

NATIVE PLANTS AND TREES OF OREGON



**LOW-MAINTENANCE NATIVE PLANTS TO
CONSERVE WATER, HELP POLLINATORS**



NATIVE PLANTS AND TREES: VITAL TO HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS

As open space and wildlife habitat diminish in urbanized environments across the country, bee and pollinator populations are down as well. What can we do so that our parks, neighborhoods and backyards can be healthier, better functioning ecosystems?

Whether you're a landowner, gardener, or manager of parks and open spaces, there are some easy actions you can take to help bees and other pollinators. Consider the many benefits of using native plants and trees to boost the ecosystem services of your neighborhood and community.

In addition to being helpful for the environment, native plants are often low maintenance, attract pollinators including butterflies, and are drought-tolerant. Just remember all newly planted plants need regular watering for the first one-to-three years until established, especially during the warmer months of summer and fall.

While not a complete list, here are a few native trees and plants to consider.

NATIVE TREES

Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*)

This deciduous tree has dark-green leaves with serrated edges and smooth, light-gray bark and grows naturally on cool, moist slopes. It can reach 40 to 50 feet in height.

Several birds - including pine siskin and common redpoll - eat the seeds of this low-maintenance tree. Plant in full sun and prune for structure when young.

Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*)

Bigleaf Maple is found naturally in moist areas and within riparian (streamside) hardwood forests. This is an easy-to-grow tree with yellow flowers in the spring that bees flock to for early-season pollen resources. Their large, glossy green leaves change to yellow in the fall.

These handsome trees can reach 40 – 80 feet high and have a wide canopy which make them a good tree for shade, but they are not recommended for planting along city streets as they create hazard trees.

Plant in part-shade to full sun on large lots or in very large yards, allowing plenty of room for height and girth. Since mature trees are sometimes prone to problems with decay, be sure to prune while young to insure one dominant leader.

Cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*)

This large shrub or small tree is a frequently overlooked native species of buckthorn found in Oregon and western North America, from northern California to British Columbia. It's an especially good choice for smaller yards, though it can reach a height of 30 feet.

Its bark is brownish to silver-gray and leaves are simple, oval, deciduous and alternate, clustered near the ends of twigs. Small cup-shaped green-white flowers appear in May and later turn to small bird-friendly berries. Provides good fall color, prefers shade or morning sun and moist, well-drained sites. It's berries are a favorite of Cedar Waxwings and other native birds.

Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*)

The Oregon white oak is an attractive deciduous hardwood tree found as far north as British Columbia and as far south as southern California. The bark is grayish with shallow ridges and fissures, leaves are dark green with 3-7 deep lobes on each side and acorns are about one inch long, with shallow, scaly cups.

Urban development continually encroaches on the habitat of this native tree. Unfortunately, because of its reputation as a slow grower, homeowners don't often plant Oregon white oak. That's a shame, since they have much to offer, giving us welcome shade in the summer and supplying habitat to important bird and wildlife including nuthatches, goldfinches and western gray squirrel.

Mature oaks need sun, but can grow up to 75 feet tall so be sure to plant them only in yards or landscapes with ample room to accommodate size. You can find Oregon white oak trees and seedlings at most reputable nurseries carrying native plants.



Oregon White Oak



Pacific Dogwood

Photo by Walter Siegmund

Pacific Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*)

Pacific Dogwood are naturally found in partly shaded locations growing as understory trees. Deep green leaves are oval in shape and flowers are small and inconspicuous; however, its large white "bracts" - often mistaken for petals - are lovely and eye-catching.

Prefers well-drained acidic soils. Also, plant where trunk will be shaded from sun and regularly rake leaves and remove from site to help prevent anthracnose. Pacific Dogwood provides great fall color. It is used by sapsuckers, woodpeckers, white-crowned sparrows and many other birds for food and habitat.



Cascara

Photo by Charles A. Brun, Ph.D., WSU

Willamette Valley Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*)

This attractive large evergreen tree - genetically distinct from Ponderosa pine found east of the Cascade Mountains - is easy to grow and can reach 150 feet or more in height. Its deep green needles - in bundles of three - are 6-10 inches long. It bears large brown cones and exudes the scent of vanilla.

An adequate weed-free space around your tree generally is thought to be a radius of about two to three feet for the first three years. Also, plant in a location with plenty of room as these trees get large. Willamette Valley Pine is highly drought-resistant and prefers well-drained soils. The Lewis's woodpecker and slender-billed nuthatch rely on it for food.



Vine maple (*Acer circinatum*)

This native deciduous shrub is a good choice for medium-sized areas and has an upright growth habit; it can reach 20-25 feet tall and 15-20 feet wide. Leaves are serrated and single or double-toothed. It features red and white flowers in spring as well as showy red, orange and yellow foliage in the fall. Prefers shady areas.



Pacific madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*)

These attractive trees are a wise choice for any landscape, featuring stunning orange-red bark, glossy dark green oval-shaped leaves and cream flowers in mid-to-late spring. Native to the west coast, they're found from British Columbia to California. However, Pacific madrone has been declining within its range in the Pacific Northwest. This is likely due to a combination of factors including fire suppression, soil compaction and drought. These trees prefer partial shade to full sun and well-drained soils, and are intolerant of site disturbance. They also shed debris, so planting near decks is not recommended. Also, Pacific madrone is prone to transplant shock. To minimize this problem, plant trees facing the same direction they had in the nursery.

Pacific ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*)

In the wild, Pacific ninebark is found along stream banks. This large shrub bears clusters of white flowers in late spring and red seed clusters. Supports birds and wildlife, pollinators and pest-eating insects such as ladybugs. Grows 10 to 15 feet tall and can be upright or spreading, depending on how branches are pruned. Pest and disease free, this shrub provides year-round interest in the garden. Does well in either part-shade or full sun and prefers moist soils.



Photo by Walter Siegmund

Bitter cherry (*Prunus emarginata*)

This deciduous shrub or small tree can reach 30 feet in height and is easy to grow. Its red fruits are not palatable but attract wildlife, and its white spring flowers are almond scented. Plant in moist, sunny sites and protect from browsing.

Western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)

In Oregon, Western redcedar frequently occurs in mixed conifer forests and is associated with Douglas-fir and hemlock. It features glossy green scale-like needles that are white-striped below; foliage is aromatic. Can reach 150 feet or more so plant where it has plenty of room to spread out. A fast grower that can tolerate a variety of soil types, it attracts many birds including Towhees and hummingbirds.

Oregon crabapple (*Malus fusca*)

Oregon crabapple occurs naturally in recently disturbed areas or open woods and is a good choice for a medium-sized yard. Its fragrant blossoms are white to pink, and its fruits attract birds including finches and cedar waxwings. In fall, leaves turn yellow-orange or red.

This little tree is tolerant of heavy clay soils. Plant in wet areas where a smaller tree is needed.



Photo courtesy Kathy Pendergrass, NRCS

Note: Due to development, in some urban settings native soil horizons that best support native trees no longer exist. In these situations you may need to experiment with tree choices to select a tree best suited to your site.

OTHER NATIVE SHRUBS AND WILDFLOWERS

There are also many attractive native plants to choose from. Some advantages of using native plants in the landscape:

“They’re adapted to the climate and soils, so once they’re established they’re pretty hardy and don’t need much water,” says Kathy Pendergrass, Plant Material Specialist with Oregon Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). “They’re also beautiful and provide habitat to pollinators, beneficial insects, birds and other wildlife,” says Pendergrass.

Here are some low-maintenance shrub species to consider.

Evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*)

This large evergreen shrub is ever-reliable, very robust and displays light pink flowers from spring to summer. The foliage is often used in flower arrangements. It prefers well-drained soil, some shade, and is beneficial to pollinators. Can be propagated by cuttings in the fall or winter when the plant is dormant.

Red-flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)

This large deciduous shrub is easy to grow with lovely eye-catching pink or magenta flower clusters in early spring. Works well as a landscape specimen or as an informal hedge. Moderately long-lived. A magnet for hummingbirds, these plants prefer part to full sun and well-drained soils.



Photo by Matthew R. Olson

Red-flowering currant

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)

This small deciduous shrub features tiny bell-like spring flowers and white berries in winter. It's commonly seen in the Willamette Valley in part shade and woodland edges. Very easy to grow and excellent for pollinators.



Photo by Cynthia Orlando, ODF

Snowberry

Showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)

Famous for being host plant to Monarch butterfly larvae, features eye-catching clusters of tiny, light pink star-like flowers with a heavenly scent. Leaves are green to grey-green with soft hairs. Found naturally in meadows and roadsides in many areas of the state. Somewhat stout, it can grow up to 3 feet in height.



Photo by Cynthia Orlando, ODF

Showy Milkweed

Manzanita (*Arcostaphylos*)

Manzanita (*Arcostaphylos*), also called kinnikinnick, is a charming evergreen ground cover featuring small white or pink flowers in the spring, followed by red berries.

Hairy manzanita (*Arcostaphylos Columbiana*)

This evergreen shrub is widespread, occurring naturally in western coniferous forests as well as clearings. With its beautiful mahogany bark and attractive shape, it holds wide appeal and the fruits are very desirable to many species of birds and wildlife. Hairy manzanita is drought-tolerant. Plant in well-drained soil in full sun to light shade.



Photo courtesy Kathy Pendergrass, NRCS

Nutka Rose

Nutka Rose (*Rosa nutkana*)

This deciduous shrub grows easily in part shade to full sun and can be pruned to stay within a 3-4 foot height. Attractive to both pollinators and birds, it bears large pink and pleasantly fragrant flowers; watch for thorns, however. Nutka rose spreads slowly by underground rhizomes, will bloom from spring to summer and can be reproduced by cuttings.

Tall Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)

This easy-to-grow native, along with salal, is a popular choice of landscapers in urban settings where it's appreciated for being low or no maintenance. The state flower of Oregon, foliage is shiny green and holly-like, fruits are blue and tart, and flowers are bright yellow clusters. This is an important early pollinator resource, particularly for hummingbirds.



Photo courtesy Chris Reidy, NRCS

Tall Oregon grape

Western yarrow (*Achillea millefolium var. occidentalis*)

This is a reliable, very hardy native plant to include in the landscape. Its flat-topped flower clusters attract many types of beneficial insects, including pollinators. Readily available at most nurseries.



Photo courtesy Kathy Pendergrass, NRCS

Western yarrow

Rose checkermallow (*Sidalcea malviflora ssp. virgata*)

This is a lovely long-blooming plant with light pink hollyhock-like flowers that typically reaches 3 to 5 feet in height. This cheery plant is often visited by bees and butterflies. Plant in part-shade to full sun and give more water in hotter / drier areas.



Photo by Cynthia Orlando, ODF

Rose Checkermallow

Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*)

A tough shrub that can reach 10 feet in height, this plant gets its name from the tiny white showy flowers that resemble foamy ocean waves. It blooms in early summer and prefers dry, sunny sites. Its leaves are lobed to roughly toothed and have yellow to red fall color. Attracts birds and butterflies.

False Solomon's seal (*Smilacina racemosa*)

An easy-to-grow perennial with arching green leaves and clusters of fragrant small flowers. Select a partly sunny spot for this interesting plant.

Blue Blossom (*Ceanothus spp*)

A large evergreen shrub that is attractive and low-maintenance, ceanothus boasts shiny dark-green leaves year-round and bright blue blossoms in spring and fall. Plant in full sun in well-drained soil. Native to California but used extensively in our landscapes, we do have some native *Ceanothus* including *C. velutinus* (snowbrush) and *C. intergerrimus* (deerbrush).



Blue Blossom



Lupine

Native plants are beneficial to Oregon's native songbirds like this White-crowned sparrow.

Photo by Matthew R. Olson

TREE CARE REMINDERS

Pruning: Knowing how to correctly prune a tree is important for safety, the tree's health, and for aesthetics. Do not remove more than 25 percent of a tree's foliage at one time, but rather, over successive years. Never top a tree.

Correct watering: Statewide, newly planted trees need extra water to survive Oregon's drought-prone summer season. Make sure new trees – and all trees and plants – get water at least once a week during these months.

Hire a certified arborist: For big jobs involving tree care, get the best help available and hire a certified arborist. If in doubt about credentials, the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (PNW-ISA) maintains a list of certified arborists for hire on their website.

ODF's "Homeowner's Guide to Tree Care" brochure is a helpful guide; call 503-945-7421 or 503-945-7200 to request a copy.

Photo by Charles A. Brun, Ph.D., WSU

Cascara



Rose Checkermallow

MORE TIPS

Other than concrete paving, having a lawn is the least productive thing for the ecosystem we can do with our parks and open spaces. Replacing lawn area with native plants is a great first step to enhancing the ecosystem. Leaving small areas of a garden or park un-mowed and un-mulched and leaving undisturbed areas for ground-nesting bees during summer months is another way to help pollinators.

Other flowering plants that support nectar and pollen throughout the growing season: California poppy, pearly everlasting, Blue Flax, Oregon Larkspur, Goldenrod, Common monkeyflower, and Lupines. Note: some of these plants are most easily found at native plant nurseries.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Parks and open space managers might like planting shrubs like oceanspray along forest edges as it is helpful for wildlife. It's also a late-bloomer - another pollinator benefit.

Other tips: "Willows are a very important early pollinator resource for bees and insects, as well as Oregon grape," says Plant Material Specialist Kathy Pendergrass, adding "make sure to choose the right plant for the right place, and the right size."

SUMMING UP

By following these suggestions to choose more native plant species you'll be providing a beautiful, hardy, drought resistant and low maintenance landscape while benefiting the environment.

Urban & Community Forestry Program
Oregon Department of Forestry
oregon.gov/odf/urbanforests/Pages/index.aspx

Cover photos clockwise:
Ponderosa Pine, Blue
Blossom, Western Red Cedar,
and Rose Checkermallow.



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