



native plant society of bc

Mahonia nervosa (dull Oregon-grape)

Meaning: The name *Mahonia* honours Irish-born 18th-century horticulturist Bernard McMahon. *Nervosa* is Latin and can mean “sinewy, nervous, strong, vigorous” but in botanical terms, it refers to the plant having distinct veins or “nerves”, usually the leaves.

Description: *Mahonia nervosa* is an evergreen shrub that can be 10 to 60 cm tall. Its leaves are pinnate with 9 to 19 leaflets. True to its name, the leaves have an intricate network of veins; they also have spiny “teeth” that can make it resemble holly. Unlike

holly though, the spines are nowhere as sharp. Dull Oregon-grape produces bright yellow clusters of flowers that usually bloom in April and May.

Habitat: Dull Oregon-grape grows on moist to dry open slopes and open forests at low to middle elevations.

Range: *Mahonia nervosa* is native to western North America. In Canada, it is found in British Columbia (it is common in southwestern BC, but becomes less frequent as one moves eastward). In the United States, it is found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California.

Wildlife notes: The leaves of dull Oregon-grape are sometimes eaten by black-tailed deer, Roosevelt elk and various small mammals. The fruits are eaten by many small birds and mammals. Some hummingbird species drink the flower nectar. *Mahonia nervosa* also provides cover for small birds and mammals.

First Nations use: All parts of dull Oregon-grape were used by First Nations peoples in the Pacific Northwest. The berries were used for food, the bright yellow roots and bark were used to make a dye, all plant parts were used medicinally to treat ailments as diverse as nosebleeds, arthritis, tuberculosis and sexually-transmitted diseases.

Gardening use: First, as always with native plants, do NOT collect plants from the wild. Instead, check your local garden store to see if it sells dull Oregon-grape -- it’s one of the more widely available native plants. (You can also check the NPSBC resources page at www.npsbc.org.) It is also possible to grow *Mahonia nervosa* from seed. You can purchase seed from the VanDusen Seed Collectors by going to www.plantexplorers.com/vandusen/



Photo: Dawn Hanna