December 9-10, 1998

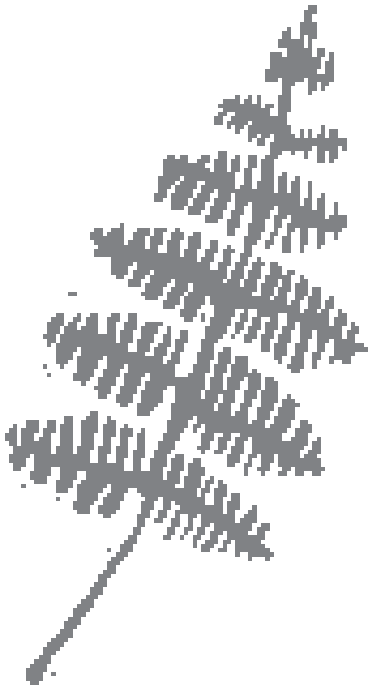
Symposium Proceedings

Native Plants

Propagating and Planting

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Nursery Technology Cooperative



SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

NATIVE PLANTS *PROPAGATING AND PLANTING*

December 9-10, 1998

ROBIN ROSE & DIANE L. HAASE

Coordinators & Editors

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Corvallis Gazette Times. Corvallis, Ore.. Thursday, December 10, 1998

Risser gets back to botany at Oregon State conference

By RITA-LYN SANDERS
Gazette Times reporter

Researchers attending a conference on native plants at Oregon State University Wednesday morning got to see a side of Paul Risser that often gets lost amid his presidential duties — Risser the botanist.


Paul Risser
OSU president

As Risser warmed up to such topics as global warming and salmon habitat protection, it became clear he hasn't lost his scientific touch.

Before he took the helm at OSU, Risser taught and conducted research at several universities — beginning in 1963 when he landed his first position at the University of Wisconsin.

But since he has taken the administrative road from vice president of research to provost to president, Risser has traded his white lab coat for a blazer.

Risser may not spend much time anymore using machines like a bomb calorimeter to measure the energy of plants, but he enjoys tapping into his scientific roots whenever he can.

'The intent is to stimulate us to think about native plants in new ways.'

OSU President Paul Risser

Risser had the opportunity to speak to more than 350 researchers attending a two-day conference entitled "Native Plants: Propagating and Planting."

Digging into his botany background, Risser called his talk, "Native Plants: What Have You Done for Us Lately?"

"The intent is to stimulate us to think about native plants in new ways," Risser said. That means seeing them as more than sources of food, products or wildlife habitat.

After taking a closer look, scientists discovered that some native plants in Wisconsin do more than look pretty and welcome spring.

Two flowers — dog-toothed violet and Dutchman's breeches — grow for six weeks just as the snow melts and before leaves appear on deciduous trees.

Because the plants live early in the season, they play a key role in capturing nutrients that otherwise might be washed away by the melting snow.

Risser said researchers have also had many conversations about how plants could be used to capture carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere.

Some scientists say the gas has been the largest contributor to a phenomenon identified as global warming, or the increase of the Earth's average temperature.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has discussed offering "carbon credits" to farmers who grow or leave crops that capture carbon dioxide, Risser said.

And in Washington, there's a program that pays for the planting of hedges in flood plain areas where fences often are washed out.

Researchers transplanted the idea to use hedges as property dividers from England, where hedgerows have dotted the landscape for centuries.

There are many opportunities to use native plants to help solve some dilemmas, Risser said.

Rita-Lyn Sanders covers higher education for the Gazette-Times. She can be reached by e mail at sandersr@gtconnect.com or by phone at 758-9526.