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# Going native

Plants that grow naturally in the Pacific Northwest are gaining in popularity

By Elizabeth Petersen

Growing native plants makes sense for gardeners. Adapted to regional soil and climate, native plants need little help to grow well, and they bolster the local ecosystem.

The time is ripe to promote the use of natives. Consumers are motivated to learn, government agencies are mandating the use of native plants, and the horticultural industry is ready to help.

"Connecting with nature is a necessity, not a luxury," according to Garden Media Group's latest trends report. "People are becoming better stewards of the earth and discovering joy and satisfaction in gardening for Mother Nature."

Consumer interest in getting back to nature gives garden centers and growers opportunities to provide solutions. To that end, efforts are underway across the country to develop specific suggestions for using native plants in gardens.

Fisher Farms in Gaston, Ore., recently became a grower for one such effort: American Beauties™ Native Plants. This regional product line helps gardeners use natives in their landscapes while benefiting retailers and the non-profit National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Part of the proceeds from sales of American Beauties plants goes to NWF for its habitat and educational work.

"There is a call for native plants," said Jerry Brown, marketing manager for Fisher Farms. "The challenge has been finding the appeal of native plants and gaining traction."

Partnering with NWF builds con- ▶

"It is both folklore and truth that the day the red *Ribes* blooms is the day the migrating hummingbirds return in spring," said Lory Duralia, owner of Bosky Dell Natives in West Linn, Ore. The retail and wholesale nursery specializes in native Willamette Valley and sub-alpine plants. Blooming *Ribes sanguineum* greeted returning birds to the nursery in March this year.

PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

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### Native vs. nativar

For native restoration projects, the term "native" is very strict. Plants are grown from seeds collected within a very specific area so they have exact genetic adaptation to a site.

For garden use, consumers tend to care more about garden qualities than about genetic provenance. They want pretty and easy plants that will fit their limited spaces.

So-called "nativars" have been selected from native species for better garden qualities: more compact habits, brighter flowers, better foliage or resistance to disease. In gardens, nativars provide many of the same important functions that natives do and may be more available in the trade. For this article, we consider both natives and nativars to be native plants.

sumer interest and confidence by encouraging gardeners to create certified wildlife-friendly gardens. "Planting native forbs, shrubs and trees is the easiest way to provide the foliage, nectar, pollen, berries, seeds and nuts that many species of wildlife require to survive and thrive," the NWF website states.

American Beauties launched in 2006 with a list of regionally specific native plants for the northeastern United States. Since then, it has worked with growers in other parts of the country to gradually identify appropriate native plants for the retail market.

The key task for Fisher Farms has been to identify garden-worthy natives for use in its market area. The first selection of Fisher Farms' American Beauties natives targets Oregon and Washington customers. The nursery will gradually

expand the line with a different palette of natives for Idaho and Utah gardens.

"Using natives isn't an all-or-nothing proposition," Brown said. "It is important to start incorporating natives with other plants. Even purists who shun cultivars as non-native seem supportive of the American Beauties program as a good way to get natives into the mainstream."

Regional native plant and wildlife experts worked with growers to develop four collections of American Beauties plants for specific needs. One is designed to attract birds, another to invite butterflies, and a third and fourth for challenging site conditions: dry shade and moist sun. Designing gardens this way simplifies choices for consumers and takes the guesswork out of using natives. American Beauties growers work with garden centers to 20▶



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## GARDEN-WORTHY Natives

This list of Pacific Northwest natives includes suggestions from Lory Duralia (Bosky Dell Natives), Jerry Brown (Fisher Farms) and Mike Ridling (Sevenoaks Native Nursery).



Shore pine

### TREES — Conifer

***Picea sitchensis* 'Papoose'** (Dwarf Sitka spruce) — A slow-growing, rounded spruce for sun. • ***Pinus contorta* ssp. *contorta*** (Shore pine, pictured) — Slow growing. Adaptable to sun or part shade, dry or well-drained wet sites. • ***Tsuga mertensiana*** (Mountain hemlock) — A favorite high-elevation native tree that makes a stately, dramatic focal point and won't outgrow its space. Some seed sources are well adapted to the Willamette Valley.

### TREES — Deciduous

***Acer circinatum*** (Vine maple) — Works well in a variety of applications, particularly upclose to buildings and in tight spaces. A mainstay in landscape design, it is often seen as a wild-dug clump. Requests for a nursery-grown product are increasing. • ***Acer glabrum*** (Rocky Mountain maple) — Spec'ed quite often in the valley; native stands in the Coast Range. • ***Quercus garryana*** (Garry oak, Oregon white oak) — Slow growing, long lived, drought tolerant. Produces large acorns that feed many animals. • ***Rhamnus purshiana*** (Cascara) — Suddenly in high demand as a small native tree; said to attract more wildlife than any other tree.



Red wood sorrel

### FERNS, BULBS, PERENNIALS

***Adiantum aleuticum*** (Maidenhair fern) — Forms sheets of delicate foliage in shade. • ***Asarum caudatum*** (Western wild ginger) — Groundcover for moist, shady woodlands. • ***Blechnum spicant*** (Deer fern) — Well-mannered fern for moist, shady sites. • ***Dicentra formosa*** (Wild bleeding heart) — Pink, heart-shaped flowers provide nectar for hummingbirds and bumblebees. • ***Oxalis oregana*** (Red wood sorrel, pictured) — Groundcover for shady, moist sites. • ***Polypodium glycyrrhiza*** (Licorice fern) — Clings to rocks and trees with moss in early spring. • ***Polystichum munitum*** (Western sword fern) — Tough evergreen fern that thrives even in the dry, deep shade beneath conifers. • ***Smilacina racemosa*** (False Solomon's seal) — For shady sites with moist, humus-rich soil. • ***Trillium ovatum*** (Western trillium, pictured) — A must-have native; Oregon's Easter lily.



Western trillium

See more garden-worthy natives on page 21 ▶

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assemble an assortment of native plants that works well grouped and merchandized together.

### Natives rise in the West

"We have seen a steady increase from both homeowners and landscape designers over the past six to seven years," said Mike Ridling, co-owner of Sevenoaks Native Nursery in Albany, Ore. The wholesale grower raises more than 400 different species of plants native to regions west of the Rocky Mountains. Propagated from seed, these natives come from reaches that include "a vast array of growing requirements," Ridling said.

"Increased popularity of natives benefits homeowners, since it causes garden centers to carry more natives and garden center staff to become more knowledgeable about natives so they can suggest the correct plant for a certain application," Ridling said. "There are native plants for most applications. They just need to be found."

Natives popular with designers tend to provide year-round interest from evergreen foliage, striking fall color or attractive fruit, Ridling said. Designers and homeowners want plants with shorter stature that are easy to care for and tolerate drought, the same attributes desired by landscape designers.

### Indigenous plants on the Internet

Online searches reveal a number of resources for natives.

Sevenoaks hosts a website ([www.sevenoaksnativenursery.com](http://www.sevenoaksnativenursery.com)) with information about the native species it grows, including information about habit, ecology and growing conditions as well as interesting facts about each species. "We highly encourage anyone with general questions or a desire to broaden their native plant palette to utilize this resource," Ridling said.

The website for Bosky Dell Natives ([www.boskydellnatives.com](http://www.boskydellnatives.com)) provides extensive plant lists and information about plants indigenous to the Pacific Northwest. It helps gardeners iden-

Cascade Oregon grape



### GARDEN-WORTHY NATIVE SHRUBS

**Arctostaphylos columbiana (Hairy Manzanita)** — Manzanitas symbolize the Pacific Coast. More than 50 species and cultivars succeed easily in the valley on well-drained sites without irrigation. • **A. uva-ursi (Kinnikinick)** — Used extensively. Leaves form part of traditional smoking mixture in North America and are often used for herbal tea. • **Mahonia nervosa (Longleaf mahonia, Cascade Oregon grape, pictured)** — Native exclusively in the Northwest, a more refined relative of the state flower, tall Oregon grape; usually found in shady canyons, on moist north slopes and coniferous forests. • **Mahonia repens (Creeping mahonia)** — Slow-growing, small, attractive shrub found in many states. • **Philadelphus lewisii (Lewis mock orange)** — State flower of Idaho. Fragrant flowers on an open, spreading shrub; great habitat for wildlife. Useful for a hedge or erosion control. • **Ribes aureum (Golden currant)** — Heavily specified for eastside jobs with growing popularity in the valley. Exceptionally cold hardy. Tolerates standing water to drought. • **Ribes sanguineum (Red flowering currant)** — A striking landscape plant heavily specified for its flower. Great choice for both restoration and landscaping. Beautiful addition to a hedgerow. Many cultivars offer size and flower color options: 'Elk River Red,' 'Icicle,' 'King Edward VII,' 'Pokey's Pink,' 'Pulsborough Scarlet.' • **Sambucus caerulea (Blue elderberry) or S. racemosa (Red elderberry)** — Great landscape plants for sun (blue) or shade (red). Requires a lot of space and may need yearly pruning to remove dead branches. • **Vaccinium ovatum (Evergreen huckleberry)** — Beauty and berries. Grows taller in shade, more compact in sun. • **Viburnum trilobum (American highbush cranberry)** — Smaller than a vine maple with similar growth. Flowers look like a lacecap hydrangea. Shiny red berries are edible for both humans and animals.

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tify their own habitat by examining site basics such as sun exposure, moist or dry conditions, and soil types.

"Get to know the habitats and plant communities that would be appropriate in your neighborhood," the site advises. "Look at nearby undisturbed sites to learn what habitat is most natural in your area."

Cities, counties and states are mandating the use of more natives, and many agencies are providing guidance for local gardeners. For instance, King County, Wash., aids gardeners with an informative website ([www.kingcounty.gov/environment.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment.aspx)) that has sections addressing how to "Create a Custom Native Plant List" and "Native Plant Landscaping Plans" for many different conditions. All plans include common themes: layering with trees, shrubs and groundcovers or perennials, clustering for a more natural aesthetic, creating diversity with evergreen and deciduous varieties to attract a diverse range of wildlife, and limiting the number of species to avoid confusion.

The City of Portland encourages the use of native plants and offers The Portland Plant List, a valuable resource for learning about and selecting plants native to the Willamette Valley. The area is so diverse that nine distinct plant communities are native to Portland.

The city's native plant policy is designed to ensure the continued viability and diversity of indigenous plant and animal communities, promote the use of plants naturally adapted to local conditions, and educate citizens about the region's natural heritage and the values and uses of native plants. ☺

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*For more information about American Beauties Native Plants, log on to [www.abnativeplants.com](http://www.abnativeplants.com).*