NATIVE PLANTS for the Garden

FALL FRUITS: ANOTHER COLORFUL SEASON OF INTEREST

by Jennifer Jewell

This time of year when you walk your favorite trails, drive your favorite back roads, or even walk out into your own native plant garden – it’s easy to have your head turning this way and that in appreciation and enjoyment of the season’s fruitful offerings: bright globs of red on the dogwoods, cinnamon-colored sculpted chalices held high on the spice bushes. On the toyon, dense clusters of green berries portend the winter’s bright red holiday offerings. Autumn is rich with light catching seeds and colorful fruits in the native plant garden. Everywhere we look this time of year we are rewarded by the results of our native plants’ seasonal labors.

A plant’s purpose is to survive and reproduce. Our plants strive relentlessly to this end through their normal processes of germination, growth, flowering, fruit set and seed dispersal. Plants have a variety of strategies to ensure the best results for their efforts at each stage of their life. Different plants produce very different kinds of seeds and each plant has evolved to take advantage of different environmental factors that will help their seeds be efficiently dispersed.

Some plants produce seeds that catch the wind, some are caught by water, some are colorful or succulent or juicy or fragrant or all of the above to catch the attention of birds, bugs or mammals who might eat or cache these seeds - thereby dispersing them.

This brings me to my real point – we as gardeners can use the survival strategies of our garden’s native plants to our own advantage thereby adding beauty and interest to our garden in any season. Just as we choose our native plants for the color and form of their flowers or foliage, we can also choose them specifically for their seeds and fruits and position them in our gardens to bring light, color and liveliness from late summer well into winter. The fruits of their labors thus helping to achieve the hoped fruits of ours: a happy, healthy, lively and lovely garden.

Of course some seeds and fruits look better in the field than on your deck, terrace, driveway, car, bikes, other planting beds, or on the bottoms of the shoes of other members of your household. And some plants that produce wonderful seeds or fruits might take more room or require more maintenance than you really want to commit to. As John Whittlesey points out, some of the vines (grape, native honeysuckle, pipevine, clematis, etc.) produce wonderful fruits and/or seed heads, but it’s important to remember the space needed for a happy vine and the maintenance involved in keeping it looking good. Similarly, while a heavily fruiting gooseberry, blackberry or grape may attract the birds you love, they may also attract critters (thinking raccoons and bears here) that you love less.
through the **Seasons**

IN THE **NATIVE PLANT GARDEN**

Keep practical matters such as these in mind when choosing a plant for its seeds or fruit and when considering its location. With space and time constraints taken into consideration, my list of top native plants for seed/fruit for trying in the home garden are categorized below by what it is I like about them – the way they catch light, the color they add, the life they bring in terms of movement and/or the abundance of wildlife they attract.

**Seeds/Fruits that catch the light:** These are by and large the seeds/fruit that also catch the wind and can be lined with small tiny hairs or wings for riding the air currents. When the sun streams through these seeds, it can look like twinkle lights or an evening field of fireflies. Consider placing these plants in the garden where the low autumn morning or evening sun will highlight them and you will be able to enjoy this effect. While these plants all catch the light, they also add to your garden the life of their movement as well as the life (and fun) of birds coming to collect their fluff for nesting.

**VINES:** Chaparral clematis (*Clematis lasiantha*)

**SHRUBS:** Mt Mahogany (*Cercocarpus sp.*) - top right page 7.

Pitcher Sage (*Lepechinia calycina*)

**PERENNIALS:** Milkweed (*Asclepias sp.*)

**GRASSES:** Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*)

Purple Needle Grass (*Nassella pulchra*)

**Seeds/fruits that add color:** As with the seeds/fruits that catch the light, the seeds that add color whether by succulent fruits or persistent woody seed pods, nuts or winged achenes, all add life through their process of aging and dispersal as well as through the wildlife they attract. Given their sometimes juicy and sometimes woody, persistent elements, these plants can create some mess and maintenance issues. Choose carefully where to locate them in the garden so that you get to enjoy their looks, but make headaches as few as possible.

**VINES:** California grape (*Vitis californica*)

Native honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula* or *L. dioica*)

**SHRUBS** (small trees): Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus laeigatus*) - bottom right page 7.

Gooseberry (*Ribes sp.*) - middle right page 7.

Red berry (*Rhamnus crocea*)

Coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica*)

**MANZANITA** sp.

Rose (*Rosa californica, R. nutkana*)

Oregon Grape (*Berberis aquifolium*) - middle left page 6.

Spicebush (*Calycanthus occidentalis*) - bottom left page 6.

**TREES:** Mountain Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*)

Big Leaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) page 2.

Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) - top left page 6.