Landscaping with Native Plants

Mason Conservation District
Karin Strelioff, MLA
Landscaping with Native Plants

1. What is “native”
2. Why use native plants?
3. Problem plants
4. Design Tips
5. Favorite plants
6. Planting Tips
7. Resources
What’s in a name?

Native Plants:

"Washington native plants are those species that occur or historically occurred within the state boundaries before European contact, based upon the best available scientific and historical documentation."

- Washington Native Plant Society

- **Exotic Plants:** Plants that were introduced from another region or bred as cultivars from regionally local plants (plants found on the West coast, for example).
  - **Named Cultivars** – can include natives propagated for specific desirable characteristics
    
    *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* ‘Vancouver Jade’

- **Naturalized Plants:** Exotic plants that persist in their new location without cultivation. Some become “invasive.”

- **Invasive Plants:** Invasive species are plants, animals, or organisms that spread so quickly that they harm other wildlife or natural processes. - *Washington Invasive Species Council*
Problem Plants in the Pacific NW

Invasive: Himalayan Blackberry
*Rubus discolor* or *R. procerus, R. armeniacus*
- native to western Europe

Invasive: English Ivy
*Hedera helix*
- native to most of Europe and southwest Asia
Problem Plants

**Invasive:** Scotch Broom

*Cytisus scoparius*

- Native to western and central Europe

**Naturalized:** Compact Oregon Grape – a cultivar

*Mahonia aquifolium 'Compacta'*

- Interbreeding w/ local populations may alter local gene pool
Why Landscape with Native Plants?
Practical Reasons …

1. **Save time** (generally low maintenance)
2. **Save money** (few inputs, bareroot = inexpensive)
3. **Protect your property** (erosion, stormwater, invasives)
4. **Help the neighbors** (repeat above)
5. **Protect our local economy** (water quality, recreation)
6. **Conserve natural resources for your children . . . and their children...** (ground and surface water protection, forest products, hunting and shellfish . . .)
A Few More Reasons . . .

1. Develop a “Sense of Place”
2. Opportunity to learn
3. Support your wildlife community
How to Landscape with Native Plants?
A few starting thoughts . . .

1. **It’s okay to mix it up!** Ornamentals and natives both have benefits – don’t hesitate to use both in your landscape. Let gardening be a joy.

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100% native

Mix of native and ornamental
2. Trees are worth their weight in gold:

Only remove trees when truly necessary. Trees help control stormwater, mitigate erosion, protect water quality, assist aquifer recharge . . .
Protect your trees!

- Choose the right tree for your site and your goals.
- Hire a professional arborist to prune for views rather than removing the tree.
3. Seasonal wet areas are very important. They help to recharge groundwater and filter out pollution. Don’t drain these areas! Instead, integrate them into your garden design.
Quick Design Tips

1. Defining Goals
2. Considerations
3. Narrowing focus
4. “Orderly” landscapes
5. “Natural” landscapes
1. Clarify Goals

Ecological restoration vs. landscape design

Restoration goals might include:

– Improve salmon habitat
– Encourage nesting sites for migratory birds
– Increase diversity of stream aquatic insects
– Expand water storage to improve flood control
– Prevent spread of non-native species
– Increase rare plant populations

Landscaping* goals might include:

– Hide undesirable views
– Reduce road noise
– Provide bright fall foliage
– Create shade to reduce cooling costs
– Display pleasing color combinations
– Delineate paths and sitting areas

* Will still have serious benefits to the environment!
SAMPLE PLANTING PLAN: LAKE SHORELINE

Focus on Pacific Northwest Native Plants

**Symbol Table**

- **Waters Edge (saturated soils)**
  - Slough Sedge (Carex obnupta)*
  - Small-fruited Bulrush (Scirpus microcarpus)
  - Hardstem Bulrush (Scirpus acutus)
  - Sawgrass Sedge (Carex stipata)
  - Tufted Hairgrass (Deschampsia cespitosa)
  - Common Rush (Juncus effusus)
  - Slender Rush (Juncus effusus)
  - Tapered Rush (Juncus acuminatus)

- **Lower Bank (moist soils)**
  - Oregon Ash (Fraxinus latifolia)
  - Western Redcedar (Thuja plicata)*
  - Red Elderberry (Sambucus racemosa)*
  - Pacific Ninebark (Physocarpus capitatus)
  - Black Hawthorne (Crataegus douglasii)
  - Red-osier Dogwood (Cornus sericea)*
  - High Bush Cranberry (Viburnum edule)
  - Salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis)
  - Daggerleaf Rush (Juncus effusus)
  - Hookers Willow (Salix hoocheriana)
  - Pacific Willow (Salix lasiandra)
  - Sitka Willow (Salix sitkensis)
  - Western Hemlock (Tsuga heterophylla)*
  - Sitka Spruce (Picea sitchensis)*
  - Shore Pine (Pinus contorta v. contorta)
  - Big Leaf Maple (Acer macrophyllum)*
  - Vine Maple (Acer circinatum)*
  - Western Hazelnut (Corylus cornuta)*
  - Serviceberry (Amelanchier alnifolia)
  - Salal (Gaultheria shallon)*
  - Sword fern (Polystichum munitum)*
  - Snowberry (Symphoricarpos albus)*
  - Swamp Rose (Rosa pisocarpa)
  - Nootka Rose (Rosa nutkana)
  - Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus)
  - Deer Fern (Blechnum spicatum)*
  - False Solomon’s Seal (Smilacina racemosa)*

* = tolerant to deep shade. Alternative plant choices are listed in gray.
2. Basic design considerations

Consider site conditions, spatial use, views, circulation, maintenance.

Define the spaces you will use . . . and those you won’t use.

Views? Inside & Outside

Circulation? Define paths before you plant.
CONSIDER MATURE PLANT SIZE

Choose and locate plants based on their eventual “mature size” – not by how they look at the nursery, and not based on the plan to “prune” them (unless you love topiary).

Look for examples in the landscape around you – this will allow you to walk up to the plant and see what the experience is like. Take your camera/cell phone and take pictures.

Select plants with different mature heights to create more interest.
3. Narrow your focus

What can you realistically achieve now?

“Zones of focus”
4. Design Styles (simplified)

“Natural” or “Orderly” . . . You can use native plants in both styles.
“Orderly” Landscapes

Neat

Uncluttered

Appear “cared for”

Most common

Challenges

• Less habitat value (less diversity)
• Needs regular maintenance to keep everything looking tidy and clean.
Typical “orderly” characteristics

• Simplicity

• Linear, geometric spaces

• Repetition of limited plant species

• Planting heights limited

Dan Kiley, “Miller House” (IN) Modernist Landscape Architect
Seattle garden
“Natural” Landscapes

Piet Oudolf, Garden Designer
“Natural” Landscape Characteristics

• Diversity is fundamental (10-15 species, minimum)
• Organic shapes, curves, variety of sizes
• Choose plants emphasizing 4 seasons
• Repeat species in “drifts” (groups of the same species); repeat accent plants for color, shape
• Great habitat value: pollinators, birds
• Maintenance: replacement of perennials, clean up, mulching . . .
Why does habitat diversity matter?

“Natural” Landscapes

(http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/landscape-design LANDSCAPE.htm)
Natural Landscapes: wildlife

- Plant in layers of different heights
- Use a diversity of species
- Emphasize fruits, nuts, flowers, 4 seasons
- Provide a source of water (with an escape route)
- Consider connections – many animals don’t like to cross open spaces; others thrive along edges
Create “order” through repetition of color / species
Challenges to “natural” look:

• Can appear “messy” or disorderly

• Visually stimulating - or overwhelming?

• Periodic investment in new plants

• Attracts bees/bugs/birds; pollen
Mixing Styles

Roberto Burle Marx, Brazilian Landscape Architect (1909-1994)
Color
- Use “drifts” (bunches of the same plant) with similar colors
- Add one contrasting color
- Provide areas for visual “rest” – just green – to allow eyes to rest and to provide variation.
- Repeat color blocks throughout the garden to unify the design
Combine Styles . . .

- Clean edges
- Open and dense
- Layered planting
- Species of different heights
- Repetition of accent plants or trees
Bloedel Reserve, Bainbridge Island
Sculptural elements, Repetition, Linear tree plantings, diverse understory
• Hardscape materials like concrete, metal, and wood contrast with diverse plantings. Simple, clean, elegant lines and visual interest.
Leavenworth, WA: Strictly WA native landscape
Rain Garden in Olympia – mixed natives and ornamentals (L. Andrews)
Wildlife garden in King County, including “snag” and native species
Wildlife garden in King County: seasonal wet area becomes a water feature. . .
PUD #3 - 90% native species with ornamental accents
WA Park Arboretum (UW Botanic Garden):

Mixed native/non-native landscape

Retaining wall and native planting above . . .
UW campus, new dorms - native planting in landscape (GGN)
Implementing your Design

1. Soils + Site Prep

2. Picking your planting stock

3. Right Plant, Right Place: Site Conditions + Exposure
Planting & Soils

- Generally, you don’t need to amend soils for native plants – they will adapt to the location.

- Add compost and mulch to the soil surface around plants to help retain soil moisture and discourage weeds, provide slow-release nutrients

- Water plants through the first two summers (minimum)
Forms of Native Plants Available

Container Stock

- easy to transplant
- can leave in pot for a long period of time
- Available all year

Expensive, Heavy to move
Bare Root Plants

- Inexpensive
- Easy to handle
- Light weight

- Only available in winter
- Must be planted quickly
- Must be stored in cool, moist conditions
- Roots must stay moist and tops dormant until planting in late fall or early spring

Planting Technique:

- Soak roots in water overnight
- Dig hole
- Mound soil in bottom
- Spread roots over mound, separating them
- Backfill with original soil
Right Plant, Right Place
Favorite Pacific Northwest Natives for Landscaping
Acer circinatum (Vine Maple)

- Deciduous tree / shrub
- Slow growing to 25 ft
- Part Shade, moist to dry
* Great for pots
Fall color
Specimen plant
Wildlife
Myrica californica (Pacific Wax Myrtle)

- Evergreen, Large shrub
- Fast growing to 15 ft
- Sun, well drained soils
- Great for hedges, privacy
Blechnum spicant (Deer Fern)

1 – 3 ft tall
Common under-story plant in moist conifer forests.
* Great for texture, shade, low growing groundcover, groups or drifts
Polystichum munitum
(Western Sword Fern)

To 4 ft tall
Common under-story plant in moist conifer forests.
* Great for texture, shade, midsized shrub, groups or drifts
Gaultheria shallon
Salal

To 4 ft tall

Common under-story plant in moist conifer forests.

Shade / Part-shade

Moist to dry

* Great for low hedges, fruit, shade, midsized shrub, groups or drifts
Arbutus menziesii (Pacific madrone)
To 100 ft tall

Dry, sun, slopes and shorelines

Extremely difficult to establish; hates disturbance

Prone to several diseases

* Beautiful bark, flowers, fruit, open growth habit for shoreline stabilization and views
Berberis sp. (Oregon Grape)

Tall (3-6’): Dry, sun, slopes, shorelines
Low (1-3’): shade, understory, moist-dry

Slow growing, tough, spreads
- Beautiful flowers, fruit, leaves
- Not fun to walk through – sharp leaves
Berberis aquifolium (Tall Oregon Grape)
Berberis nervosa (Low Oregon Grape)
Vaccinium ovatum
(Evergreen huckleberry)

To 4 ft tall
Common under-story plant
Shade / Part-shade
Moist to dry
* Great for low hedges, fruit, shade, midsized shrub, evergreen foliage
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi (Kinnikinnick)
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi (Kinnikinnick)
Fragaria chiloensis (Coastal Strawberry)
Holodiscus discolor (Oceanspray)

Deciduous Shrub- Up to 15 ft.
Salt spray tolerant

Blooms: April – August
Flowers: Creamy white, sometimes blushing salmon/pink
Moisture req.: dry - moist
Exposure req.: sun – shade
**Rosa sp.**

**Rosa Gymnocarpa (Baldhip Rose)**
- Up to 5 ft
- Leaves: 1- cm long 5-9 toothed leaflets
- Flowers: pale pink; 1-2 cm across
- Fruits: Purplish red; 1-2 cm

**Rosa nutkana (Nootka Rose)**
- Up to 10 ft.
- Leaves: 1-7 cm long 5-7 leaflets
- Flowers: Pink; 4-8 cm across
- Fruit: Orange to scarlet; 6-10mm
Rubus spectabilis (Salmonberry)

3-10 ft tall

Moist places
Philadelphus lewisii (Mock Orange)

To 10 ft tall

Dry, full sun, rugged
Ribes sanguineum
(Red flowering currant)
Ribes sanguineum
(Red flowering currant)
Quercus garryana (Garry Oak)
Garrya elliptica (Silk Tassle)
Deschampsia cespitosa
(Tufted hairgrass)
Physocarpos capitatus
(Pacific Ninebark)
Cornus sericea (Red-osier dogwood)
Amelanchier alnifolia (Western Serviceberry / Saskatoon Berry)
Symphoricarpos albus (Snowberry)
Oemeleria cerasiformis  (Osoberry)
Pacific Rhododendron
(*Rhododendron macrophyllum*)
Rubus parviflorus (Thimbleberry)
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Acer macrophyllum (Big Leaf maple)
Douglas fir
Grand fir
Thank You!

Karin Strelloff, MLA
Environmental Specialist / Landscape Designer,

Mason Conservation District
450 W. Business Park Road
Shelton, WA 98584
360.427.9436  x 122
karinls@masoncd.org