

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Arno Bergstrom, Kitsap County's newest WSU Extension Agent for Natural Resources and Agriculture. A forester by training, one of his specialties is weeds. Arno comes to our county after twenty-two years in Pierce County Extension service.

Bergstrom is the ex-officio sixth member of the Kitsap Weed Board. Other members are Dori Lechner (Kitsap Parks and Recreation); Board Chairperson Margaret Duncan (Suquamish Tribe and Bainbridge Island); Wendy McClure (botanist and Native Plant Society member from Poulsbo); Ron Ross (agriculture and development, Central Kitsap); Jack Lefcoski (aquatics, Kitsap Lake, Bremerton); and Susie Duke (small livestock producer, Port Orchard). Members serve staggered terms of two to five years. Every member except Lechner and Bergstrom are volunteers. The Weed Board meets quarterly. Meetings are open to the public and held in County meeting rooms at the former Ryan's Restaurant at the Fairgrounds. Their mission is to help homeowners and landowners control problem weeds on their property.

Dori Lechner is the official contact person if you want to report a noxious weed problem or ask questions. Call Lechner at 360-337-7051. Arno and master gardeners can also answer questions if you call 360-337-7157. Lechner is assigned the task of going out and sighting the weeds and recommending actions to be taken. "Dori has done a great job; she responds quickly," says Arno. When noxious weeds are reported the areas are marked on a map.

"This fall we'll implement training for a weed advisor program. It will be patterned after the master gardener program," said Bergstrom. He explained that master gardeners can opt for additional certification as weed advisors with twenty hours of additional training related to noxious weeds in Kitsap County. Non-master gardeners volunteering to serve as weed advisors will take twenty to forty additional botany-related hours of training.

What is a noxious weed anyway? "A noxious weed is any non native plant that's hard to contain. It has the potential to spread everywhere and can take over areas and displace native plants and alter the habitat," says Arno. Noxious weeds fall into three classifications, A, B and C. "A Class A weed doesn't have a strong hold and if you work at controlling it you can eliminate the weed. Scot's Broom once fit this definition, but now it doesn't," he said.

According to the State Noxious Weed Control Board Class A Weeds are the easiest to eradicate, therefore eradication of all Class A weeds is required by state law. Class B weeds are of limited distribution or are not present in other regions of the state so treatment of Class B weeds varies from region to region. Class C weeds are already widely established throughout the state and are of special interest to the state's agricultural industry. Weed Boards throughout the state help landowners with methods of suppression and control. There is also a "Monitor List" of weeds that bear watching because they have the potential to be a threat.

If you have Internet access you'll want to visit www.wa.gov/agr/weedboard/ to find out even more information about noxious weeds. This site includes photographs of each weed. If you're an educator you'll find materials galore at this site. There's even a coloring book. Remember our local libraries have free Internet access. You can also call the Extension Office and they'll send you information about weeds. Or, stop in at the Extension Office. They're located on Sidney in Port Orchard across from the County Jail.

Describing the purpose of the weed boards in the state, Arno says, "We want people to become more aware of their eco-system and really notice their impact on it. The noxious weed doesn't know it's a noxious weed, it's just trying to survive. It's doing what a plant does."

Bergstrom explains, “We will probably never eradicate the A and B weeds but we will be able to get a handle on them. We’ll always be looking for that new noxious weed or putting up the fight for those currently listed. We’ll think they’re gone, but they could come back. We’ll keep working on them.”

Sent comments or questions to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.