

SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

January 2012

Island County, Washington

Issue No. 84

This issue of Shore Stewards News was prepared by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator, Island County.

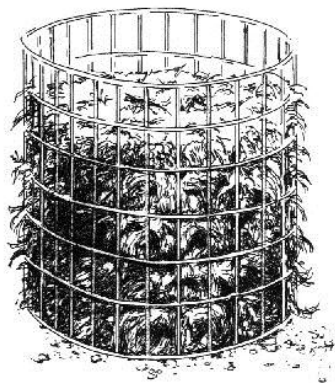
Salmon-Friendly Gardening Practices

The ways in which we garden have a big impact on how healthy the waters are for our salmon. After swimming hundreds of miles through our ocean, surviving predators and fishing nets, they return to where they hatched to spawn a new generation. In some instances, they may find their spawning areas washed away, contaminated by pesticides and chemical fertilizers, or filled with silt from erosion. Salmon-friendly gardening practices help you to grow healthy plants with a minimal amount of irrigation, pesticides, and fertilizer, and in ways that reduce harmful surface runoff. Every time we mow, plant, fertilize, control pests, or water our gardens, we can do so using methods that protect salmon, saving you both time and money.

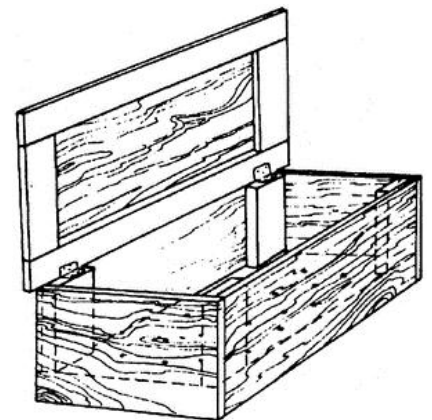
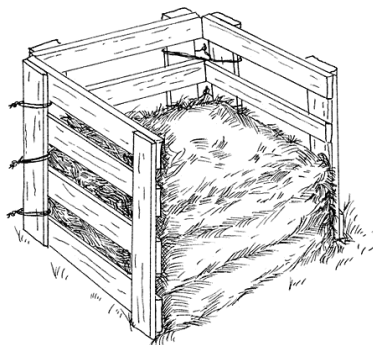
Start with Compost to Build Healthy Soil

Adding compost to your soil helps you to grow healthy plants without the addition of fertilizer or pesticides, and lessens the amount of water needed for irrigation. It helps the soil in absorbing and storing the water, which helps purify and reduce the amount of surface runoff into our streams and Sound. You can start by mixing two to four inches of compost into the top six to 12 inches of soil when planting your garden. If you have a lawn, spread a half inch of compost on top of the lawn, and use a composting mower to chop up your clippings and leave them on the lawn. On an annual basis, mulch your garden beds with leaves and compost.

If you don't already have one, consider building a compost bin. One can be made with very little investment of time or money. You can also build a worm bin for composting your kitchen waste at home. There are many simple plans available on the internet. Brochures and plans on building compost bins for yard waste and worm bins for kitchen waste can also be seen at the WSU Waste Wise webpage on composting: <http://county.wsu.edu/island/nrs/wastewise/Pages/Composting.aspx>



compost bin



Worm bin

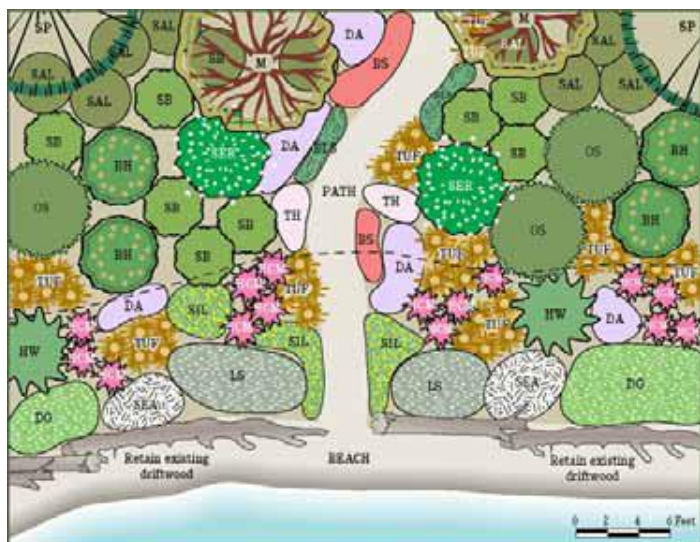
Choosing the Right Plants

Planning your garden is an important first step, and includes which native plants, shrubs or trees you will need to buy and what purpose they fulfill. Do you live on a bluff and are concerned about erosion control and prevention of landslides? Will your garden get a lot of salt spray and require salt-tolerant plants? Perhaps you would like to provide shading for forage fish, an important part of the salmon's diet. Or plant overhanging vegetation that will drop insects into the water below, providing food for salmon and other marine life. There are a large number of books and internet sources to check out as far as what native vegetation will meet your requirements.

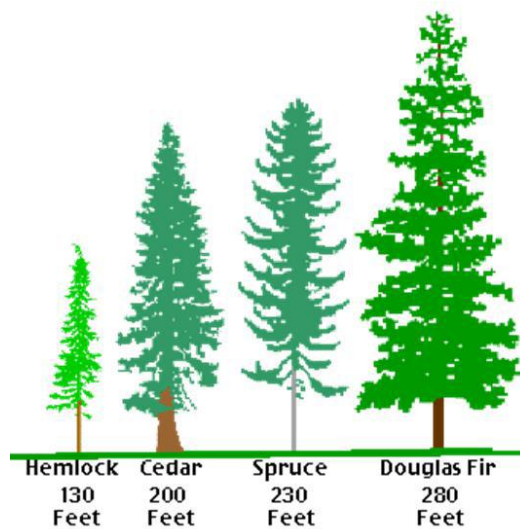
The May 2010 edition of the Shore Stewards News provides information about salt tolerant trees and shrubs, native herbaceous plant for shoreline sites, local native plant guide and shoreline planting plans, as well as books and publications about native plants specific to our region. To see this newsletter, go to: <http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2010/March2010Newsletter.pdf>

The June 2009 Shore Stewards News contains a wealth of great information about the benefits of native plants, height consideration for trees near the shoreline or bluffs, planting techniques, pruning techniques, and lists of where you can find native plants. This newsletter can be seen here: <http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2009/January2009Newsletter.pdf>

In Island County, a good source for native plants is the annual native plant sale organized by the Conservation District for each island. On Whidbey, the Whidbey Island Conservation District's sale site can be found at <http://whidbeycd.org/plantsale.aspx> For Camano Island, check out the Snohomish Conservation District's site at <http://snohomishcd.org/plant-sale>



Planting plan from May 2010 newsletter



Tree height comparisons from June 2009 newsletter

Use Water Wisely

Water is precious, and using as little as possible in the garden preserves our aquifers and other water sources, meeting our own household needs as well as keeping water in our streams and rivers for salmon. The sources mentioned earlier can provide you with drought-tolerant plants, trees and shrubs, which require a minimal amount of irrigation.

Choosing drought-tolerant plants is a good first step, but you should also try to group plants with similar watering needs, and water appropriately. Check the watering requirements for each plant, especially for the time period needed to get established. This usually means watering deeply but infrequently, allowing the plant to grow deep roots and helping to prevent disease. Be sure the roots are soaked, and allow the top few inches of soil to dry prior to watering again. Using soaker hoses and drip irrigation will use half as much water or less than traditional watering methods. If possible, consider installing rain barrels or cisterns next to your house to “harvest the rain” and provide clean, free water for your plants.



Where Does Your Rain Water Go?

Rainwater has the ability to carry pollutants and sediment into salmon habitat in the form of runoff. Your garden has the natural ability to prevent runoff and filter pollutants. If you are going to have any pathways or walks, use porous materials instead of pavement. Gravel paths, stepping stones, flagstones in sand, bricks, and other paving stone options allow the rain to return to the soil and reduce runoff. Be sure not to use creosote railroad ties in your gardens, as these are full of toxic chemicals.

During new construction, avoid disturbing native soil when possible. You can scrape away the topsoil before grading or excavating and save it for planting when construction is finished. Direct your runoff into grassy swales or rain gardens, but be sure to avoid installing rain gardens anywhere near a bluff, as the excess weight has the potential of causing landslides. For additional information about rain gardens, see the February 2010 edition of Shore Stewards News: <http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2010/February2010Newsletter.pdf>

Use Natural Pest Controls

We use a lot of chemicals in our gardens, which can wash into Puget Sound, endangering salmon and other marine life. We've discussed using compost and mulching as alternatives to fertilizer, but what about control of garden pests? There are natural ways to control those as well, using IPM, or Integrated Pest Management. There are a number of websites and books on this subject. Some examples from previous Shore Stewards newsletters include the January 2010 issue, which covered the topic of Crane Flies: <http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2010/January2010Newsletter.pdf>

The August 2009 issue describes methods to control yellow jackets without use of chemicals: <http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter/2009/Aug2009Newsletter.pdf>

New Coastal Atlas Maps from Dept. of Ecology Now Available

The Washington State Department of Ecology has just released an exciting new mapping tool that should be of interest to shoreline residents. The big changes this time around include a new and improved shoreline photo viewer that includes a way to simultaneously view photos of a location through different time periods. See what your property looked like in previous decades! Also included are new flood hazard maps. To see the new Coastal Atlas, go to: <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/coastalatlus/>



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.