants, some of which are more than merely nuisances. Some of them pose a threat to our natural lands and their inhabitants.

A plant can be a wildflower or a weed. Anywhere there is water, purple loosestrife can appear. Its tall purple flower spikes are a favorite of bees who make a dark flavorful honey. This bee activity has helped to spread this problematic plant. In parts of the United States, ox-eye daisy is a noxious weed. Here in Nevada, green fountain grass was once readily available, but now it is recognized as an invader that can crowd out native species.

Despite that, these pests can be attractive enough that many people will permit it to grow and flower around their property. This is a disservice to other gardeners and to our natural lands. It would be easy to remove them if weeds were necessarily ugly. In fact, some of our most invasive, even noxious, weeds appeared first as garden plants. Salt cedar (*Tamarix*) was introduced as an ornamental plant which could also help to save riverbanks from erosion. It was both attractive and effective in holding soil in place. Part of its survival and spread has to do with its large seed production (over one quarter of a million seeds per year!) Salt cedar is listed as noxious, a legal designation of invading plants that are deleterious to health, whether that is

Red Brome



human, environmental, or economic. Its name comes from the ability to grow in salty soil. As it grows, salt accumulates on the soil surface impacting native plants and animals that lose their food or shelter.

Small weeds, such as cheat grass and red brome, can promote fires. These die soon after appearing, flowering and producing seeds. The dead plants are standing fuel, causing a wildfire to spread over a large area, threatening homes as well as wildlife.

Homeowners must be vigilant concerning weeds. The smaller they are, the easier to control. Pull them out before needing to spray herbicides. Cooperative Extension has publications to identify invaders, and we are happy to share them with the public.

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