

# The Lay of the Land

The Newsletter of the Solano Resource Conservation District

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Fall 2013

## All About Plants

*By Christopher Rose, Executive Director*

The RCD works hard, both in the District and throughout the County to restore, enhance, and protect natural resources and educate County residents about the importance of watershed conservation and protection. A common thread runs through all that we do in our projects throughout the County. Plants! A majority of our work is related to plants in some way. At both restoration sites and education field days, we are either collecting seed in order to grow plants for projects; seeding native grasses, planting plugs of native grasses, sedges, and rushes; or planting trees and shrubs in various forms. On the other side of things, we work with plants by controlling or eradicating invasive vegetation like exotic grasses,

broadleaf weeds, and trees and shrubs. The control/eradication work we do is often in conjunction with replanting the site once the “bad plants” are removed.

Volunteer programming is critical to our efforts, both as an outreach tool and a method of getting work done, and plant based activities are the main component of most our field days. Plant propagation, weed removal and planting field days offer great opportunities for community members to get their hands dirty and assist Solano RCD, and provides the satisfaction of knowing their work with plants is helping to improve the landscape in Solano County.



*Katherine Holmes teaches a class on replacing your lawn at a Solano RCD Plant Sale*

If you'd like to talk more about plants (and we hope you will!), please come out to the Conservation Education Center on 6390 Lewis Road, Vacaville on October 26th to the Annual Solano RCD Fall Plant sale to purchase well priced, high quality plants while getting advice from Master Gardeners and RCD staff. During the sale, Solano RCD and Solano County Water Agency (SCWA) staff will teach a “How to Replace Your Lawn” workshop in the demonstration garden from 10:00-11:00 am. The one hour workshop will focus on what plants to use and how to irrigate them once you have taken out your turf. SCWA staff will also provide information about SCWA's cost share program, which pays for a portion of the transformation of turf to drought tolerant alternatives.

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# Welcome to New Staff Members (and a Fond Farewell)

By Andrea Mummert-Puccini

Solano RCD continues to develop new restoration projects and our education program is in full swing with school back in session. We are excited to have the help of two new staff members.

Jerah Frye started as our Restoration Field Technician in mid-September. He comes to us from the University of California Reserve System, where he worked as a Reserve Steward for the past six years. At the reserve system, he managed weed control efforts, assisted with environmental monitoring projects, and facilitated other operational needs.



Restoration Field Technician Jerah Frye

Jerah also has experience as a Scientific Aide with both the California Department of Pesticide Regulation and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. On our staff, Jerah will assist with management at all our restoration sites, including invasive weed control, native plant installation, and irrigation. Jerah will also work with our volunteers and help with maintenance at our Conservation Education Center by caring for the native plant nursery and Demonstration Garden. We anticipate that Jerah will spend a lot of time at our Alamo Creek, Blue Rock Springs Creek, and Delta area project sites.

Jamie Solomon also joined the Solano RCD team in September as the Education Program Coordinator. Jamie has held science education positions with the UC Davis Bohart Museum of Entomology and with Camp Galileo in San Francisco. In these positions, she developed presentations for museum visitor groups and presented curriculum materials to demonstrate



Education Program Coordinator Jamie Solomon with 6th graders at Rush Ranch

science concepts to students. As our new Education Program Coordinator, Jamie will teach student classes and field trips and assist with organizing our Watershed Explorers Program for 3rd graders, Suisun Marsh Watershed and Wetland Program for 6th graders, and our Bio-monitoring Program for highschoolers.

We also bid a fond farewell to Martha Rocha. Martha worked as our Education Coordinator since the winter of 2012. She assisted with our watershed education programs and the Lake Berryessa boater education program. Martha has been a great addition to our staff – a pleasure to work with and an excellent educator. Martha will be moving to Putah Creek Council, where she will serve as an Education Coordinator. We wish her the best in her future endeavors.

We are glad to have Jerah and Jamie joining our team. We look forward introducing them to our programs through to the coming year and learning from the new skills and perspectives they will bring to us. Contact information for all of our staff is in the directory on page 6.

## Get the *Lay of the Land* by e-mail!

Our newsletter is now available in pdf format, for delivery by email. If you would like to start receiving the *Lay of the Land* in your email in-box instead of as a mailed paper copy, please contact Judy Powell at [jkpowell@solanorcd.org](mailto:jkpowell@solanorcd.org)

# Autumn Seed Collection

by Mike Gordon

For most RCD restoration projects, we use not only native plants but plants propagated from seed collected as close to the restoration site as possible. So when the time is right, we peel away from our other projects to collect seed from a variety of plant species in a variety of locations. Fall is an especially busy time for seed collection.



Propagating collected seeds for restoration work

Species we have propagated from seed include: valley oak, interior oak, coast live oak, CA buckeye, big leaf maple, box elder, toyon, blue elderberry, buttonwillow, coffeeberry, CA rose, spicebush, and coyote bush.

If you are interested in collecting seed from local native plants, here are a few tips to get you started:

- Collect seeds when they are mature; mature seeds will loosen from the parent plant and begin to fall;
- Avoid damaged seed; seeds with insect damage or mold should be discarded;
- Collect from more than one parent plant; collecting



California Rose, *Rosa californica* by Zoya Akulova,

from numerous individuals provides more genetic diversity;

- Do not over harvest from any one individual or group of plants; a good rule of thumb is to harvest no more than 40% of a patch;
- Check to see how the seed must be stored. Many species must be stored in cold moist conditions or undergo special treatments in order to germinate successfully.

You can also get involved by coming to one of our volunteer events where you will have a chance to be part the propagation process

by sowing, transplanting and caring for locally collected seeds. Please contact our office at 707-678-1655 ext. 3 if you are interested in joining our volunteer list!



Drying acorns after rinsing

# Promoting Wildlife in Your Backyard – What to Plant in Those Dry Shady Areas?

By Amy King

One of the questions we hear most frequently at our native plant sales is what to plant in those dry, shady areas that seem rather inhospitable to most horticultural plants. There are actually a number of native and drought-tolerant plants that thrive in those conditions and can help turn that corner of your yard into a

source of food and shelter for birds, insect pollinators, and other wildlife. Most of these species need some filtered light or a few hours of sun; but particularly in hot central valley locations, they appreciate substantial shade and require very little water...

## Four Great CA Native Plants for Dry Shade



Photo: Stonebird

### Mugwort (*Artemesia douglasiana*)

With aromatic and attractive leaves, this very drought-tolerant native makes seeds for birds and is used by native Californians to soothe poison oak and other rashes. Does best with partial sun.



Photo: Dvortygirl

### California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*)

Blooms in late summer and is a hummingbird favorite. Cut it down to the ground after bloom and it will emerge fresh in the spring. Does best with partial sun.



Photo: Barry Breckling

### Coral bells (*Heuchera species*)

There are many horticultural cultivars of this attractive native. All of them like shady, sheltered areas and make an excellent groundcover.



Photo: Alberto Salguero

### Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Yarrow attracts butterfly and bee pollinators and makes a great groundcover in areas of partial sun.

Other Solano County natives that do well in a shady garden with some irrigation or natural moisture include California blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*), spicebush (*Calycanthus occidentalis*), Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)

and baby blue-eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*). There are also many non-native but drought-tolerant alternatives that thrive in dry shady conditions.



CA blackberry © Doreen L. Smith

# Fall Acorn Harvest

By Miles DaPrato

can litter bike paths, home lawns, and roadways in a carpet of brown shells and seed fragments in the fall months. In other years, the acorn crop can be so scarce that when an acorn woodpecker or gray squirrel passes by with an acorn in its mouth, my first reaction is to chase it down and confiscate the seed for my own use.

Solano RCD relies on collecting and planting acorns each year to grow a variety of oak trees in our habitat restoration and enhancement projects across the diverse landscapes of Solano County. Whether in the rolling hills of western Solano or the elaborate waterway levee system north of Rio Vista, the iconic oaks are a critical component of the local plant communities and the wildlife that rely on them.

Having extensively collected acorns every fall for the last 10 years in the area, I would say that this is a “good” acorn year. There is no need to track down and confiscate the seed cache collected by woodpeckers, jays, squirrels, and the like...this year. There are plenty of acorns to go around for both the critters that depend on them and the natural resource professionals who work to ensure that oaks thrive in our county for many generations to come.



*Valley oak (Quercus lobata) acorn harvested in early Sept.*

The fall brings with it numerous stories of harvest and bounty across Solano County’s Agricultural landscapes--lush grapes trimmed from the vine, walnuts and almonds shaken to the ground, hops hand stripped and added to a local brewer’s seasonal beer creation. But across the region, a harvest of a different kind is in full stride: The Acorn Harvest. Every fall, natural resource professionals, land managers, and nursery staff across the state search far and wide for California’s “other” gold: the Oak Acorn.

Oaks are considered a masting tree species, one that goes through intensely variable seed production cycles from year to year. In some years, acorns from the 20 different varieties of native oaks seem excessively abundant and may even be a bit of a nuisance. They



*Valley oak with acorn along Hastings Cut in the Delta*

## Solano RCD Staff Directory

**Marianne Butler** *Education Program Manager*  
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**Seasonal Education & Restoration Staff:**  
Deborah Bartens, Don Broderson, Jeff Carlson,  
Duc Jones, Wendy Low and Carla Murphy

Solano Resource Conservation District

Annual

# Fall Plant Sale

## October 26, 2013

8:00 am-12:00 pm

at the Conservation Education Center  
6390 Lewis Road, Vacaville

FREE *How to Replace Your Lawn* workshop in  
the demonstration garden from 10:00 am to 11:00 am

featuring an excellent selection of  
well-priced California native & regionally appropriate plants

## The Lay of The Land

Newsletter of the Solano Resource Conservation District  
1170 N Lincoln, Suite 110  
Dixon, CA 95620

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**Solano RCD's Fall Native Plant Sale is October 26**