

# Feature Plant Sheet #4 - "Ring in the Spring"

## **Indian Plum** (*Oemleria cerasiformis*) & **Red-flowering Currant** (*Ribes sanguineum*)

These two plants are among the earliest flowering of our native shrubs. Their fresh green leaves and dainty clusters of white or magenta bells are a sure sign that spring is upon us.

**Indian Plum/Osoberry** bushes are common in moist, open sites along low level trails, roadsides and stream banks. In mild years they may start blooming in late February.

- Erect shrub 1 to 5m tall & wide.
- Male and female flowers are on separate plants (dioecious) which are otherwise similar.
- Distinct, upright clusters of new leaves glow like lime-green lanterns. Mature leaves are lance-shaped 5-15cm x 2-4cm wide, pale green and untoothed.
- Male and female flowers are very similar, with 5 white petals and star-shaped green sepals.
- Male plants seem to be more common, with more flower clusters per stem.
- Flower scent may be mild and cucumber-like, or stronger and unpleasant, like cat urine.
- The plum-shaped berries mature to blue-black with a whitish bloom. They have a large seed and are edible, but usually insipid or somewhat bitter and astringent.



**Flower Clusters & Leaves [Inset: ripe & underripe berries]**



**Female Flowers**



**Male Flowers**



## Feature Plants cont. **Red-flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguinum*)**

The brilliant magenta flower clusters of this gooseberry relative are attractive to hummingbirds and have given rise to many garden cultivars in colours ranging from deep red to creamy white. It favours dry open woods, rocky slopes and disturbed sites at low to middle elevations; seedlings often establish a foothold on rocky seaside bluffs on the Gulf Islands.

- Erect shrub from 1 to 3 meters tall, usually taller than wide. Ascending branches are crooked, with reddish brown bark.
- Deciduous leaves emerge in March or early April, at the same time as the flower buds. They start out coppery, but mature to a bright medium green, which sets off the pink flowers. They have a distinctive, spicy scent characteristic of this plant family.
- Leaves are palmate, 2-6cm broad, with 5 rounded lobes and toothed edges. The upper surfaces are deeply veined while the underside is hairy, especially in the subspecies *glutinosum*.
- The bluish-black berries are hairy, with a waxy bloom and a rather insipid flavour, but are a good food source for wildlife.



Mature Shrub; Inset: Flower Buds & New Leaves



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Flower & Berry Clusters