

LANDSCAPING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

NATIVE PLANTS

Advantages of Native Plants

Plants native to the Pacific Northwest evolved over thousands of years to suit our climate, soil conditions, and weather patterns. As a result, they require less maintenance, little watering once established, and no pesticides to remain vigorous and healthy. Woody native plants have deep roots that reduce erosion and allow water to penetrate into the ground.

Native plants are particularly good for problem areas in the landscape. If an area stays wet much of the time or often grows moss, choose a native plant that tolerates wet conditions, such as Red Osier Dogwood or Pacific Crabapple. For clayey soils, try planting Douglas Spirea or Pacific Ninebark. To minimize streambank erosion, plant willows or Salmonberry.

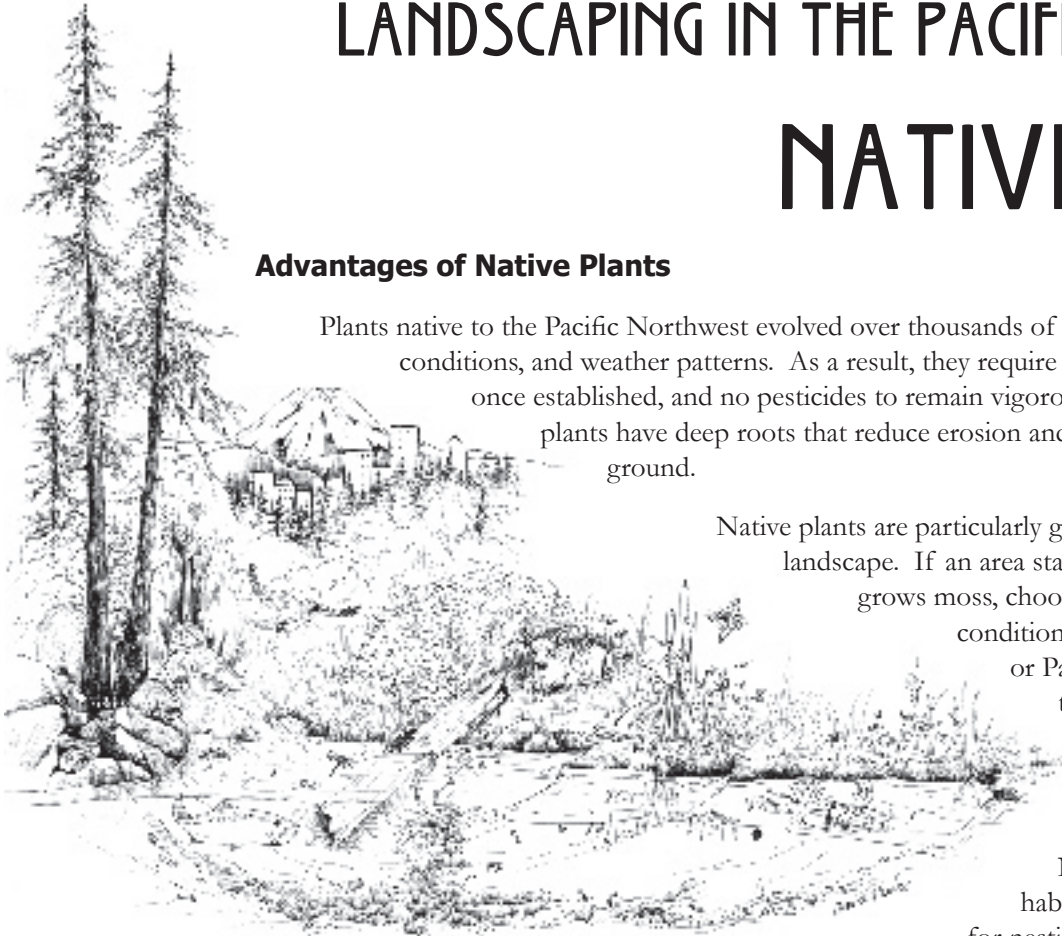
Native plants also provide wildlife habitat. Native roses provide cover for nesting birds while Beaked Hazelnut or Oregon White Oak provide food for squirrels.

Native plants enhance the environment by intercepting and filtering storm water. Water also soaks into the ground along their root channels. Because native plants do not require fertilizer or pesticides to stay healthy, they provide a healthy landscape for kids, pets, and the environment. Well adapted to our environment, native plants resist most diseases and, in many cases, grow vigorously enough to out-compete insects and diseases. Reducing herbicide fungicide, and insecticide use in the garden makes your garden healthier for kids, pets, and wildlife.

Planning your landscape

First, carefully examine your landscape and inventory existing conditions. Look at the soil in several different locations. Does it drain well or are there ponds after a rain? Does your soil feel sandy or sticky like clay? To determine soil texture pick up a small amount of damp soil and squeeze it in your hand. Clay soil will feel smooth and sticky and your fingers will leave an impression. You can usually squeeze a ribbon of clay one or two inches long between your thumb and forefinger. Sandy soil feels gritty, doesn't hold together well, and often slips through your fingers. Loam soil will feel spongy and be dark brown or black in color.

Determine the sun's path both summer and winter to determine how much light each section of the yard receives. Locate all buildings and utilities, including the locations of hose bibs. Make a scale drawing of your yard and include permanent features such as the plants you want to keep.



Salal

WATERSHED



STEWARDS



Locate thirsty plants, such as hybrid tea roses and vegetable or herb gardens, near a water source for easy irrigation. These types of plants require extra water during the summer and gardening will consume more if you locate them far from your water source. Plants are also easier to harvest when they are located close to the house. Native plants can be located in distant corners of the yard because they seldom require water after establishment and often make a good privacy screen.

Look for areas in your yard where grass or other non-native plants are doing poorly. In many cases this happens due to shade and/or wet conditions. It may also be due to poor quality soil. Check the plant list on page four and choose a few plants that do best in your conditions. In many cases, native plants evolved together to create plant communities. Take advantage of this fact by creating a community in your own yard using complementary plants. If you choose plants of varying heights (e.g. ground covers, shrubs 5 to 10 feet high, and trees) it will have the added benefit of creating wildlife habitat.

Making certain you have three vertical (canopy) layers of vegetation, ground cover, shrubs, and trees, will make your yard more attractive to wildlife. Ground cover provides food and cover for insects and small animals that often serve as a food source for birds and other wildlife. Shrubs provide food and protection from predators for birds, squirrels, and other small animals. Larger trees provide shade, nesting space, and insects for food. Providing three layers in your garden creates a complex habitat that provides for the needs of a wide variety of species. A water feature, either as small as a bird bath or as large as a pond, also helps attract wildlife.

Choosing the Right Plants

Pick an area of your yard that you want to landscape with native plants. If there is existing lawn, it can be removed by cutting the lawn into small squares and digging it out with a flat bladed spade or renting a commercial sod cutter. You can also compost the lawn in place by covering it with cardboard or several layers of newspaper followed by a few inches of wood chips or bark. Before digging deeply, ensure there are no buried utilities in the area. Call 800-553-4344 for utility locations.

Check the plant list on page four and narrow down your choices to the plants which suit your conditions. You may wish to visit local nurseries to look at the various plants and determine which best suit your needs. Be sure to take the plant list with you and be prepared to use the botanical name. For example, asking for a Mock Orange may get you the European *Philadelphus coronarius* rather than the native *Philadelphus lewisii*.



Douglas spiera

Carefully look at the mature size of plants you want to include in your plan and allow the plants plenty of room to grow to this size. While the landscape will look a little sparse to begin with, natives usually grow quickly. Pruning large plants to fit in a small area is a lot of work and may damage the plant's health. It isn't always best to choose the largest plant in the nursery. Smaller plants will normally experience less transplant shock. Native plants like Vine Maples and Rhododendrons are usually easy to find at local nurseries, but other plants may prove more challenging. Check the resource list on page six for more information.

Proper Planting

Believe it or not, fall or winter is the best time to plant native plants, especially trees and shrubs. Planting after March requires more supplemental watering in order to establish a healthy root system. Before planting add three to four inches of good quality compost to the entire planting area and work it into the soil well. Amending the entire site with compost will give your plants a much better start than simply adding compost to the planting hole.

Before planting, set the plants in their pots where you want them and rearrange for the look you like. General guidelines for plant spacing are 10-15 feet apart for trees, 5-10 feet apart for shrubs, and 1-3 feet apart for groundcovers. Planting shrubs under the tree canopy provides a layered habitat that will attract birds and other wildlife.



Using plant names from Table 1, go to the website, <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/>, to find more information and pictures of a particular plant.

Planting Steps

1. Take the plant out of its pot to see the root size. Keep roots damp.
2. Dig a hole two or three times the width of the root mass and about as deep.
3. Build a mound of soil at the bottom of the hole.
4. Loosen bound roots and gently shake off excess potting soil.
5. Gently spread the roots evenly over the soil mound. The roots should not circle in the hole.
6. Place the plant so the root flare (where the roots join the stem) is at the soil surface.
7. Replace the soil in the hole so it fills the space between the roots. Tamp down gently to avoid any air spaces around the roots.
8. Water and add more soil to fill the hole up to the root flare.

Table 1: Native Plant List

	Common Name	Botanical Name	Deciduous		Evergreen		Dry	Moist	Wet	Sunny	Some Shade	Shady	Height (ft)
			X		X								
Shrubs and Ferns	Beaked Hazelnut	Corylus cornuta	X				X		X	X	X		20
	Blue Elderberry	Sambucus cerulea	X		X	X				X	X		15
	Deer Fern	Blechnum spicant		X		X	X			X	X		2
	Evergreen Huckleberry	Vaccinium ovatum		X	X	X				X	X		10
	Indian Plum	Oemlaria cerasiformis	X		X	X			X	X	X		15
	Lady Fern	Athyrium filix-femina	X		X	X			X	X	X		4
	Mock Orange	Philadelphus lewisii	X		X	X			X	X			9
	Oceanspray	Holodiscus discolor	X		X	X			X	X			15
	Oregon Grape	Mahonia sp.		X	X	X			X	X	X		6
	Pacific Ninebark	Physocarpus capitatus	X			X	X		X	X	X		13
	Pacific Wax Myrtle	Myrica californica		X	X	X			X	X	X		13
	Red Elderberry	Sambucus racemosa	X		X	X			X	X	X		15
	Red-flowering Currant	Ribes sanguineum	X		X	X			X	X			6
	Red Huckleberry	Vaccinium parvifolium	X		X	X				X	X		10
	Red Osier Dogwood	Cornus stolonifera	X			X	X		X	X	X		15
	Rosa species	R. nutkana, R. pisocarpa	X		X	X	X		X	X			6
	Salal	Gaultheria shallon		X	X	X			X	X	X		5
	Salmonberry	Rubus spectabilis	X			X	X		X	X	X		10
	Serviceberry	Amelanchier alnifolia	X		X	X			X	X	X		20
	Snowberry	Symphoricarpos albus	X		X	X	X		X	X			5
Spirea	Spirea douglasii	X			X	X		X	X			7	
Sword Fern	Polystichum minitum		X	X	X				X	X		3	
Thimbleberry	Rubus parviflorus	X		X	X			X	X	X		8	
Trees	Big Leaf Maple	Acer macrophyllum	X			X			X	X			100
	Bitter Cherry	Prunus emarginata	X		X	X			X	X			30
	Black Cottonwood	Populus trichocarpa	X			X	X		X	X			160
	Cascara	Rhamnus purshiana	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		30
	Douglas Fir	Pseudotsuga menziesii		X	X	X			X	X			250
	Grand Fir	Abies grandis		X	X	X			X	X	X		250
	Oregon Ash	Fraxinus latifolia	X			X	X		X	X			70
	Oregon White Oak	Quercus garryana	X		X	X			X	X			75
	Pacific Crabapple	Malus fusca	X			X	X		X	X			40
	Pacific Willow	Salix lasiandra	X			X	X		X	X			40
	Pacific Yew	Taxus brevifolia		X	X	X				X	X		25
	Red Alder	Alnus rubra	X		X	X	X		X	X			120
	Scouler's Willow	Salix scouleriana	X		X	X			X	X			30
	Shore Pine	Pinus contorta		X	X	X	X		X	X			50
	Sitka Spruce	Picea sitchensis		X		X	X		X	X			200
	Vine Maple	Acer circinatum	X		X	X			X	X	X		25
	Western Hemlock	Tsuga heterophylla		X		X				X	X		225
	Western Red Cedar	Thuja plicata		X		X	X			X	X		200
Groundcovers	Beach Strawberry	Fragaria chiloensis		X	X	X			X	X			0.5
	Bleeding Heart	Dicentra formosa	X		X	X				X	X		1.5
	Camas	Camassia quamash	X		X	X			X	X			1
	Inside-out Flower	Vancouveria hexandra	X		X	X				X	X		0.5
	False Solomon's Seal	Smilacina racemosa	X			X				X	X		3
	Kinnickinnick	Arctostaphylos uva-ursi		X	X				X				0.5
	Vanilla Leaf	Achyls triphylla	X			X				X	X		1
	Western Trillium	Trillium ovatum	X			X					X		1
Wood sorrel	Oxalis oregana	X		X	X				X	X		0.5	

WATERSHED



STEWARDS

After planting it is always a good idea to mulch around each plant. To reduce weeds and hold water around the roots of the plant, consider mulching. Compost makes excellent mulch because it helps filter pollutants and immediately improves the soil. Relatively coarse wood mulch holds moisture in the soil well and provides good weed control. Avoid fine bark dust which washes away easily and can clog storm drains.

Maintenance

While well adapted to our climate, it is still best to water your native plants deeply and frequently during the first two summers to encourage vigorous growth. Hand pull weeds as they come up to keep them from robbing your new plants of water and nutrients. Once established, maintenance is minimal. Established natives will only need water during the driest part of summer and will out-compete many weeds when properly mulched.

Native plants mix well with many ornamentals. Robust perennials like Daylily, Coneflower, Helianthus, or Joe-Pye Weed add color during the summer. Well adapted plants like lilacs, rhododendrons, ceanothus, and hydrangeas, complement natives well and require very little maintenance. Don't try and mix natives with tender plants like hybrid tea roses or annuals. These plants require so much water and fertilizer that they defeat the purpose of creating a low maintenance native landscape. Don't hesitate to change your landscape from time to time. As time goes by conditions change: an area that was in full sun may become shady as trees mature or an area that used to remain dry may become wet much of the time due to changes in drainage. If a plant does not thrive in one current location, move it where it may do better.

Resource List

WSU Extension guide to native plants <http://gardening.wsu.edu/text/nwnative.htm>

King County Native Landscaping <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/pi/Go-Native/index.htm>

Portland Eco-Trust Plant Native office <http://www.plantnative.org/index.htm>

Metro guide to natural gardening <http://www.metro-region.org/pssp.cfm?ProgServID=4>

Guide to Northwest native plants <http://www.tardigrade.org/natives/index.html>

Oregon State University guide to landscape plants <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/>

Washington State Native Plant Society <http://www.wnps.org/landscaping/plantselect.html>

Grow Your Own Native Landscape, Michael Leigh, WSU Extension Thurston County

Gardening with Native Plants, Arthur R. Kruckeberg University of Washington Press

Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast, Pojar and McKinnon Lone Pine Press



Written by Gary Bock, December 2005

Watershed Stewards is sponsored in partnership
by WSU Extension Clark County and the Clark
County Clean Water Program.

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