

Natives & Nativars For PNW Gardeners

The term “nativar” is a newer term for gardeners. Think of these plants as simply cultivars of native plants for our specific region. Between native and nativar plants, there are many benefits to planting them (and some we continue to learn about too) as they are perfect choices for our specific climate. Native plants to Western Washington will thrive in Western Washington – it really is that simple. Natives provide a long list of beneficial attributes for our specific region, here are some listed below...

- They are a way to add natural diversity to the garden/landscape
- They provide benefits for wildlife and birds, including food sources and shelter
- They are perfectly acclimated to our climate and soil conditions
- They can deal with our wet winters and dry summers
- They can naturalize easily and will thrive in the right conditions
- They can provide erosion control on slopes, if needed
- They help maintain our pollinator diversity and health
- They often are drought tolerant and need little watering, once established

If we are going truly “native” in the purest sense, then cultivars do not count. A native is a distinct species of plants for our climate that can be found out in nature. A retail family nursery, like Sunnyside Nursery, does have some useful natives in stock at most times, but would never have the huge array of natives from our area that a native specialty nursery would have – there are a few in our area. At Sunnyside we do love natives, but we tend to stock the most useful ones that also mix well in ornamental landscapes. Here is a list of natives that Sunnyside would have on hand a different times in the season, or things we can try and locate for you quickly...

- **Ferns** – Deer Fern, Maidenhair Fern, Sword Fern
- **Groundcovers** – Bunchberry, Creeping Mahonia, *Fragaria chiloensis* (alpine strawberry), *Fragaria vesca* (alpine strawberry), Kinnikinnick, Leatherleaf Mahonia, Oregon Oxalis, Oregon Sedum, Salal, *Sedum spathulifolium*, Wild Ginger, Wintergreen
- **Perennials** – Blue Eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium*), Columbine, Lewisia, Pacific Bleeding Heart, Pacific Coast Iris, Trilliums, *Vancouveria*, Yarrow, Yellow Eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium*)
- **Shrubs** – Evergreen Huckleberry, Flowering Currant, *Juniper communis* (tree and groundcover forms as well), Leucothoe, Lewis’ Mock Orange, Oregon Grape, Osier Willow, Red Huckleberry, Snowberry, Twig Dogwood, *Viburnum opulus* (Cranberry Viburnum)
- **Trees** – Alpine Fir, Douglas Fir, Mountain Hemlock, Serviceberry, Shore Pine, Sitka Spruce, Vine Maple, Western Hemlock, Western Red Cedar

Nativars can provide many of these characteristics as well. As a cultivar of a native plant, they are essentially the same plant but are named as a specific variety because they are unique in some way. Some nativars are selected out of wild stock and named as a specific cultivar, while others are bred/hybridized using native plant selections. Would we find one hiking out the woods? No in most cases, but therein lies the debate. With “Nativars”, are they truly native or not? For me, I tend to consider them improved natives for the garden. Many of the attributes listed below are the reasons I chose many for my own landscape to mix in with ornamentals and true natives as well...

- Longer season of bloom/different color flower/fragrance – example Foxglove
- Different color foliage, perhaps variegated even to add color – example Ninebark
- More disease resistant/less prone to common insect issues – example Dogwood
- Tidier growth habit in the landscape, dwarf or slower growing – example Pines
- Easier maintenance on some versus native specie – example Spiraeas
- Bark color adding winter interest – example Vine Maple

As you are considering options for the landscape, think of using natives and/or nativars as options. When planted in the right places in the garden, they are sure to thrive in your home landscape while providing benefits to the local ecosystem. I encourage all of you gardeners to come down and explore all the options available to you as a gardener!

Here is a list of a few of my favorite nativars to use in local landscapes...

- **Bitterroot (*Lewesia*):** Cool evergreen succulent for rockeries or gravel pathways – anywhere in sun that drains well. Very drought tolerant. Bright flowers in lots of colors are out there as natives - check out the possibilities! ‘Sunset Mix’ is a favorite.
- **Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra*):** ‘Gold Heart’, ‘Ruby Gold’, ‘Valentine’, ‘Alba’, and more. ‘Luxuriant’ would be a nativar of our native bleeding heart, but these other choices can be grown in woodland gardens. These perennials love shade to part sun and offer outstanding spring flowers, and in the case of the ‘Gold Heart’, bright yellow foliage as well.
- **Box Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia*):** ‘Berried Treasure’ is a low spreading huckleberry (actually native to the Midwest) that thrives here. Tasty, small, dark berries and a nice evergreen foliage that turns red in the winter months. Great nativar for a low spreading shrub in sun or part shade.
- **Chokecherry (*Aronia*):** ‘Low Scape Hedger’ and ‘Low Scape Mounder’ for a couple smaller growers. ‘Viking’ is an example of a larger grower. Deciduous, great spring bloomer, outstanding fall color and red or black berries for the birds in the fall/winter
- **Coast Leucothoe (*Leucothoe axillaris*):** ‘Little Flames’, ‘Rejoice’, ‘Curly Red’, ‘Scarletta’, these are all good shrubs for sun/part shade/even shade. Nice spring blooms and excellent evergreen foliage. New growth will show nice red, orange or purple coloring on them, intensifying in the fall and over winter. Useful shrubs in many garden spots.

- **Columbines (*Aquilegia*):** These are early spring blooming beauties and great for pollinators and nectar seekers. Low and clumping in habit, this perennial is great in most any sun location with good drainage.
- **Common Juniper (*Juniperus communis*):** These super hardy plants take heat, drought and cold winters. Both uprights and more sweeping ground cover varieties are around. Look for 'Pencil Point', 'Berkshire' and 'Blueberry Delight', to name a few. Make sure these stay high and dry with minimal water, once established, and good winter drainage.
- **Contorted Filbert/Hazlenut (*Corylus*):** 'Red Dragon', 'Red Majestic' are two natives that offer superior disease resistance, reddish cast foliage, and cool contorted branching/winter bloom. Deciduous. Makes for some pretty cool winter interest!
- **Dogwoods (*Cornus nutallii hybrids*):** 'Venus', 'Starlight', 'Eddie's White Wonder'. The Pacific Dogwood is a bit disease prone, so natives like these cross in some Korean Dogwood to help with foliage. These have large white flowers and are large growers.
- **Elderberries (*Sambucus*):** Natives of elderberries can be found with dark purple/black, gold, or variegated foliage. Deciduous and easily grown into large shrub or even small tree shape. Look for 'Black Lace', 'Laced Up!', 'Black Tower', 'Lemon Lace' or 'Instant Karma' – all excellent plants with great foliage color.
- **Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*):** 'Thunderbird' and 'Scarlet Ovation' are a couple options of natives. They all get the same tasty berries and keep their foliage all year. 'Thunderbird' has bronzy/orange color in winter and spring and grows larger/bushier. 'Scarlet Ovation' has more red on its foliage and is much tighter/small growing.
- **Ferns (Assorted):** Selections like 'Lady Fern', 'Sword Fern', 'Northern Maidenhair Fern', 'Oak Fern', 'Deer Fern' and others – some of these have interesting cultivars to try as well. Ferns are always great additions to shade or part shade gardens. Pay attention to which ones are perennial and which ones are evergreen.
- **Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*):** 'King Edward', 'White Icicle' and others. These early spring blooming deciduous shrubs are hummingbird magnets! Bright red flowers on 'King Edward', pure white on 'White Icicle'. These will get nice and bushy with age, but can be pruned to control size. I have even seen them grown as small little ornamental trees too!
- **Foxglove (*Digitalis*):** One of classic PNW woodland perennials that comes in all sorts of colors. There are taller growers, and are biennial as well. Be sure to allow them to drop seed to produce more plants in the coming years. Many natives to find on these, in lots of colors. Also 'Digiplexis', a new hybrid of North and South American foxglove, all in one.
- **Lupine (*Lupinus*):** Lots of hybrids out there, even bicolor ones. Our native Lupines are always blue/purple, but lots of named cultivars are out there if you want to spice up the colors. Remember these are a biennial plant – they must be allowed to drop seed to reproduce as the original plant lasts for two years only. Deadhead them early summer to keep blooming, then allow seed to develop.
- **Mock Orange (*Philadelphus lewesii*):** 'Blizzard'. This native deciduous mock orange sports a sea of white fragrant single flowers every May/June and turns nice yellow for fall color. Give some room to grow as they become arching shrubs in the 6-8 foot range long term.

- **Mountain Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*):** The main nativar choices here would be named blue ones, like 'Glacier Peak' and 'Mount Hood Blue'. These grow slowly into a magnificent upright alpine tree that take sun in well-drained soil.
- **Ninebark (*Physocarpus*):** Varieties available include 'Ginger Wine', 'Amber Jubilee', 'Lemon Candy', 'Fireside' and many others. All these are great upright deciduous specimens with spring blooms, great foliage color all season and cool peeling winter bark. There are even dwarf varieties like 'Little Devil', 'Spicy Devil', and 'Lucky Devil'.
- **Oregon Grape (*Mahonia*):** Hybrids like 'Winter Sun', 'Charity', 'Soft Caress'. These are not really Oregon Grape, but crosses with Asian Mahonias that produce large plants with attractive foliage, large yellow nectar rich flowers in fall/winter for hummingbirds, and make a nice statement in either sunny or partial shady locations.
- **Rhododendrons:** Species like viscosum, occidentale, macrophyllum. All kinds of rhodies/ azaleas are native to Washington, and many are available as named selections. Try fragrant azaleas like 'Irene Koster' (*Rhododendron occidentale*), or maybe 'Pink and Sweet' - a great nativar of *Rhododendron viscosum*. *Rhododendron macrophyllum* (Pacific Rhododendron) offers different flower colors and this plant's parentage is included in many of the thousands of *Rhododendron* hybrids we use in the PNW.
- **Serviceberry (*Amelanchier*):** Deciduous - many varieties of both Western and Canadian serviceberries out there including dwarfs, more upright ones, and others with improved disease resistant. 'Autumn Brilliance', 'Cumulus', to name a few
- **Shore Pine/Lodgepole Pine:** 'Spaan's Dwarf', 'Taylor's Sunburst', 'Chief Joseph' - there are some outstanding nativars available. 'Spaan's' is a great dwarf shore pine, 'Taylor's' is a cool lodgepole pine with all yellow new growth, and 'Chief Joseph' turns an unbelievable golden color during the cold winter months.
- **Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*):** 'Papoose' and 'Silberzweig' are two great choices for dwarf nativars on this one. Nice tight growth habit, great needle color and manageable size are true for both of these.
- **Snowberry/Coralberry (*Symphiocarpus*):** 'Galaxy', 'Candy', 'Scarlet Pearl' and others. These nativars offer summer bloom for pollinators followed by large crops of colored berries, which persist into fall/winter and feed some wildlife. They are deciduous and easy to prune back each spring to control size.
- **Sumac (*Rhus typhina*):** 'Tiger Eyes' is great nativar of staghorn Sumac with bright limey golden foliage all season, intensifying to red/orange in fall. Very showy!
- **Trilliums (*Trillium*):** Another classic PNW woodland perennial. Nativars that have been hybridized or collected and named in the wild are out there if you look – offering flowers in a bunch of colors to home gardeners.
- **Twig Dogwoods (*Cornus*):** Lots of options here. Twigs in yellow, red, or orange. Leaves can be green, golden, even variegated. These take some wet and heavy soils and are easy to prune as well. Some of the best out there are 'Ivory Halo', 'Midwinter Flame', 'Arctic Fire', 'Little Rebel' and 'Neon Burst' - in my opinion. Deciduous with good fall color.

- **Vine Maples (*Acer circinatum*):** 'Pacific Fire', 'Sunglow', 'Sunny Sister', 'Burgundy Jewel', 'Little Gem' to name a few flavors, and there are lots more natives out there on this one. 'Pacific Fire' offers superior bark color, especially noticeable in winter months. The others add foliage color in spring, summer and fall. 'Little Gem' is a nice, bushy dwarf.
- **Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*):** Some fun natives can be found on western hemlock, including 'Thorson's Weeping' - a fun little weeping form that grows slowly and will take some shade as well.
- **Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*):** Lots of options here, from hybrid ones like 'Green Giant', 'Green Sport' and 'Tiny Tower' that grow large, to interesting dwarf ones like 'Whipcord' and 'Grune Kugel'. These are great PNW choices for many spots, turning bronzy color in winter and taking on more wet and heavy soils.
- **Wintergreen (*Gaultheria*):** 'Berry Cascade', 'Cherry Berries', 'Winter Splash', 'Winter Fiesta'. These great low shrubs/ground covers are easy to grow in part sun/shade, stay evergreen, and sport nice bright red berries in fall and winter for interest. 'Winter Splash' even has showy green/white/pink variegated foliage.
- **Yarrow (*Alchillea*):** These pollinator and butterfly perennial favorites love sunny, well-drained locations. Nice long blooming season over summer in a bunch of color options. Nativar choices on these could offer just about any color in the rainbow for flower color.