



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet Bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Pacific Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra Formosa*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/pacific-bleeding-heart-dicentra-formosa/

By colliiek2

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Bleeding Hearts are a welcome guest in most forest garden. It creates a thick and beautiful ground cover, and speaks to ancient symbolism.

This delightful herbaceous plant belongs to a small genus of heart-shaped plants. Plants in this genus grow flowers and leaves from stems and roots. *Dicentra Formosa* are an exception as the flowers and finely dissected leaves grow only from the roots. This perennial is known as the western, wild, and Pacific Bleeding Heart.



Bleeding Hearts (Photo courtesy of Unsplash)

Commercial Development

Bleeding Hearts have soft pinkish-purple and white heart-shaped flowers. Commercially developed forms can include red and white or pink and lighter pink flowers, chartreuse foliage, and larger plants and blooms. Fragrance was of interest to commercial developers and used in the production of perfumes.

Habitat

Bleeding Hearts grow in western Canada, south into parts of Central and South America. They are a common native in Oregon.

Bleeding Hearts grow in 'edge' areas where there is access to water and dappled sunlight to shade. In some areas, direct sun will damage the blooms and retard plant growth.

Wild Bleeding Hearts grow to be 18-inches tall. Typical height is around 12-inches. Some new introductions can get to be nearly 3-feet tall.

The plant is not drought or salt tolerant. It prefers moist, well-draining soils. Shallow roots are easily damaged. Yet, the wild plant has a high tolerance to fire.

Symbolism

The emotions and strong symbolism surrounding Bleeding Hearts have been captured in song and story. Many people believe that flowers communicate special meanings through their shape and colors.

For some, Bleeding Hearts symbolize sorrow and lost love. For others, it is a symbol of beauty and positive energy. Bloom colors are often associated with positive energy, love, friendship, and warmth at home.

There is a dark side to this beauty: the flowers are poisonous. All parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested. Even so, Bleeding Hearts received the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit.

REFERENCES:

- USDA, National Resources and Conservation Service, Bleeding Hearts (<https://plants.usda.gov/java/charProfile?symbol=DIFO>)
- Bleeding Heart Flower – Meaning, Symbolism and Colors (myflowermeaning.com/bleeding-heart-flower-meaning/)
- Wikipedia, Bleeding Heart (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dicentra_formosa)