

Oregon grape

by [Paul Willis](#) in the [January 7, 2015](#) issue

Oregon grape, what makes you so sour today—  
or every day, for that matter? Your blue berries,  
ripe to bursting, look delicious but they're not.

Some native peoples would not eat them altogether.  
Others, only intermixed with sweeter berries  
from other plants—huckleberries, for example.

Are you jealous of your upland cousin,  
thriving in subalpine meadows,  
you stuck down here in the woods?

Listen: your little leaves in bending ladders,  
dark green and shining like the holly,  
lift me into holiday spirits. I'm serious.

With you it is Christmas in the gloom.  
If you could just be happy about it,  
I might forgive you for your flavor.

*—Ross Lake National Recreation Area*