

# State Symbols

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## Idaho's symbols offer insight into the state's heritage

SYRINGA  
APPALOOSA  
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HAGERMAN HORSE  
STAR GARNET  
SQUARE DANCE  
CUTTHROAT TROUT  
POTATO  
GREAT SEAL OF IDAHO

### SYRINGA

The syringa has been known as the state flower since Idaho became a state in 1890. It was officially adopted by the state legislature in 1931, when several state symbols were put into law. Ger-

man botanist Frederick Pursh named the species *Lewis' Syringa*, or *Philadelphus Lewisii*, in honor of Captain Meriwether Lewis who saw the plant on his expedition to the Pacific Northwest in 1805.

The Native Americans found many ways to use the syringa. For example, they made arrow shafts from the stem of the plant.

Syringa is found only in the western states, from Montana and Wyoming to Washington and California. However, similar flowers are found under different names throughout the Northern Hemisphere.

A branching shrub standing six to twelve feet tall, the syringa grows wild along forest borders and stream banks.

In June and July the hillsides and canyons in Idaho are covered with the white, heavy-scented blossoms of the syringa bush. The creamy-white color and the fragrance of the syringa makes it much like the orange blossom, and the flower is often called "mock orange" because of this likeness.

### MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

The lovely mountain bluebird was chosen by the 1931 state legislature as the state bird of Idaho.

The male mountain bluebird has a sky-blue "coat" and a blue "vest" with white underfeathers and is about seven inches

## GLOSSARY

**Syringa:** (su - ring - ga, not sir - ing -ga)

**Crevice:** narrow crack

**Legislature:** people with the power and responsibility to make or change laws

## Idaho's state symbols are an official part of Idaho Code

long. The female bluebird is a light blue-gray color and usually lays about six or seven blue-white eggs. She builds her nest in a crevice such as the hollow of a tree or a woodpecker's hole. The bluebird is very tidy about its home and carries all trash some distance away from the nest.

The mountain bluebird lives in the area between the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and the Great Plains of the Midwest. The bluebird family is especially plentiful in the mountains of Idaho.

So many people in Idaho love the bluebirds that they have started building homes for them along roads and in timbered areas.

### WESTERN WHITE PINE

The western white pine grows throughout the Northwest, but the largest and best forests can be found in northern Idaho in the Coeur d'Alene and Bitterroot Mountains. For this reason, the tree is often called the soft Idaho white pine or just the Idaho white pine.

It has slender limbs, light blue-green needles, and a smooth, silvery-gray bark. Older trees have a darker bark that appears to be broken into small, rectangular blocks. The needles are slender, two to four inches long, and grow in bundles of five. Each cluster of needles flares out in a spreading fashion that makes the tree easy to recognize.

The wood is soft, straight-grained, and evenly textured. It is used to make everything from houses to wooden matches.

Some western white pine trees grow to 213 feet. That is five feet taller than the Idaho State Capitol building! The western white pine was made the official state tree of Idaho by the 1935 legislature.

### APPALOOSA

The state horse of Idaho is the appaloosa.

The appaloosa is a fast, intelligent, and hard-working breed. The Spaniards brought these horses to America. The Nez Perce Indians began to train and breed them.

Today, they are known for being fine riding horses. Every appaloosa's spotted coat is different, but they all have black and white stripes on their hooves.

The appaloosa was adopted as Idaho's state horse by the 1975 legislature.

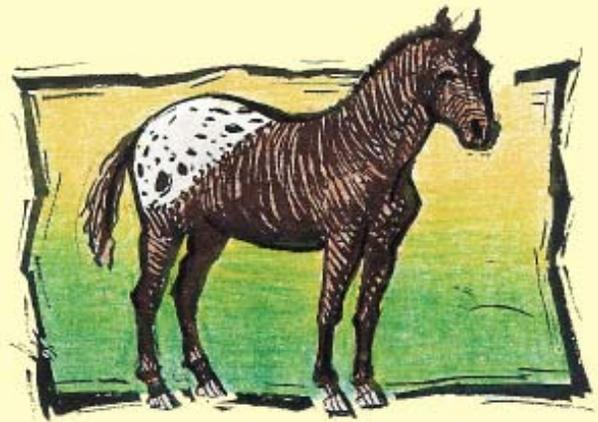


Illustration by Dick Lee

### THE HUCKLEBERRY

"Purple gold" can be found in the mountains of Idaho during the late summer. That is the time huckleberries ripen. This small round fruit, which

## Teachers and students are a part of the act

grows on shrubs two to six feet tall, is a delicious treat not only for humans but for bears as well.

Fourth-grade students from Southside Elementary in Bonner County proposed the idea for a state fruit. The huckleberry was adopted as Idaho's state fruit on February 14, 2000.

## MONARCH BUTTERFLY

The 1992 Idaho State Legislature voted to make the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) our state insect. Fourth grade students at Boise's Cole Elementary School proposed the legislation. For years, the teacher of this fourth grade class had her students raise and release hundreds of monarch butterflies each year as part of their science class.

The life of all butterflies is divided into four stages: egg, larva (caterpillar),

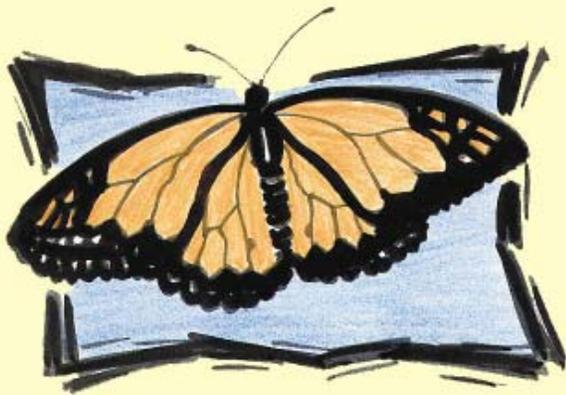


Illustration by Dick Lee

cocoon (chrysalis), and adult. It can grow from an egg into an adult butterfly in just three to six weeks. The monarch lives on the milkweed plant. Its wings are orange with black tips.

A monarch is a great migrator, travelling many miles during its lifetime. Monarchs

travel south during the winter from their northern homes, and return in the summer.

## HAGERMAN HORSE

The Hagerman horse is Idaho's state fossil. It became our state fossil in 1988.

This animal lived in Idaho over 3 million years ago. Its bones were found near the south-central town of Hagerman. Over 130 complete skeletons have been uncovered in the area since the 1920s.

Scientists believe that the Hagerman horse is closely related to today's zebra. The location where the bones were found has been designated as Fossil Beds National Monument and is considered one of the best known Pleistocene-epoch fossil sites in the world.

## STAR GARNET

The star garnet has been the state gem of Idaho since 1967.

Deposits of this valuable stone were found near Fernwood, Idaho, in Benewah County as early as the 1880s.

The stone is dark red or reddish purple in color. After it is polished, the stone usually has a shiny star floating across the surface. Most stars have four points, but some have six points. Star garnets can be found only in Idaho and the far-away country of India.

The gem is considered more precious than either star rubies or star sapphires. The star garnet is the January birthstone.

## The Square Dance is also Texas' officially recognized dance

### SQUARE DANCE

The square dance was chosen as the American folk dance of Idaho by the 1989 legislature.

The square dance was first associated with the American people and has been recorded in history as early as 1651. Early pioneers often square danced to celebrate the completion of a new barn.

Although what we call square dancing is usually done in a square, with four couples, it can also be done in a circle or in a straight line.

### CUTTHROAT TROUT

The cutthroat trout was named the state fish by the 1990 legislature. The cutthroat, the rainbow, and the bull trout are all native to Idaho.

The cutthroat's color varies from steel gray to olive green. The sides may be yellow brown with red or pink along the belly. The red or orange slash under its jaw gives the cutthroat its name.

### POTATO

Henry Spalding planted the first potatoes in Idaho. Spalding, an early missionary, gave the Nez Perce Indians seeds to plant. They were probably the first to sell potatoes in Idaho – selling them to hungry emigrants traveling through North Idaho. In 1838, Spalding and a group of Nez Perce recorded that they harvested a bumper crop of potatoes, more than what they grew the year before.

Today Idaho ranks as a leader in the United States for potato production. Fresh and frozen potatoes are shipped all over the country and the world. If you have ever eaten french fries at McDonalds, you've sampled some of Idaho's best.

Most of Idaho's potatoes are the Russet Burbank variety. Potatoes are tubers. Idaho is a great place to grow potatoes because of its rich volcanic soil, plentiful supply of water, and a perfect growing climate for the plant. Did you know you can grow an entire potato plant – one that would develop many potatoes – just by planting a single "eye"? Give it a try!

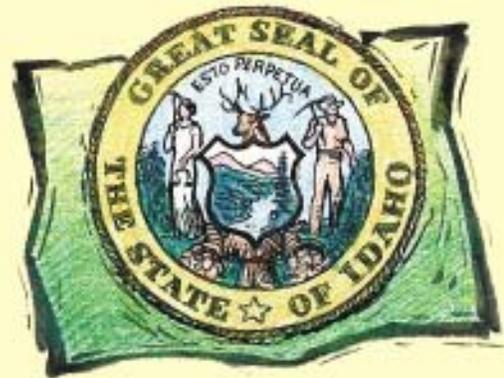


Illustration by Dick Lee

### GREAT SEAL OF IDAHO

The great seal of Idaho was drawn by Emma Edwards in 1890 and adopted by the first state legislature on March 14, 1891.

Many symbols relating to Idaho's resources and industries are shown on the seal. Agriculture is represented by grain, a horn of plenty, and a man plowing a

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field. The miner with his pick and shovel and the stamp mill in the center show the important part mining played in Idaho. The elk head above the center shield tells us of the plentiful game found in Idaho. The woman on the left represents justice and liberty, and the fact that the woman is the same size as the man shows us that in Idaho men and

women are considered equal.

The state motto, "Esto Perpetua," means "may it endure," and suggests the wish that Idaho may last forever.

The great seal is placed on all official state papers. It is also the symbol in the center of the Idaho State flag.

### Citizens in action!

Idaho's state symbols each tell a part of Idaho's cultural history (story). From social activities (state dance) to industry (state gem, tree, vegetable) to its wildlife (state fish, insect), these symbols help us learn about our state. State symbols actually are part of Idaho Code, meaning they are "law". The legislature must support the idea and the governor signs off showing executive branch approval... and in several cases it was an Idaho fourth grade class that helped get the ball rolling!



Huckleberry

Four symbols were initially sponsored and brought to the Idaho

legislature by students. Those four are the state insect (Monarch Butterfly), state horse (Appaloosa), state fruit (Huckleberry), and the state vegetable (Potato). The potato became the newest Idaho symbol in 2002.



Potato

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