

Native plants for local gardens

Working with the landscape to find flowers, shrubs, hedges

BY REBECCA LEXA

Ecologically valuable and supportive of local wildlife, native plants are those that have adapted already to local climate and soil patterns. For gardeners, this means that they're easier to grow than many non-native species, and make an excellent addition to any garden.

That said, some are tougher to cultivate than others. There's a great difference between a well established native ecosystem and a cultivated residential garden. With some time and a little experimentation, however, a lovely array of native plants can grow right outside of your home. Some smaller plants will even thrive on an apartment balcony.

The following native plant species may be found along the coastline, in nearby mountain areas or both, and are available at nurseries across the Pacific Northwest. Some species may also be propagated by cuttings. Be sure to check local laws and regulations before collecting plant materials from public lands, or get permission from private land owners.

Wildflowers

Want a little extra pop of color? Native wildflowers provide a lovely variety of seasonal beauty. One of my favorites is the Pacific bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*), with a more delicate pink color than cultivated species. Native violets like early blue (*Viola adunca*), stream (*Viola glabella*) and evergreen (*Viola sempervirens*) make lovely additions, while Western lily of the valley (*Maianthemum dilatatum*) sprouts lovely green heart shaped leaves in the spring. The lily's white flowers will in time become red berries, persisting even after its greenery fades in the fall. Beach strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) is one of two strawberry species hybridized into the local landscape. The berry makes an attractive evergreen ground cover. To add a nice climbing vine, try planting western honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa*).

To make local pollinators happy, consider adding both yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*). These plants both feature tall stems with clusters of white flowers. While coastal seashore lupine (*Lupinus littoralis*) isn't common in nurseries, other local lupines like broadleaf (*L. latifolius*) and riverbank (*L.*

rivularis) are often available. Another choice for fans of purple flowers is Oregon iris (*Iris tenax*), or Douglas iris (*Iris douglasiana*), which ranges in shade from off-white to rich violet. Native Nootka (*Rosa nutkana*) and baldhip (*Rosa gymnocarpa*) roses can cross over into shrub territory in size, and feature simple but lovely pink flowers.

Shrubs

For native plant shrubs, consider planting either of two local huckleberries, red (*Vaccinium parvifolium*) and evergreen (*Vaccinium ovatum*). Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), which forms a perennial ground cover along local trails, also features edible berries, while Western thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*) grows with bright red berries. Blackcap raspberry (*Rubus leucodermis*) grows fruit resembling a blackberry, though the rest of this plant gives it away as a raspberry. Pair its berries with beaked hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*) for more edible garden offerings.

For a hedge, try Pacific wax myrtle (*Myrica californica*), which can grow up to 30 feet tall and features dense evergreen foliage. The region's most common rhododendron, mock azalea (*Rhododendron menziesii*) is not commonly found in the nursery trade, but its cousin the Pacific rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophylla*) is more easily found. Both can grow to form excellent hedges.

Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*) is another hardy native shrub with lovely white flowers, while twinberry honeysuckle (*Lonicera involucrata*) is a native bush with bright yellow flowers, beloved by hummingbirds. Red Osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) shows off bright red branches, even in winter when the leaves have been shed. Pacific ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*) is fast growing, can compete well with invasive plants, and is a good soil stabilizer for slopes and embankments.

Other notable natives

Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) also makes a lovely ground cover, and is even tolerant of salty ocean breezes. Plenty of native fern species also grow quite well on the North Coast, like deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*), western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*) and lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*).

Moss gardens are fairly easy to establish too, even from small fragments. Common local species include square goose neck moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*), common haircap moss (*Polytrichum commune*)



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The Nootka Rose is a lovely addition to any native plant garden.



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The common yarrow is a widely seen regional native species.

and neat feather moss (*Pseudoscleropodium purum*). Since many commercially sold mosses are harvested unsustainably, I recommend getting permission from private landowners to gather small sections from healthy

populations.

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