

# Make a Difference

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## NATIVE PLANT LANDSCAPING

At Whidbey Island Conservation District, we promote conservation practices that help protect natural resources like waterways, forests, and farmland. Native plant landscaping ties many different conservation practices together and is a great way to get started in thinking about incorporating conservation principles into your landscape.

Native plants are well adapted to our wet winters and dry summers and provide a host of benefits to a property and the surrounding environment. They improve our water quality, reduce soil and wind erosion, replace noxious weeds, clean the air, reduce yard maintenance costs and time, attract and support local wildlife, provide pollinator habitat and beautify our island.

"[Native plants] are easier to take care of as well as they fit into the 'natural' look of what I love about living in the northwest," says Whidbey resident Jamie Johannessen. She lives on 20 acres that have large cleared areas and logging property in the next lots over. "I am utilizing some of these larger trees to grow back into a buffer as well as help with wind protection and erosion protection. As for some of the other smaller plants, they are great to grow in a forest setting."

Many native plants can help with erosion and

slope stabilization because of their ability to hold on to soil and spread out their root systems. Freeland resident Christina Tsang has an acre of property on a hill. Their intention for their "back-back" yard is to provide a wild buffer/privacy screen using native shrubs and trees that will prevent erosion and provide wildlife habitat.



Tall Oregon Grape (mahonia aquifolium) grows well in almost any conditions on Whidbey Island.

"We're also hoping native plants will help with controlling water runoff from the hill behind us," Tsang said.

Tsang said they chose native plants for their landscape "because they should adapt well to our soil; the different varieties will accommodate for sun and shady areas on the property; they are lower maintenance (not fussy and pretty resistant against pests and disease) and do well in drier conditions (at least the ones we selected) and provide food and habitat for the wildlife. Those are all the practical reasons. They are also beautiful and we love the sight and scent of many of the native species such as the Red-flowering currant, Mock-orange and Low Oregon grape."

Native plants are well-adapted to our unique climate. Landscape designer Dianne Iverson uses native plants in her designs as much as possible, listing many of their benefits, including "their drought and rain tolerant qualities, so unique to the PNW."

Due to their low maintenance demands and adaption to our specific climate, native plants are often used in wetland mitigation and riparian restoration projects. WICD Natural Resource Planner Kelsi Mottet planted over 280 bare root native plants for a wetland mitigation project on her property in central Whidbey. She chose eight native plant species, including Douglas Spirea, Red Osier Dogwood, and Nootka Rose.

"It's been a real journey," Mottet said. "Tending to them, mulching them, regularly watering them during the dry season."

The plants grow quickly and in just a few years will create a wild wetland area that absorbs and filters water, prevents soil erosion, and provides habitat for birds and wildlife.

"What I love about [the restoration project] is that it's taking the grass species...a somewhat lower ecologically functional plant species and replacing it with much more diversity."

Not sure what to plant? Take a walk and look for forested areas and wild spaces near



Native plants growing in wilderness near your property are good choices to incorporate into your landscape.

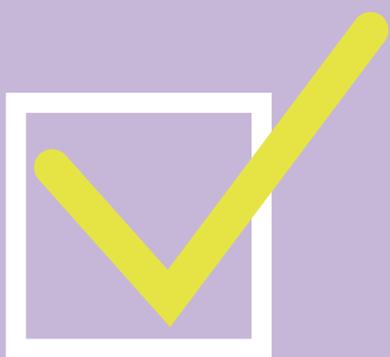
your property. Observe the plants that are growing heartily there, and even in closer areas like ditches and neighboring fields. The native plants around your property will most likely also grow happily on your property

WICD administrator Sandy Welch has planted many different native plant species over the years, and she says one of her favorite species turned out to be Tall Oregon Grape. When she first planted the bare root plants, she said their leaves turned brown, then fell off, and became sad little sticks in her yard. She assumed they had died, while the rest of her plants did well. But the next spring, the Tall Oregon Grape sticks grew new leaves and have been thriving ever since!

The experience taught her that Tall Oregon Grape plants have a unique process of establishing themselves in the yard, but are hardy and beautiful if given patience, attracting native bees and even hummingbirds with their bright yellow flowers in spring.

You can learn more about the benefits of native plants and where to find them for sale at [www.whidbeycd.org/native-plants](http://www.whidbeycd.org/native-plants).

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