



Water-Wise Gardening with Pollinators

*Indicates pollinators visit the flowers of these plants

The Puget Sound region has a well-deserved reputation for wet, gray winters, but what happens in the summer? Only 10 percent of our rainfall occurs between June and September, when we want our gardens to grow. The plants that work best are those that evolved in the region and are well suited to our unique climate. 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 fence rows 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 that are 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 grows among 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*)

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, narrow 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*)
- * Slender Cinquefoil (*Potentilla gracilis*)

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 (These trees may host pine white butterflies)

- * 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*)
- * Birch-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*)
- * Tiger Lily (*Lilium columbianum*)
- Evergreen Violet (*Viola sempervirens*)

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, chopped 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 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 two summers 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.

Washington Native Plant Society

6310 NE 74th Street, Suite 215E

Seattle, WA 98115

Phone (206) 527-3210 www.wnps.org wnps@wnps.org