

SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

March 2011

Island County, Washington

Issue No. 77

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Shoreline Planting for Pollinators

We all know the value of pollinators in the garden, moving pollen between flowering plants, shrubs and trees to ensure the growth of seeds and fruits. They are not only important for the vegetables and flowers that we may grow in our gardens, but also for the native plants the shoreline property owner relies on for erosion control and bluff stability. When deciding what we should plant along our bluffs or shorelines, few of us think about the importance of providing attractive habitat for our pollinator friends. With a bit of advance planning, we can choose not only an attractive variety of vegetation that will produce flowers throughout the growing season, but also help propagate new plants so that we do not have to rely on costly native plant purchases year after year.

Who Are Our Pollinators?

Native bees are the most important pollinators we'll usually find in our gardens, but by no means the only pollinators: moths, butterflies, hummingbirds, beetles, and flies also provide this important function. Each species is attracted to different colors and odors, so it is important to choose native plants that will draw a wide variety of pollinators.

Native ground and twig nesting bees account for almost 4,000 of the bee species in the U.S., with some living in colonies while others live a solitary life. Their tongues vary in length, determining which flowers they are attracted to for their source of pollen and nectar. According to the Xerces Society, bees are particularly attracted to flowers that are yellow, blue, violet, purple, and white.

Moths and butterflies are important pollinators, with moths typically being active during the night, and butterflies during the day. Moths are attracted to sweet smelling flowers that open later in the day or at night, particularly those that are light colored or white. Butterflies enjoy locations where they can bask, such as large stones or open areas, and prefer bright flowers that are in full sun and protected from the wind. Moist soil or mud are important sources of needed minerals and moisture to allow butterflies to thrive.

Though most of us do not think of flies as being a pollinator, they will visit a large variety of plants, and are important in pollinating small flowers that bloom in shady, moist areas. There are also over 30,000 species of beetles in the U.S., and you can see them crawling from plant to plant, carrying pollen from one to another. They seem to prefer large flowers with strong scent.

We have all seen hummingbirds at the feeders many of us provide, using their long beaks and tongues to sip the nectar from the red "flowers" at the base of the containers. Since hummingbirds can see the color red, they are drawn to the red tubular flowers in nature, carrying pollen back and forth on their beaks and feathers.



Mason bees and hummingbirds are just two of the large variety of pollinators important to the Puget Sound region.



Thoughts on Planting and Habitat

You should plan your garden so that you can provide the most efficient habitat for your pollinators, keeping in mind their needs for food, water and shelter. Since both pollen and nectar are important food sources to our pollinators, you'll want to plant so that you can provide food from early spring to late fall, so knowing the bloom periods for different plants is important. Planting in groups is also important, so that pollinators don't have as far to travel, and can more easily pollinate a same-species plant, rather than carrying pollen to unreceptive flowers. You should also consider planting a large variety of plants, so that you can provide resources to a number of different pollinators. Different flower colors, bloom periods, fragrances and heights will ensure a good supply of pollen and nectar from early spring to late fall.

Water is very important for your pollinators, so make sure there is an adequate supply. Small containers of water placed around the garden will help, as will natural features such as ponds. Make sure that there is a shallow side to the container, so that the pollinators can access the water without drowning. Shelter is also important to protect pollinators from weather and predators, as are locations they can roost or nest. Dead snags can be left in place for shelter, as can piles of twigs, branches, and leaf litter. Leave some uncovered soil for ground nesting insects. Seek non-chemical alternatives to pest and weed management; many of our off-the-shelf herbicides and pesticides may be lethal to our beneficial pollinators.

Native Plants and Shrubs That Attract Pollinators

The following native plants and shrubs are just a few that provide multiple benefits to shoreline property owners. They are adapted to maritime Pacific Northwest locations, attractive to our pollinators, and in many instances provide bluff and shoreline stability. For aquatic health, these native plants may provide shading for forage fish, as well as food resources for our salmon. These are listed in order of when they bloom throughout the growing season.

For further information on native plants for shoreline locations, several of our past newsletters were partially or entirely devoted to this topic, including lists of local books and online resources. Check out our newsletters from March 2010, May 2010, and January 2009: <http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/>

Tall Oregon Grape (*Berberis aquifolium*, sometimes called *Mahonia aquifolium*) Bright yellow clustered flowers bloom in March - June. Can grow up to 8 feet high, dwarfing its cousin, Low Oregon Grape. Though adapted to dry, rocky, open habitats, it can also grow in moist or shady locations. It looks best when you plant shorter plants around it. Oregon grape spreads from underground roots. Attractive to hummingbirds, bees, butterflies and birds.

Tall Oregon grape on bluff at Camano Island State Park.



Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) White flowers bloom in April – July on this shrub that grows from 6 - 20 feet in height. It will grow in moist to dry soil, and in sunny to partially shady locations. Attractive to bees and flies.

Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) This is a great groundcover plant for shoreline locations, with deep and wide root system. The white to pink flowers bloom from April – July. It can be grown short, if pruned, or left to grow to five feet or more in height. It can grow in dry to moist soils, from shady to sunny locations, though it doesn't do as well in full sun.

Attractive to butterflies and bees.



Pacific Ninebark (*Phsocarpus capitatus*) Widely planted as a Northwest native, this shrub produces showy white dome-shaped flowers from May – June, and is attractive to a number of pollinators. Enjoys full to partial sun, with medium soil moisture. Grows up to 15 feet in height.

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) Widely known for its white, waxy berry-like drupes that are visible in winter, it is also known as Waxberry or Coralberry. Pinkish to white bell-shaped flowers appear in May – August. Grows from 2 to 5 feet tall, spreading by root suckers. It grows in dry to moist, well-drained soils, in sun or partial shade.

Attractive to bees, butterflies, and /or hummingbirds



Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*) Large 5" long, white to cream, lilac-like flowers are quite showy from June to August, and have a pleasant fragrance. This shrub is very sun-tolerant, and does well on dry slopes, but can also grow in more shady areas. Prefers dry to moist soils. It grows from 10 to 15 feet in height. Attractive to hummingbirds, butterflies and birds.

This is by no means a complete list of native plants that are attractive to pollinators. Others you might check in your favorite local native plant guide include red currants, elderberries, red huckleberries, evergreen huckleberries, Indian plum, mock orange, Nootka rose, and others. Coastal trees whose flowers attract pollinators include vine maple, big-leaf maple, madrone, and Pacific dogwood.

References and Resources

Selecting Plants for Pollinators: A Regional Guide for Farmers, Land Managers, and Gardeners in the Pacific Lowland Mixed Forest Province, Pollinator Partnership and NAPPC. Excellent 24 page resource with charts showing numerous plants, trees and shrubs along with the different pollinators that use each.
<http://www.pollinator.org/PDFs/PacificLowlandrx8.pdf>

Invertebrate Conservation Plant Sheet: Pacific Northwest Plants for Native Bees, The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. <http://www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/pacificnw-plants-for-bees-xerces4.pdf>

Hummingbirds and How to Attract Them, Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. Good list of flowering plants, trees, shrubs and vines whose flowers attract hummingbirds, listed by season:
http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/hummingbirds/humming_flowering.html

Butterflies and How to Attract Them, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.
<http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/butterflies/butterflies-plants.html>

Sample Plants for Salmon Friendly Gardens, City of Seattle. In addition to attracting pollinators, many of these native plants help with salmon habitat. Some listed species also help with slope stabilization.
http://www.cityofseattle.net/util/groups/public/@spu/@csb/documents/webcontent/samplepla_200311261659383.pdf

Events

April 23, 2011, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm: Earth Day Family Fun Festival, Oak Harbor Yacht Club. Join us for a fun day of lively games and hands-on activities for all ages. Spin the Wheel of Waste. Play Pitch the Poop. Compete in the Recycle Relay. Learn how to set up a worm bin, set up a rain barrel and make non-toxic household cleaners. Kids can ride through the bike rodeo. BYOB for the bike repair clinic or pick out a beater bike for free. Additional information: (360) 279-4762

April 27, 2011, 7:00 pm: The Saratoga Grays: Farming the Mudflat for Shrimp and Worms. Howard Garrett with the Orca Network will talk about the distinct group of gray whales that return to Saratoga Passage each spring. Enjoy the beautiful photos and the stories Howard tells in explaining how these large mammals farm our mudflats. Camano Multipurpose Center, 141 N. East Camano Drive, Camano Island. Information: 360-387-3443, ext 258



This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at www.islandcountymrc.org

The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at <http://www.nwstraits.org/>

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If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters, please visit www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter. Your Shore Stewards Coordinator is Scott Chase, (360) 387-3443, ext 258, or email at shorestewards@wsu.edu.