



SPOTLIGHT ON... NATIVE PLANTS

Native Plants Work in a Myriad of Ways

Native plants are ideal for home gardens: at the same time they provide diversity to a landscape, they can also create a habitat for wildlife. Native plants are mostly disease and pest free and usually survive very happily in our relatively wet winters and springs with drought-like summer months from mid-July through mid-October most years. Native plants rarely if ever need fertilizer. In our region where fungi and molds happen naturally, native plants can have diseases and conditions, but they usually don't succumb to these conditions. The various fungi and phytophthoras that attack our madrones are an example. Newly planted natives also need regular watering their first two to three years until they're established in a landscape.



The native plants in my own garden, where we've lived for over 20 years, have never needed fertilizer. A few of the natives festooning my half acre garden are: Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*); Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*); Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*); Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*); Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*); Mock orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*); Pacific Ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*); twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*); Mahonia (Oregon Grape); Trillium; Red Huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*); Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*); Red Elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*); Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*); Vine Maple (*Acer circinatum*); Sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*), Bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) and Red-Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*). All of these plants provide great habitat (and food) for myriad creatures plus give continuous interest to our garden. They also coexist very well with the ornamental plants in my garden, all of which are quite similar in growth, habitat and needs to our native plants.

Planting Natives and Ornamentals Together



A lovely combination of Sword Fern, Salal, Japanese Maple, varieties of rhododendrons, Mountain Hemlock, and Douglas Fir.
Photo by Peg Tillery.

Native plants blend in well with other ornamental plants. The trick (if there is one) to incorporating native plants, or selecting native plants, is to determine how much size (height and width) is available for the plants to inhabit. Trees can get very tall and wide and some natives can sprawl throughout the garden. It's also important to know what the particular native's cultural requirements are (i.e. soil type, water requirements, sun/shade requirements). Remember, some native plants like dry rocky soils and others like moist, humus rich soils (like the duff in a forest). It's a good idea to visit a local park or nursery where natives are already in abundance to get an idea on which ones appeal to your particular tastes, or will fit your particular site conditions.



Oregon Grape, Salal, Evergreen Huckleberry, Smokebush Cotinus, and Rhododendron. Photo by Peg Tillery.



Nootka Rose *Rosa nutkana* Photo by:
<http://www.nwplants.com/> CC BY-SA 3.0

Finding the Right Plants for Your Situation

If you're working from a mandated list provided through a regulatory entity, realize that these lists are sometimes very general to meet the needs of a wide range of conditions. You may wish to consult with an experienced landscape designer or architect who has knowledge and expertise in working with current rules and regulations. WSNLA (Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association) has a list of CPH (Certified Professional Horticulturists) who have a background in these matters. Visit <http://www.wsnla.org/> to learn more about WSNLA and to find a resource list of CPHs in your area. In some counties, WSU Extension has Native Plant Advisor volunteer educators who can often answer your questions in selecting the right plant for your particular situation. Call your WSU Extension Office for more information. Another good way to see how native plants grow is to visit a nearby nature center, park or preserve.

Publications and Resources

WSU Publications: MISC0274 "Winter in the Woods: A Winter Guide to Deciduous Native Plants in Western Washington" gives tips on identifying bare plants by their twigs, texture and features such as leaf scars and fruits and seeds. The guide includes a glossary of scientific terms to aid in identification, plus notes on commonly confused plants. This guide is helpful when trying to figure out what vegetation to cut back or remove when establishing a garden on a new piece of property or expanding an existing garden. You do not want to remove a great native plant by accident. The cost for this publication is \$6 plus shipping and handling. To order, go to: <https://pubs.wsu.edu/ListItems.aspx?Keyword=MISC0274>

Another extremely valuable publication is MISC0273 "Grow Your Own Native Landscape: A Guide to Identifying, Propagating and Landscaping in Western Washington with Native Plants." Once you see this publication, you'll want it. This particular publication is no longer in a print version, however you can download the entire publication for free. Download a free copy of this publication at <https://pubs.wsu.edu/ListItems.aspx?Keyword=MISC0273>

Washington State University Extension has a great website on native plants. Link to: <http://pnwplants.wsu.edu/> to find abundant information. The photos and plant recommendations for a wide variety of situations and growing conditions are a good place to start and even finish on your quest to explore the attributes of using and/or incorporating native plants into an existing or new landscape.

Recommended Books:

Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast -- Washington, Oregon, British Columbia & Alaska, Jim Pojar & Andy MacKinnon, editors., 528 p; Lone Pine Publishing, 1994.

This paperback publication is divided into color coded sections to aid in choosing a plant or looking up a plant that has peaked your interest. The definition of natives includes plants found in Washington, Oregon, Alaska and British Columbia. Pojar and MacKinnon also list the ways in which the plants were used for food, clothing and/or shelter by natives and early settlers and often still persist in use to this day.

Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest, Arthur R. Kruckeberg, 284 p; UW Press, second

edition revised 1996.

This book is also in a sturdy paperback format. Color photos are included in the center of the book, but nearly every page includes pen and ink line drawings of the particular plant being described. Many northwest gardeners call this the native plant bible for gardeners.

Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest, Russell Link, 320 p; UW Press/Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, 1999, also a sturdy paperback version, includes how to design a landscape or explore and/or edit an existing landscape and includes abundant lists of plants and landscaping ideas. The underlying theme is how to attract wildlife to our gardens, how to discourage them if one has too many pesky critters, and in doing so helps us to understand how the landscapes, human beings and wildlife are interconnected. The plant listings include sizes of plants, various planting zones and climates and features tons of useful appendices with abundant information and cross references. Even though there are no photos or color prints, if you can only purchase one book, this one is the book for learning about and actually incorporating native plants into our gardens.

Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest by Russell Link is the follow up book to Landscaping for Wildlife listed above. It too is a sturdy paperback publication, and is crammed full of abundant information about the critters who share our neighborhoods and surrounding natural areas. Its main purpose is to give us an appreciation of the creatures living in our own backyards and byways, but it helps us cope with them when they can become pesky or a hazard. It doesn't educate us about the native plants, but does educate us about why native plants are a very good thing and how all the creatures who were here before us depended on these plants. We really can live peaceably with the wild critters in our region.

This "Spotlight On" publication was originally a Shore Stewards Newsletter from February 2012, written by garden writer and WSU Extension Educator Peg Tillery and provided by Renee Johnson, WSU Extension in Kitsap County



Shore Stewards is a program of Washington State University Extension.

Extension programs and policies are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, sex, religion, age, color, creed, national or ethnic origin; physical, mental or sensory disability; marital status, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.