

Get Wild: A tale of three daisies

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Jim Alexander
Get Wild



A comparison of Summit County's three daisy species.

Photo by John Taylor

Summit County has three species of daisies, and unfortunately two are noxious weeds: oxeye daisy and false chamomile (the crazy daisy). These two are on the state's list of weeds and should be removed from our county.

Noxious weeds are invasive species that aggressively replace our native species and ruin the habitat for wildlife in the process. Both the oxeye daisy and false chamomile tend to create monocultures, and in Summit County, you might find an entire field filled with these white flowers. They are pretty, but they're terrible for our forests.

I'm tuned into false chamomile, in part because we had a hillside of white flowers when we first bought our home in Wilderndest. It was beautiful, but when a neighbor told me they were noxious weeds, I began pulling them. It was probably five years before I got ahead of the game, and even 15 years later, dozens

come up every year. As the false chamomile went away, I began to find pretty, native flowers on the hillside. And a bit later, a fox family moved into our area.

False chamomile is the smallest of the daisies, featuring a little, white flower and feathery leaves. As they take over, the native wildlife lose forage. Chamomile plants irritate animals' skin and mouth if eaten, so wildlife avoids an area with those weeds. The good news is that it is easy to attack the weeds by pulling them out of the ground. Each plant can have thousands of seeds, so be sure to seal them in a bag and put them in the trash.

On the other hand, you shouldn't pull the other bad daisy. Oxeye daisies should be treated with herbicide or with a biological agent. Oxeye daisies have strong root systems, and when they are pulled or cut, the root systems just spread more aggressively. Like false chamomile, oxeyes tend to take over fields and replace native plants. In areas where there are large infestations, the soil can become bare and erode.

The one daisy we can keep, the Shasta daisy, is a lovely one for your garden. Though Shasta daisies are not native, they are well-behaved and will stay in your garden. If you find white daisies in your garden, look closely and make sure they are these big, lovely Shastas. Even if you know you have Shastas in your garden, you should look closer. A neighbor of mine has a beautiful garden with big clumps of Shasta daisies. One day, we were looking at them and realized some false chamomile were pushing their way into the garden among the Shastas. We pulled them and saved the day.

By keeping these two noxious weeds at bay at home, we hope to keep these invaders out of our precious forests and wilderness. The Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance has a weed-spotter program that has been working to keep noxious weeds (there are more than 30 species in Summit County) from entering the Ptarmigan Peak and Eagles Nest wilderness areas for the past decade. Our members report new weed infestations to the U.S. Forest Service, fund professional eradication of weed infestations and organize public weed pulls. We will be pulling musk thistles July 10 and 31. If you're interested in learning more about weed events, email weeds@eaglesummitwilderness.org.



Jim Alexander

“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Jim Alexander is the “weed czar” for the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit Counties. For more information, visit EagleSummitWilderness.org.

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