



Klamath Network Featured Creature

February 2012

Redwood Sorrel, Oregon Sorrel, Oregon Oxalis (*Oxalis oregana*)

General Description:

Redwood Sorrel is a perennial herb that grows 6-12 inches in height. The leaves are composed of three heart-shaped leaflets of roughly equal size. The leaflets are borne on 5-20 cm stalks. The stems and undersides of the leaves are tinted burgundy to purple, and the leaves have small brown hairs. The flowers are borne on solitary stalks and may reach up to 2 cm in diameter. The flowers have 5 petals and sepals. Petal color can range from white to pink. In addition, dark lavender veins are often visible on the petals. Redwood sorrel is one of the most characteristic ground cover plants on the forest floor under coastal redwood trees. Redwood sorrel flowers are long blooming, from April to September. The fruit is a small capsule containing several seeds. Redwood Sorrel roots are often tuberous and succulent.



Image from TerraGalleria.com



Image from CurbstoneValley.com

Ecology:

Redwood Sorrel has a low drought tolerance. To conserve water the leaflets fold along a central axis during periods of drought, or when exposed to strong sunlight. When moisture or shade returns, the leaves reopen. The leaflets may also fold during periods of heavy rain which reduces the impact of the raindrops on the leaves. Taking only a few minutes, this movement is said to be observable to the human eye so look out for it!

Where to see in the Network:

Redwood Sorrel, in specific, is present in only Redwood National and State Parks. However, similar species of wood sorrel are found in Lassen Volcanic National Park (*Oxyria digyna*), and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area (*Oxalis corniculata* and *Oxalis laxa*). In addition, Redwood National and State Parks host 5 different types of wood sorrel, including *Oxalis albicans*, *Oxalis corniculata*, *Oxalis incarnata*, *Oxalis rubra* and *Oxalis suksdorfii*.



Image from California Academy of Sciences

Distribution and Habitat:

Redwood Sorrel is the dominate plant life in woodland ecosystems in the coastal range ecoregion. It is native to moist Douglas fir and coast redwood forests of North America from southwestern British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California. It grows in fertile, humus-rich soil, and requires full or partial forest shade. Redwood Sorrel is able to photosynthesize at low levels of ambient light (1/200th of full sunlight). It grows in low to moderate elevations (50-2,000 feet). Redwood Sorrel grows in close association with coastal redwood trees, and alongside fern, wild ginger and trillium species. It often forms lush, inviting carpets on the forest floor.

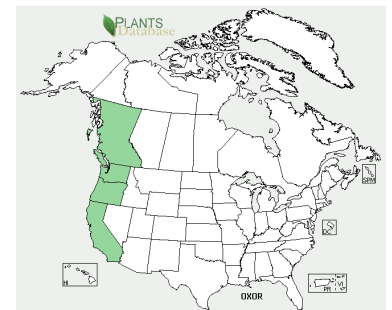


Image from Plants Database

Ethnobotany:

West coast Native American tribes have a long history of using *Oxalis oregana*. The Cowlitz are known to have used the juice as a medication for sore eyes. Pomo and Kashaya tribes utilized a decoction of the plant for rheumatism. Some tribes cooked and ate the leaves. Others, like the Pomo, Cowlitz, Makah and Kashaya ate the leaves raw for their tangy, sour taste. The sour taste of *Oxalis oregana* is due to oxalic acid. The sour taste is characteristic of the entire genus, *Oxalis*, as the genus name is derived from the Greek work oxys, meaning sour.