Learn more about plants in the Puget Sound region

Whether planning a garden or hiking in the woods, understanding our native flora helps us to appreciate and protect our natural resources. The Washington Native Plant Society offers monthly lectures on topics of interest to its members – such as gardening with natives and information on Washington's plant communities. Some chapters offer plant workshops where chapter botanists teach plant identification techniques. The Washington Native Plant Society produces the quarterly publication Douglasia as well as local chapter newsletters. There are also many resources and links available on the Internet at www.wnps.org.

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Some Useful Resources

Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon, Eds. 1994.
Flora of the Pacific Northwest: An Illustrated Manual. C. Leo Hitchcock and Arthur Cronquist. 1973.
Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest, 2nd Edition. Arthur R. Kruckeberg. 1996.
Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest. Russell Link. 1999.
Native Plants in the Coastal Garden. 2nd Edition. April Pettinger. 2002.
Grow your Own Native Landscape. Item MISC0273, WSU Cooperative Extension. Revised 6/99. (call 1-800-723-1763)
Propagation of Pacific Northwest Native Plants. Robin Rose, Chachulski and Haase. 1998.

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Landscaping Ideas For the Environment

Water - Wise Gardening

Wet winters and dry summers: How does your garden grow?

The Puget Sound region has a well-deserved reputation for wet, gray winters, but what happens in the summer when we want our gardens to grow? The annual rainfall is about 35 inches a year but only about 10% of that falls between June and September. Compare this with New York City where half of the annual rainfall of 40 inches falls in the summer months. Even Tucson, Arizona has a wetter summer than the Seattle area.

But don't go running out to buy desert plants. The region's wet winter will overwhelm most drought-tolerant plants from other parts of the world. The plants that work best are those that evolved in the Puget Sound region and are well suited to the unique climate patterns of our area.

WATER-WISE GARDENING WITH PUGET SOUND NATIVES

For a garden or landscape that needs little watering, try mimicking one of the natural plant communities in the Puget Sound that are well-adapted to low summer rainfall and coarse, excessively-drained soils.

Bluffs and Forest Edges

Imagine the edge of a forest on a bluff above Puget Sound. There is some shade and moisture from the nearby woods, but the exposure to sun and wind dries the soil and stresses the plants. There are many plants suited for landscaping that grow well in these harsh conditions. In urban gardens, there are borders or fencerows that can be planted to mimic the bluffs or forest edges in nature. For areas with exposure to sunshine for at least part of the day and dry, well-drained soils, consider using plants adapted to these conditions.

Shrubs
- Nootka Rose (*Rosa nutkana*)
- Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*)
- Red-flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)
- Mock-orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)
- Hairy Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos columbiana*)
- Tall Oregon-grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)
- Soapberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*)
- Honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa or L. hispidula)*

Trees
- Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*)
- Shore Pine (*Pinus contorta* var. *contorta*)
- Rocky Mountain Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*)
- Garry Oak (*Quercus garryana*)

Groundcovers and Low Shrubs
- Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)
- Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)
- Oregon Box (*Paxistima myrsinites*)
- Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)

Olympic Rainshadow Meadows and South Puget Sound Prairies

In areas with southern exposure and thin or coarse soils, the conditions favor a mixed grass and wildflower community. Grasses that are found in Puget Sound meadows and coastal grasslands include Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) and red fescue (*Festuca rubra*). It is important to find the locally adapted varieties of these species so they will tolerate wet winters. A dryland sedge also common in prairies and dry meadows is *Carex inops* (also known as *Carex pensylvanica*). A beautiful array of wildflowers grow amongst the grasses, many of them flowering in the moist spring and going dormant in the dry summer.

Meadow Wildflowers

- Blue Camas (*Camassia quamash*)
- Puget Balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza deltoidea*)
- Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon hendersonii*)
- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium douglasii*)
- Oregon Sunshine (*Eriophyllum lanatum*)
- Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*)
- Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca* or *F. virginiana*)
- Tiger Lily (*Lilium columbianum*)
- Blue Violet (*Viola adunca*)
- Large-leaved Lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*)
- Prairie Lupine (*Lupinus lepidus*)

Dry Forest Community

Puget Sound forest plants are adapted to less rain than those in the wetter Cascades and western Olympic Peninsula and they grow well in coarse, low-nutrient soils. In a shady yard, consider creating a dry, forest community mixing trees with an understory of shade-tolerant groundcovers.

Trees

- Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*)
- Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
- Western White Pine (*Pinus monticola*)

Shrubs

- Vine Maple (*Acer circinatum*)
- Beaked Hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*)
- Thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*)
- Little Baldhip Rose (*Rosa gymnocarpa*)
- Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*)
- Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*
- Shiny leaved spiraea (*Spiraea betulifolia*)

Groundcovers/Herbs

- Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)
- Low Oregon-grape (*Berberis nervosa*)
- Twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*)
- Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*)
- Deer Fern (*Blechnum spicant*)
- Vanilla Leaf (*Achlys triphylla*)
- Piggyback Plant (*Tolmiea menziesii*)
- Bedstraw (*Galium triflorum*)
- Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra formosa*)
- Fringecup (*Tellima grandiflora*)
- Tiger lily (*Lilium columbianum*)
- Evergreen Violet (*Viola sempervirens*)

Beach Community/Coastal Strand

Plants that are adapted to saltwater beaches are especially good at conserving water and growing in thin, coarse soil with little organic matter. These plants can withstand salt, wind and sun exposure. The long, thin areas with vegetation along beaches are called coastal strands. A small area in the garden with full sun and sandy soil might be just the spot to create a mini-coastal strand or dune community. Plant the beach grasses and sedges mixed in with wildflowers.

- American Dunegrass (*Elymus mollis*)
- Gumweed (*Grindelia integrifolia*)
- Yellow Sand-verbena (*Abronia latifolia*)
- Large-headed Sedge (*Carex macrocephala*)
- Coastal Strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*)
- Sea Thrift (*Armeria maritima*)
- Sea Blush (*Plectritis congesta*)
- Villous Cinquefoil (*Potentilla villosa*)

Tips for Water-Efficient Gardening

- ❖ Research the water requirements of your plants before planting them and then group the plants by watering requirements.
  - Plant drought-tolerant plants away from lawn areas or gardens that will be regularly watered or plant them higher on slopes to minimize over-watering them.
  - Put higher water users in naturally wet areas or depressions such as at the bottom of slopes or put them where you can get water to them without having to water the rest of the garden.
- ❖ Plant in the fall and early spring in order to give plants a chance to develop healthy roots before the dry season.
- ❖ Use layered plantings. Shade from trees will help understory plants thrive and tall grasses or shrubs will help shelter more tender herbaceous plants from exposure to wind and sun.
- ❖ Consider replacing part or all of your lawn with drought-tolerant native shrubs, groundcovers and/or stones and pebbles. The lawn you keep should be easy to water without watering the other parts of your garden.
- ❖ Cover all exposed soil with dense plantings and mulch. The mulch will slow down evaporation from the soil and will keep the soil cool and moist.
  - Mulch generously with garden compost, leaf mold, chipped yard waste or even gravel or newspaper. Use the mulch that best mimics the natural habitat of the plants – rock garden plants grow best with a dry mulch like pea gravel but forest understory plants thrive on leaf mold and humus.
  - For forest plants, encourage soil microorganisms such as fungi because they will enhance the ability of the plants to tolerate drought. Use leaf mold as a mulch, don't disturb the soil, leave woody debris on the ground when possible and avoid chemicals such as fungicides.
- ❖ Pamper native shrubs and trees for the first summer or two with extra water to help them become established and they will reward you for years to come with little or no watering.
- ❖ Control weeds regularly and especially in the summer – they take water from your garden plants.
- ❖ Water at dusk and dawn or use drip irrigation and soaker hoses. Much of the water from sprinklers is lost to evaporation especially during the day and it is more difficult to direct the water only where it is needed.
- ❖ Water deeply and infrequently. Soak the roots and then wait until the top few inches dry out before watering again.