

# Restless natives

By Linda Roe

Summer is here and it's time to play outside. Some of us choose the mountains as our playground, while others choose to play in or on the water. Wherever you choose to play, take along a good field guide and get to know some of our beautiful Northwest native plants. Gardeners will find there are many natives that are truly garden worthy.

First, look up. Our natural landscape is dominated by large trees, such as western hemlock, western red cedar and Douglas firs. If you have one in your yard that is not impeding power lines or threatening your roof, treasure it as the wildlife sanctuary it is. Underneath the big trees at the edge of the woods, look for vine maple. It is a multi-trunked small tree often covered with moss. It goes unnoticed until fall, when it lights up the green landscape with leaves of orange, red and yellow. It likes part shade and is happy in dry summers.

Wild currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) is a wildlife and gardener favorite. The dangling pink blooms in spring are a hummingbird treat, and the black currants produced in summer are quickly eaten by hungry birds. Red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) is found anywhere the roots can

stay moist, from damp streams to mountain slopes. A garden workhorse for poorly drained soils, it colors up in the fall with maroon leaves and has showy red stems in winter.

Evergreens come in other forms beside big trees, and some of the most useful are found growing underneath these trees. Evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*) is found in lowlands all over the Olympic Peninsula. With its small, glossy green leaves, bell-like white flowers in spring and red new growth, it is a wonderful plant for any landscape, and the berries are edible, too. It grows in sun or shade and will tolerate some dryness.

Looking for a problem solver? A species of Oregon grape (*Mahonia*) can be found for just about any condition except boggy soil. The bright yellow flowers are full of nectar for hummingbirds, bees and early butterflies. Some people make jam out of the berries if the birds don't get them first.

Anybody who likes the tropical look but is tired of half the plants dying in the winter should take a look at our hardy native ferns. Sword ferns can grow three feet tall and as wide, and the large leathery fronds make a statement. Generally found growing in the deep shade of mature forests, they adapt well to part sun in the garden.

Prune off the old dead fronds in spring for a fresh look.

Don't like big ferns? Try the dainty little deer fern often seen growing among rocks and old logs in wet woods. Hardy maidenhair ferns are just as delicate as the tender house plant and are pretty among large leafed hostas.

Most native wildflowers are so site specific that they do not adapt well to a garden setting. However, there are some that do quite well and are worth seeking out. Trillium is a showy shade plant in spring. Crisp white petals fade to pink, and the big green leaves are attractive all summer. Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*) looks like white astilbe but is much tougher. It prefers damp soil in sun and is often found alongside old logging roads in the ditch.

Familiar to hikers, bunchberry is a cute little ground covering flower that looks like miniature dogwood, and it is indeed a member of the dogwood family. It grows along trails all over the Cascades and will grow in your garden, too. It is slow to establish, so have patience. Bluebells



PHOTO BY TOM ROE

of Scotland don't come from Scotland at all — they are Northwest natives found growing in grassy meadows. The nodding blue flowers are easily grown in gardens. Lewisia is a rare native that is more easily found in nurseries. The bright, long blooming flower is best grown in a pot that will give it the drainage it needs.

There are many good native plants for your garden, so go out and discover some yourself. Whether you're switch backing up a steep mountain trail or throwing a fishing line in the water, keep an eye out for beautiful Washington plants. But remember: Take only pictures, leave only footprints. ■