Choosing

The Right Plants

for a Beautiful, Trouble-Free Garden

Photograph courtesy of Great Plant Picks

Helleborus hybridus
When you grow plants in the appropriate conditions, they thrive with minimal care. By choosing plants well adapted to each garden situation, you save time and money, reduce maintenance, help prevent pests and diseases, and keep water clean for salmon, wildlife and people. Plan now and enjoy the benefits for years to come.

Follow these simple steps for choosing plants that will flourish in your garden:

1. Get to know your site.
   Learn about the conditions in each part of your garden. Use this guide to make a simple map of your site. Once you know the soils and unique climatic conditions (microclimates) of your yard, you can choose plants that will thrive in each area.

2. Dream a garden.
   Decide how you want to use your landscape. Consider all the ways plants can help you create play areas, seasonal color, privacy, shade, wildlife habitat, food and more.

3. Create a plan to fit your site.
   Identify plants that will thrive with little maintenance in each garden area, as well as providing the colors, scents, fruit or other qualities you desire. See The Plant List box on page 7 for more information.

4. Give plants a good start.
   Prepare your soil with compost, plant properly, topdress with mulch and follow smart watering practices. For detailed tips and techniques, see the Growing Healthy Soil and Smart Watering guides.*

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**How To Select The Right Plants For A Beautiful, Trouble-Free Garden**

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**Wet Winter/Dry Summer Plants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Plants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>- <em>Pinus contorta</em> var. <em>contorta</em> (Shore Pine)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Liquidambar styraciflua</em> (American Sweet Gum)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shrubs</td>
<td>- <em>Gaultheria shallon</em> (Salal)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Myrica californica</em> (California Wax Myrtle)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Potentilla fruticosa</em> (Shrubby Cinquefoil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennials, Grasses and More</td>
<td>- <em>Carex ‘Ice Dance’</em> (Variegated Sedge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Erythronium revolutum</em> (Pink Fawn Lily)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Hemerocallis cultivars</em> (Daylily)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See The Plant List guide* for more options.

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**Pacific Northwest Native Plants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Plants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>- <em>Acer circinatum</em> (Vine Maple)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Quercus garryana</em> (Garry Oak)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Tsuga mertensiana</em> (Mountain Hemlock)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shrubs</td>
<td>- <em>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</em> (Kinnikinnick)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Mahonia nervosa</em> (Cascade Oregon Grape)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Philadelphus lewisii</em> (Mock Orange)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Symphoricarpos albus</em> (Common Snowberry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennials, Grasses and More</td>
<td>- <em>Asarum caudatum</em> (Wild Ginger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Blechnum spicant</em> (Deer Fern)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Cornus canadensis</em> (Bunchberry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Smilacina racemosa</em> (False Solomon’s Seal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See The Plant List guide* for more options.
Step 1: Get To Know Your Site

First, make a simple map of your garden conditions. All it takes is a tape measure, shovel, graph paper and colored pencils. (Observing your existing landscape over the seasons can really pay off here and in Step 2, Dream a Garden). After careful measuring, create a drawing of your property to scale, showing all buildings, pavement, rockeries, trees, planting beds and other landscape features.

Dig small holes about a foot deep in several spots around the yard to check soil type and identify problem situations such as compaction or poor drainage. Note these soils on your garden map. For help determining soil conditions and correcting problems, obtain the free Growing Healthy Soil guide.*

Next, use colored pencils to outline the following microclimates and landscape conditions:
- sunny, shady and partly sunny areas
- “hot spots” on the south or west sides of walls or fences, or next to pavement
- windy or exposed areas
- areas with rocky or compacted soil that need improvement
- wet or poorly drained areas, runoff or draining downspouts
- slopes that may erode or are difficult to mow
- dry spots under roof eaves or evergreens

Lawns and Vegetables Are Picky!

Healthy lawns and vegetable gardens need well-drained soil at least 6 inches deep, and require several hours of direct sun per day. Many shrubs, trees and perennials will grow well in shady or wet spots, but lawns will have constant problems in these conditions.

Most vegetables need full sun; few will produce well in shade or in poorly drained or shallow soil.

*Refer to the back cover for a list of all Natural Lawn & Garden guides and how to obtain them.
STEP 2: DREAM A GARDEN

Before choosing plants that will do well in your garden, think about what plants can do for you. Strategic landscaping can define outdoor spaces, attract wildlife and provide privacy, play areas, food, colorful flowers and foliage, fragrant herbs and much more. Best of all, you can accomplish all of this with low-maintenance, waterwise plants. Decide how you want to use your garden and how much time you want to spend working in it. Look around your neighborhood for ideas, and refer to the gardening books and demonstration gardens listed in the Resources section at the end of this guide.

Consider the following options when planning your landscape:

- vegetable and herb gardens
- flowers and colorful foliage
- fruit trees
- food, water and shelter for birds, butterflies and wildlife
- living screens for privacy
- decks or paved areas for outdoor living
- wood-chip or lawn areas for play
- views you want to accentuate or block
- pathways necessary for home and garden maintenance
- specific plants you want to keep, move or remove
- garden storage, composting and work areas
- Other needs: ________________________________

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TREES: ENVIRONMENTAL HEROES

Trees play a crucial role in our gardens and environment. They shelter and feed wildlife, cleanse the air, reduce runoff and prevent soil erosion. Deciduous trees planted on the south and west sides of a building provide summer shade, while letting sun through naked branches in the winter. Trees can also help block winter winds.

When planting trees on a suburban or city-sized lot, think small. Trees can grow quickly and shade out lawns or sun-loving plants.

A certified arborist can assess the health of mature trees and provide guidance on their care. To find a certified arborist, refer to the Resources section on page 7.
**STEP 3: CREATE A PLAN TO FIT YOUR SITE**

Pair your site map from Step 1 with your list of objectives from Step 2 to define your use areas. Now you can begin to select plants suited to the conditions of each location—whether you are adding a plant to an existing garden or renovating a garden area. For example, your lawn and vegetable garden will thrive in sunny areas with good drainage. The bird and wildlife viewing sanctuary you’ve always wanted can go in the shady area, as can the compost pile. Use tracing paper or online garden design tools over your site map to experiment with varied layouts.

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT PLANTS FOR EACH SPOT**

Refer to the Resources section at the end of this guide for help finding plants that will meet your needs and flourish in your garden’s conditions. Consider the following when choosing plants:

- **Choose plants that thrive without irrigation.** Many plants grow beautifully with just the water provided by nature—once they are established in your garden. Plant moisture-loving varieties where soil stays wet. Drought-tolerant plants perform best where soil is dry in the summer and well draining in the winter.

- **Select pest-and disease-resistant varieties.** Whether you grow roses or rhododendrons, apples or tomatoes, you will find that certain varieties resist common pests and diseases better than others. Ask your local nursery to suggest pest- and disease-resistant varieties, or refer to *The Plant List.*

- **Diversify your planting.** Landscapes characterized by a rich array of plants resist the spread of pests and diseases better than gardens with little variety. Diverse plantings are visually appealing to people and also attract birds and insects that eat pests.

- **Go native.** Indigenous plants are adapted to the local climate and pests. Many Northwest natives are beautiful and easy to grow. However, the needs of natives vary and, for best results, they must be grown in the right conditions where they naturally thrive—just like non-native plants.

**CREATE A GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS**

Landscape for year-round interest!

- **Look for winter standouts,** including plants that feature varied leaf color or texture, colorful winter bark or berries, and fragrant or colorful winter flowers.

- **Include evergreens.** Use both coniferous and broadleaf evergreen plants to define spaces while keeping your garden green throughout the year.

- **Provide winter structure.** Woody trees and shrubs, as well as arbors, trellises and garden art, provide visual interest during the dormant season.

**PLAN FOR EASY MAINTENANCE AND EFFICIENT IRRIGATION**

At every stage of laying out your garden, consider how to water wisely and make upkeep easy. See the *Smart Watering* guide* for details.

- **Plant practical lawns.** Grow only as much lawn as you need and want to maintain. Remember that lawns need regular watering in summer to stay green and need weekly mowing during several months of the year. Avoid planting lawn on slopes, narrow strips or irregular shapes that are hard to mow or irrigate. See the *Natural Lawn Care* guide* and the box on page 3 for more tips.

- **Create low-maintenance areas.** Plant slopes, areas along fences and other hard-to-access sites with groundcover plants that crowd out weeds and require little watering.

- **Group plants by their water needs.** This way, they can be watered by the same sprinkler or irrigation zone with each group receiving just the right amount of moisture. Lawns should be irrigated separately from garden beds.

- **Set up irrigation zones for automatic irrigation systems.** Create zones to efficiently water areas based upon plant needs, sun exposure and soil drainage. See page 7 *Resources* to enlist the help of irrigation professionals.

- **Drip and soak for savings.** Drip irrigation and soaker hoses provide the best way to water most plants other than lawns. They apply water directly to the soil, without wasting it on pavement or allowing water to evaporate as it sprays into the air.
**Step 4: Give Plants a Good Start**

Any plant you choose will grow best with good soil preparation, proper planting and care. The following simple practices will help prevent many problems.

**First—Before Planting Beds or Lawns, Build Healthy Soil**

- **New Beds or New Lawn Areas.** Loosen soil at least 10 to 12 inches deep throughout new planting beds, and 6 to 8 inches deep in new lawn areas. Use a shovel or digging fork, or a rototiller for large areas. Try a pick or mattock to break through compacted layers.

  Thoroughly mix compost into loosened soil throughout the new planting bed before planting a new or remodeled garden area. To determine how much compost to use, see the *Growing Healthy Soil* guide.*

- **Existing Beds.** When planting individual plants into an established planting bed or in the middle of a lawn, loosen the soil in a three to four foot diameter area—larger for root balls measuring over a foot wide. Do not add compost to this small of an area because doing so can inadvertently prevent the plant’s roots from growing beyond this planting hole.

**Next—Plant Right**

- **Dig a hole wide enough to spread the plant’s roots and only as deep as the root ball.**

- **Before planting a shrub or tree, find its root flare—where the trunk flares out to the roots. It is not uncommon for this to have been buried in the pot. If you cannot see the root flare, you will need to remove all soil that is above it before planting your plant.**

- **Loosen and spread the roots. Untangle circling or matted roots and spread them out around the plant, using a hose to gently spray soil off the outside of the root ball if needed.**

- **Place the plant into the planting hole with the root flare exposed above the soil surface. For plants that do not have a root flare (vegetables, perennials, ferns, annuals), the top of the existing roots must be at or slightly above the soil surface. If needed, mound native soil underneath to raise the plant up.**

- **Fill in around the roots with the native soil (not potting soil or compost), being sure to keep the root flare visible. Avoid adding soil on top of the root ball. Firm the soil with your hands, and water thoroughly. Check the level of the plant after watering has settled the soil.**

**Then—Mulch and Water Wisely**

- **Spread mulch over any bare soil, extending a little further out than the plant’s branches. Mulch keeps roots moist and makes soils loose and absorbent. Keep mulch a few inches away from the plant’s trunk or stems. For help choosing the best mulch, refer to the *Growing Healthy Soil* guide.*

- **Water as needed until plants are established. Even most drought-tolerant plants need irrigation their first two or three summers. Once established, they can get by with little or no water in addition to what nature provides. For more on healthy watering practices, see the *Smart Watering* guide.*

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*Refer to the back cover for a list of all Natural Lawn & Garden guides and how to obtain them.
RESOURCES

BOOKS

- *Pacific Northwest Month-by-Month Gardening: What to Do Each Month to Have a Beautiful Garden All Year* by Christina Pfeiffer and Mary Robson; Cool Springs Press, 2017.

HOTLINES FOR GARDENING QUESTIONS

- WSU Master Gardener Hotline, Snohomish County Extension
  — Visit (Monday-Friday): Willis Tucker Park Office, 6705 Puget Park Dr, Snohomish
  — Email (year-round): snocomg@gmail.com
  — Call (April-September): 425-357-6010

DEMONSTRATION GARDENS

- WSU Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens at:
  — Jennings Park, 6915 Armar Rd, Marysville
  — Evergreen Arboretum & Gardens, 145 Alverson Blvd, Everett
- Waterwise Garden at Bellevue Botanical Garden, 12001 Main St, Bellevue, www.bellevuebotanical.org

WEBSITES

- Great Plant Picks: www.greatplantpicks.org
- Native plant information:
  — King County, www.kingcounty.gov, search for “Native Plant Guide”
- Washington State University, Gardening in Washington State: http://gardening.wsu.edu

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

Seek licensed landscape professionals with certification matching your need (design, build, maintenance, consultation) and who serve your locale.

- Find a landscape professional: www.savingwater.org/lawn-garden/choosing-a-nursery-or-landscaper
- Find a certified arborist: www.pnwisa.org
- Find an irrigation professional: www.irrigation.org, click on “Membership,” then “Find a Member”
- Association of Professional Landscape Designers, Washington Chapter: www.apldwa.org
- Washington Association of Landscape Professionals: www.walp.org
- Washington State Nursery & Landscape Association: www.wsnla.org

THE PLANT LIST

The Plant List is designed to help you pick the right plants for your site’s conditions. The guide of over 200 plants is organized by:
- Wet winter/dry summer plants
- Moisture-loving plants
- Favorite Pacific Northwest native plants
- Drought-tolerant plants

The Plant List also indicates whether each plant likes sun, shade or partial shade, and is evergreen or deciduous, and includes helpful tips.

The Plant List was developed in coordination with the Great Plant Picks (GPP) program, which promotes plants well suited to Pacific Northwest gardens west of the Cascade Mountains. Many of the plants in The Plant List are GPP selections. GPP is administered by the staff of the Elisabeth Carey Miller Botanical Garden. For more details and to view color photos of all GPP selections, visit www.greatplantpicks.org.
TO REQUEST A NATURAL LAWN & GARDEN GUIDE, CONTACT:

◆ Snohomish Conservation District
  425-335-5634, www.snohomishcd.org
◆ Snohomish County Conservation & Natural Resources Surface Water Management
◆ WSU Snohomish County Master Gardeners
  6705 Puget Park Dr, Snohomish
  snocomg@gmail.com (year-round)
  425-357-6010 (April-September)
  www.snohomish.wsu.edu

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, VISIT:
www.naturalyardcare.org

NATURAL LAWN & GARDEN GUIDES:
◆ 5 Steps to Natural Yard Care
◆ Choosing the Right Plants
◆ Composting at Home
◆ Growing Food At Home
◆ Growing Healthy Soil
◆ Natural Lawn Care
◆ Natural Pest, Weed & Disease Control
◆ Smart Watering
◆ The Plant List

Available in Spanish:
◆ El Cuidado Natural del Jardín
◆ Cultivo de Hortalizas en Casa

Translations, interpretations, and ADA accommodations are available upon request. Call 425-388-3464. (TTY: 711).

Se encuentran disponibles traducciones, interpretaciones y adaptaciones de conformidad con la ADA a pedido. 425-388-3464 (TTY: 711) (Spanish)

요청 시, 통번역 서비스 및 ADA 지원을 받을 수 있습니다. 전화번호: 425-388-3464. (TTY:711) (Korean)

Bản dịch, dịch vụ thông dịch và hình thức điều chỉnh ADA được cung cấp theo yêu cầu. 425-388-3464 (TTY: 711) (Vietnamese)

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