

February 10, 2025

Chair Jama, Vice-chair Bonham, and Committee members,

My name is Bennett Burns, member of The Portland Garden Club (PGC) and The Garden Club of America (GCA). On behalf of myself and these organizations, I would like to offer strong support of SB 547 to permanently establish April as Oregon's Native Plant Appreciation Month.

Since 2023 we have been working in partnership with The Native Plant Society of Oregon to introduce this legislation, with Judi Sanders leading the team and securing senate sponsorships. We support the extensive testimony and information she has presented to your committee.

The Portland Garden Club knows that native plants are essential for healthy and diverse ecosystems, critical for clean air and water, and offer benefits to pollinators and wildlife. PGC has also joined a larger national effort led by the Garden Club of America to increase awareness of the importance of native plants, with a goal of creating Native Plant Months in all 50 states. I am currently on the GCA committee leading this initiative. Last year, 47 states across the country passed either a proclamation or state law establishing a native plant month. The six states that have passed laws declaring April or May as their Native Plant Month include California, Mississippi, Ohio, Colorado, New Jersey and Louisiana. It is our hope that **Oregon will become another key state in the nation to permanently acknowledge the importance of native plants through its own resolution.**

Oregon is home to over 3400 species of native plants and their benefits are numerous, including:

1. **Ecological Balance:** Native plants play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of local ecosystems. They support the native wildlife, such as pollinators (bees, butterflies, etc.), birds, and other animals, by providing food, shelter, and nesting sites. These plants have evolved alongside local species, making them well-suited to the area's climate and soil.
2. **Biodiversity:** By preserving native plants, we help protect the diversity of Oregon's natural habitats. Native plants form the foundation of healthy ecosystems, contributing to the overall biodiversity of the state. When non-native species are introduced, they can outcompete native plants, leading to a loss of biodiversity.
3. **Water Conservation:** Many native plants are adapted to Oregon's climate, meaning they require less water, fertilizers, and pesticides than non-native species. This

makes them more sustainable, particularly in areas where water conservation is important.

4. **Soil Health and Erosion Control:** Native plants are adapted to the local soil conditions and root systems, which help prevent soil erosion, improve soil health, and stabilize landscapes, especially in areas prone to landslides or flooding.
5. **Cultural Significance:** Native plants are often integral to Oregon's indigenous cultures, providing resources for food, medicine, and traditional crafts. Preserving these plants honors the heritage and practices of Native American communities in the region.
6. **Resilience to Climate Change:** Native plants are generally more resilient to the local climate and weather patterns. As climate change affects temperature, precipitation, and seasonal patterns, native plants are better equipped to adapt, unlike non-natives that may struggle to thrive under changing conditions.
7. **Aesthetic and Historical Value:** Many of Oregon's native plants are visually striking, adding to the region's natural beauty. They also help maintain historical landscapes, giving a sense of place and identity to the state. Oregon grape has been the state flower since 1899, and Douglas fir has been the state tree since 1939.
8. **Economy:** Native plants, especially the Douglas fir and Western hemlock, are the backbone of the timber and construction industries.

Organizations like the PGC and GCA can help spread the word about the importance of native plants and promote planting of natives in home and public gardens. We are regularly engaged in community restoration projects and offer grants to the community for native plantings and education initiatives.

For all these reasons, I and the Native Plant Society of Oregon, The Portland Garden Club, and The Garden Club of America urge you to pass SB 547.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation,

Bennett Burns