

Landscaping with Native Plants

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Landscaping with native plants offers minimum maintenance and maximum enjoyment.

Would you rather have landscaping that needs little care once established, or plants that need lots of water, fertilizer, monitoring and pest control? (Plastic flowers and AstroTurf don't count here.)

If you prefer high-maintenance landscaping, have fun working to pamper those 'hothouse flowers' that require conditions far from those offered by our climate and soils. For a much easier landscape, you may want to choose plants that are native to the Pacific Northwest.

What makes a plant 'native?' In his book, 'Gardening with Native Plants,' Arthur Kruckeberg, professor emeritus of botany at the University of Washington, notes that, "Any plant untainted by artificial breeding or selection grows as a native somewhere in the world."

How true - many of our common houseplants grow as trees and shrubs in tropical climates, but you won't find rubber trees or ponytail palms flourishing next to madrona trees, one of the most dramatic Northwest natives.

Incorporating non-native plants, often called 'exotics,' requires great modification of the landscape, along with constant monitoring and care. Native plants have evolved the ability to resist the many rusts and other diseases common to our damp climate.

'Exotic' plants, such as those developed in drier areas, may succumb to soil, water or airborne disease, giving gardeners yet another problem to cope with. Some people enjoy challenge—others (like me) want to avoid having to apply anti-fungal sprays and other treatments. Planting natives can allow gardeners to avoid these messy applications all together, which also keeps these chemicals out of the soil and water.

If your landscape was planted with natives, you could be enjoying an early spring array of pink fawn lilies and brilliant flowers of red-flowering currant shrubs. Later in springtime, ferns unfurl green, waxy fronds. Wild ginger's purple flowers appear in summer, along with tiger lilies and the fragrant mock orange.

In autumn, native asters and twinflowers twinkle in the landscape. The rosy, bare branches of red osier dogwood shrubs create 'winter interest' in the landscape through the often-gray months until spring.



Top left: Red flowering currant, or *Ribes sanguineum*, blooms in the spring and thrives in shady woods to dry or rocky sites.

Top right: Delicate, light pink to white flowers of Bleeding hearts, or *Dicentra Formosa*, bloom from spring to early summer.

Left: Alpine fawn lily, or *Erythronium montanum*, is found in mountain forests and meadows.

Right: Licorice fern, or *Polypodium glycyrrhiza*, grows on wet mossy ground, logs and rocks or on the mossy side of big-leaf maples. Photos courtesy of www.wnps.org



‘The right plant in the right place with the right conditions for the plant’s mature size’ is the mantra for a healthy landscape. This applies to exotics as well as natives.

What better excuse for taking a hike than to learn about native plants! The Salal Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society leads wonderful walks through out Skagit County, where you can see native plants in their natural habitat. (For details, visit www.wnps.org/chapter_info/chapter_trips.html#salal.) You can find inspirations for your landscape while exploring the many ecosystems in western Washington, and learn how Native people used various plants for food, clothing and shelter. They cultivated camas lilies for food, sometimes burning prairies to eliminate competing plants! Many native plants also have medicinal uses. The field of ethnobotany covers these many traditional uses of native plants.

Always get your native plants from a native plant nursery or by permission from a friends’ property. Never dig up wild plants – they play a critical role in sustaining native wildlife. Let them fulfill their niche in the ecosystem! Native plants have evolved along with the insects, birds, fungi, mammals and other creatures that make up the interconnected webs in every

ecosystem. Observe, learn, and buy properly propagated plants for your landscape. Native birds, insects, etc., will appreciate this.

You can meet an array of native plants in many of the area's public gardens, including the collection from Dr. Kruckeberg's lifetime of native plant research at the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden in Shoreline, just north of Seattle. Visit the Skagit Display Garden, which is tended by the Salal Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society. It is located just south of the Discovery Garden, adjacent to WSU Research Center at 16650 SR 536, Mt. Vernon. For a list of other area gardens featuring native plants, see the Infobox.

There are over 3,000 plants native to our state. If you don't already enjoy them in your landscape, get to know their versatility and beauty. That is, if you seek minimal maintenance and plenty of native wildlife.

Native Plant appreciation

Native Plant Appreciation Week in our state is April 25-May 1. The Washington Native Plant Society has many special events planned. For details, visit www.wnps.org.

To learn about native plants from an expert, attend the next WSU Master Gardener **Know and Grow** class called: 'Enhancing Your Landscape with Native Plants'. Landscape architect Roger Hill will discuss ways to use native plants in the home landscape and suggest a wide variety of native plants to fit your needs. This free class takes place Tuesday, April 13, 1:00 – 2:30 pm, in the Auditorium of the WSU - Mount Vernon Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center, 16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway), west of Mount Vernon. For more information please call 360-428-4270 ext. 0 or visit http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/upcoming_events.htm.



Left: Cascade Oregon grape, or *Mahonia nervosa*, blooms in the spring, then fruit forms in late summer to early fall. **Right:** The native cow parsnip, or *heracleum lanatum*, exhibits a cluster of white flowers in the summer. **Photos courtesy of www.wnps.org**

Native Plants in NW Public Demonstration Gardens:

- Skagit County: [Skagit Display Gardens](#), just south of the Discovery Garden, adjacent to WSU Research Center at 16650 SR 536, Mt. Vernon.
- Whatcom County: Hovander Native Plant Garden at Hovander Demonstration Garden: <http://whatcom.wsu.edu/mastergardener/nativeplantgarden/index.htm>
- Snohomish County: McCullum Park at WSU Master Gardener headquarters.
- Thurston County: [Longhouse Ethnobotanical Garden and Waterwise Pollinator Garden](#)
- Thurston County: [Delbert McBride Ethnobotanical Garden](#)
- Jefferson County: [Kul Kah Han Garden](#)
- Pierce County: [Native Plant Garden at Pt. Defiance, Tacoma](#) and Lakewold Gardens just south of Tacoma: www.lakewoldgardens.org
- King County has several [demonstration gardens](#) featuring native plantings:
 1. Bellevue Botanical Garden: www.bellevuebotanical.org/
 2. Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island: www.bloedelreserve.org/
 3. Daybreak Ethnobotanical Garden, Discovery Park, Seattle
www.kingcounty.gov/environment/stewardship/nw-yard-and-garden/native-plant-resources-nw.aspx
 4. Eastpointe Native Plant Demonstration Garden in Bellevue: (425) 296-6602
 5. Erna Gunther Ethnobotanical Garden at the University of Washington, Seattle campus: www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/exhibits/details.php?ID=16&type=current
 6. Highline Community College, Des Moines. Plants from four regions: eastern WA., coastal, NW forest, and subalpine. S. 240th Street & Pacific Highway S., Des Moines. (206)878-3710
 7. Kruckeberg Botanic Garden, Shoreline (just north of Seattle): www.kruckeberg.org
 8. Olympic Sculpture Park: art and native plants on the waterfront north of downtown Seattle: www.seattleartmuseum.org/visit/OSP/AboutOSP/landscape.asp

Landscaping Resources:

- ✚ WSU Extension ‘Gardening in Western Washington – Native Plants’ <http://gardening.wsu.edu/text/nwnative.htm>
- ✚ Snohomish County Extension ‘Gardening in Western Washington – Gardening with Native Plants’ <http://gardening.wsu.edu/column/05-04.htm>
- ✚ Washington Native Plant Society – Native Plants for Western Washington Gardens and Restoration Projects: www.wnps.org/landscaping/herbarium/index.html
- ✚ Native Plant Guide: Create Your Own Native Plant Landscape: <http://green.kingcounty.gov/gonative/>
- ✚ Gunther, Erna Ethnobotany of Western Washington. University of Washington Press, Seattle 1964.
- ✚ Hortus West: journal listing sources for Northwest native plants
- ✚ Kruckeberg, Arthur R. Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2nd edition 1996 (1982).
- ✚ Pettinger, April and Brenda Costano. Native Plants in the Coastal Garden – A Guide for Gardeners in the Pacific Northwest. Timber Press, Portland, OR, revised edition 2002 (1996).
- ✚ Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast: a field guide by Pojar and McKinnon. 1994, Lone Pine Publishers.