

**THINK OF EACH SPECIES IN AN ECOSYSTEM AS A MEMBER OF A TEAM. THE TEAM WEAKENS EVERY TIME A MEMBER IS LOST. THIS LOWERED BIODIVERSITY MAKES LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS MORE VULNERABLE TO THREATS.**

*Continued from Page 6*

Many ecosystems in the Columbia-Pacific region are pale shadows of what they used to be, with native species partly or entirely replaced with invasive ones. Even if a place has some native plants, it's likely that the number of species represented is far lower than it was a couple of centuries ago. Think of each species in an ecosystem as a member of a team. The team weakens every time a member is lost. This lowered biodiversity makes local ecosystems more vulnerable to threats like pollution, severe weather, habitat fragmentations and climate change.

While local ecosystems can't necessarily be restored to their pristine state, they can be helped by an increase in the number of native species in the area. It's not practical to suggest breeding rare butterflies in your yard. But by using native plants in your garden, you can create a habitat that helps to also attract native insects, birds and other wildlife that rely on them for food.

First, determine how much space to set aside for native plants. If you have a large yard space, that's great. However, a pot of native wildflowers on an apartment porch is worth the effort too. Pay attention to how much sun that a location gets, both through the day and throughout the year, because this will help determine which plants may thrive the best. If you're planting in the ground, take note of the soil. Most local native plants are going to be fine with going straight into the ground since they're adapted to local soil profiles. However, some may need the ground to stay wetter, so planting them in the middle of a sun exposed yard that dries out quickly isn't going to be the best option for them.

If you want to do extra homework, research what the original ecosystem was like where you live. While mixed conifer forests are common in the Columbia-Pacific region, the coast has also historically had both long grass and short grass meadows, most of which have either been plowed up for agriculture or development or taken over by non-native beach grasses. Trying to recreate that historic ecosystem may not be fully feasible now given yard and garden constraints. Land mostly shaded by trees probably won't be ideal for meadow plants. But do the best with what you've got.

Next, it's time to select your plants. There are several native plant nurseries in the Pacific Northwest, including a few on the coast. Many general plant nurseries in the region also tend to have at least some

native species available, even if it isn't their specialty. Don't expect to see them at big box stores, instead go with locally owned nurseries. Even nurseries that don't normally carry native plants can sometimes order them for you, though you may have to give more information on which species are actually native and which ones are non-native plants that simply do well in the region.

Finally, search for local native plants and see them ranked by how many native insect species they support using the National Wildlife Federation's native plant finder. This tool shows how well each plant can contribute to an entire food web. So if you only have room for a few species, consider choosing those that support more insects.

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Photos by Rebecca Lexa

**ABOVE: A freshly planted bed features beach strawberry and kinnikinnick, both local native plants that make good groundcovers. BELOW: Domestic currants and native salmonberry bushes grow together, demonstrating a successful mix of native plants.**

