THE NATURAL LAWN & GARDEN

Healthy Landscapes for a Healthy Environment

Choosing *The Right Plants* *for a Beautiful, Trouble-Free Garden*

Photograph courtesy of Great Plant Picks

Helleborus hybridus

2010

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

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 leave more clean water for salmon and other wildlife. Plan now and enjoy the benefits for years to come. This guide takes you through the following simple steps for choosing plants that will flourish in your garden:

- **Get to know your site.**
  Learn about the conditions in each part of your garden. Once you know your soils and microclimates—the areas in your landscape with unique climatic characteristics—you can choose plants that will thrive in each area.
- **Dream a garden.**
  Decide how you want to use your landscape, and consider all the ways plants can help you create play areas, colorful flower displays, privacy or shade, wildlife habitat, food and more.
- **Create a plan to fit your site.**
  Identify plants that will thrive with little maintenance in each situation, as well as providing the colors, scents, fruit or other qualities you desire. See *The Plant List* box on page 7 for more information.
- **Give plants a good start.**
  Prepare your soil with compost, plant properly, mulch and follow healthy watering practices. More information is detailed in the free *Growing Healthy Soil* and *Smart Watering* guides (ordering information on back page).

Wet Winter/Dry Summer Plants

A selection from *The Plant List* (see back page to order this and other Natural Lawn & Garden Guides):

Trees
– *Betula utilis var. jacquemontii* (Himalayan White Birch)
– *Liquidambar styraciflua* (American Sweet Gum)

Shrubs
– *Gaultheria shallon* (Salal)
– *Myrica californica* (California Wax Myrtle)
– *Potentilla fruticosa* (Shrubby Cinquefoil)

Perennials, Grasses and More
– *Carex* 'Ice Dance' (Variegated Sedge)
– *Erythronium revolutum* (Pink Fawn Lily)
– *Hemerocallis cultivars* (Daylily)

Garden and photo by Stacy Crooks

A sunny border

Garden and photo by Carl Woestwin

A shady garden of native plants

Pacific Northwest Native Plants

A selection from *The Plant List* (see back page to order this and other Natural Lawn & Garden Guides):

Trees
– *Acer circinatum* (Vine Maple)
– *Quercus garryana* (Garry Oak)
– *Tsuga mertensiana* (Mountain Hemlock)

Shrubs
– *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (Kinnikinnick)
– *Mahonia nervosa* (Cascade Oregon Grape)
– *Philadelphus lewisii* (Mock Orange)
– *Symphoricarpos albus* (Common Snowberry)

Perennials, Grasses and More
– *Asarum caudatum* (Wild Ginger)
– *Blechnum spicant* (Deer Fern)
– *Cornus canadensis* (Bunchberry)
– *Smilacena racemosa* (False Solomon's Seal)

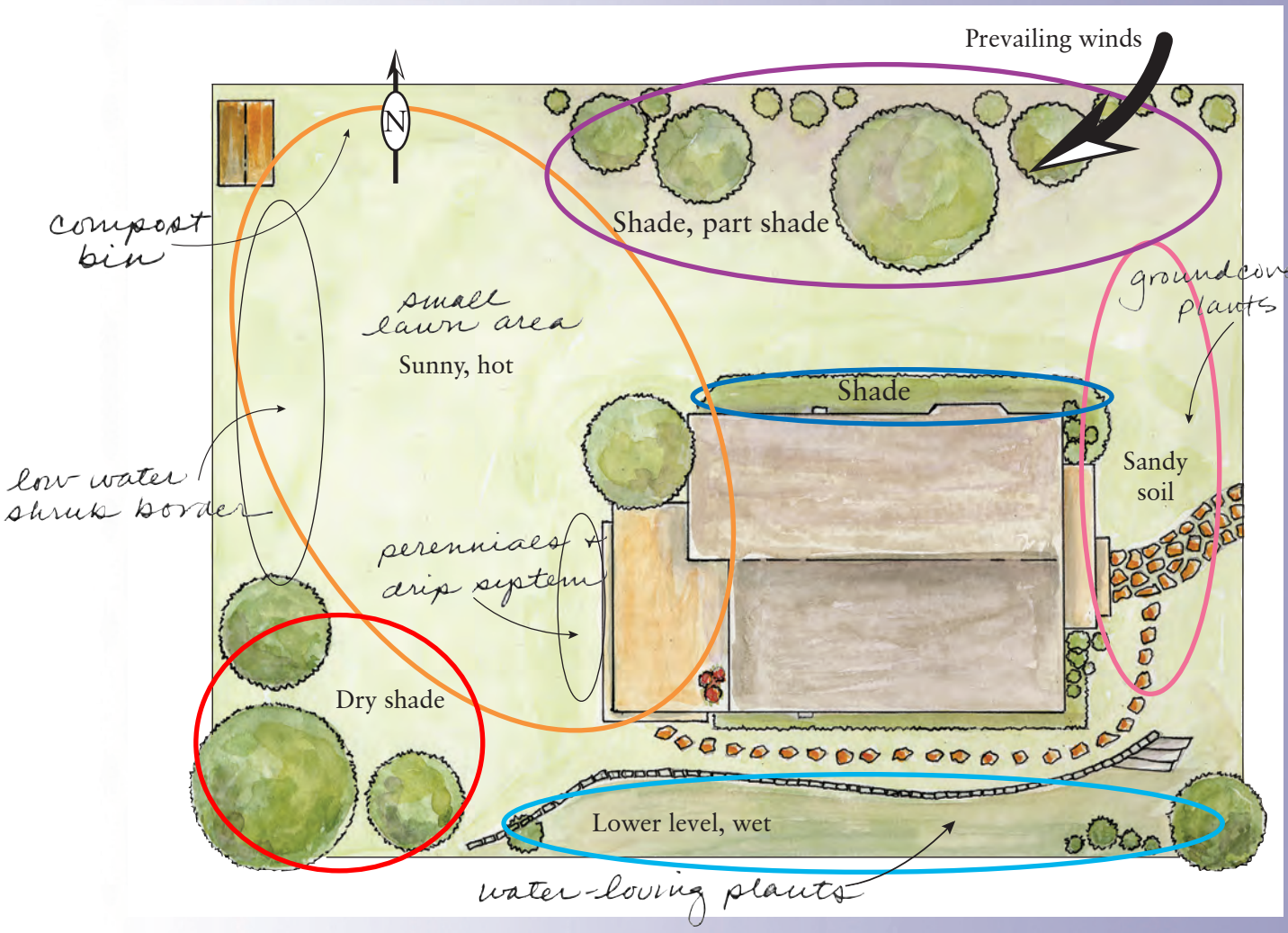
Step 1: Get To Know Your Site

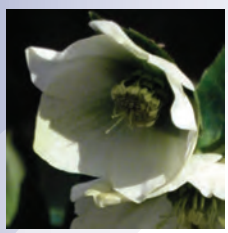
First, make a simple map of your garden conditions. All it takes is a tape measure, shovel, graph paper and colored pencils. (Observing your existing landscape over the seasons can really pay off here and in step 2, Dream a Garden). After careful measuring, create a drawing of your property to scale, 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. (For help determining soil conditions and correcting problems, obtain the free *Growing Healthy Soil* guide. Ordering information is on the back page.) 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 needs improvement
- ❒ wet or poorly drained areas, runoff or draining downspouts
- ❒ slopes that may erode or are difficult to mow
- ❒ places that are hard to access for maintenance
- ❒ 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. Few vegetables will produce well in shade, or in poorly drained or shallow soil.





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, water-wise 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 public 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 other wildlife
- ❒ living screens for privacy
- ❒ decks or paved areas for outdoor living
- ❒ low-maintenance areas
- ❒ wood-chip areas or lawn 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 and composting areas
- ❒ potting and work areas
- ❒ places for creating and displaying art
- ❒ Other needs: _____

Trees: Environmental Heroes

Did you know that trees play a crucial role in our gardens and environment? They shelter and feed wildlife, cleanse the air, reduce storm 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. Falling limbs from large trees—especially our native firs and other conifers—can damage structures and power lines.

Photograph courtesy Great Plant Picks

Acer palmatum 'Osakazuki'

Step 3: Create A Plan To Fit Your Site

Once you know your garden conditions and what you want your landscaping to accomplish, you can lay out your garden. Pair your site map from step 1 with your list of objectives from step 2 to define use areas. Then select plants for each location. For example, put your lawn and vegetable garden 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 sheets of tracing paper laid over your site map to experiment with varied layouts, and match plants with the conditions that best suit them.

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.
- ✓ **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* (see back page to order).
- ✓ **Diversify your plant investments.** Landscapes characterized by a rich array of plants resist the spread of pests and diseases better than gardens with little variety. Diverse plantings attract birds and insects that eat pests—and are more attractive to people, too.
- ✓ **Why not 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—just like any other 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.

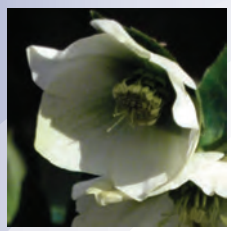
Photograph courtesy Great Plant Picks

Viburnum tinus 'Spring Bouquet'

Plan for Easy Maintenance and Efficient Irrigation

At every stage of laying out your garden, consider how to water wisely and make upkeep easy.

- ❒ **Plant practical lawns.** Include 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 box on page 3 for more tips.
- ❒ **Create low-maintenance areas.** Plant slopes, areas along fences and other hard-to-access sites with quick-growing ground cover 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 other plants with different water needs.
- ❒ **Create irrigation zones for each exposure.** Plants in full sun usually use more water than those grown in the shade, and should be watered using different zones if you have an automatic irrigation system.
- ❒ **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

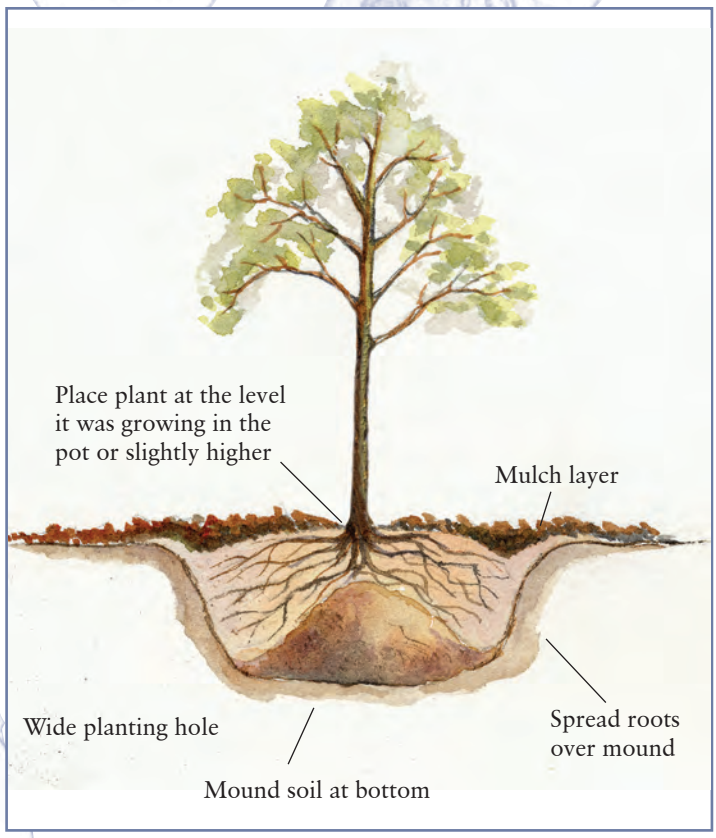
Any plant you choose will grow best with good soil preparation, and proper planting and care. The following simple practices will help prevent many problems.

Build Healthy Soil

- Loosen soil at least 10 to 12 inches deep throughout planting beds, and 6 to 8 inches deep in lawns. 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 planting bed when planting a new or remodeled garden area. To choose an amendment for your soil and to determine how much to use, see the *Growing Healthy Soil* guide (ordering information on back page). When planting individual plants in the middle of a lawn or into an established planting bed, loosen the soil in an area at least three to four feet in diameter—larger for root balls measuring over a foot wide—but do not add soil amendments since this may prevent the plant's roots from spreading beyond the planting hole.

Plant Right

- Dig a hole large enough to spread the plant's roots.
- Form a firm mound at the bottom of the planting hole. Make it high enough so that the top of the root ball is at the soil surface, as it was in the pot or at the nursery.
- 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.
- Fill in with the soil removed to make the planting hole. Firm soil with your hands, and water thoroughly. Check the level of the plant after watering has settled the soil.



Mulch and Water Wisely

- Spread mulch in a circle 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 for each type of plant, refer to the *Growing Healthy Soil* guide (ordering information on back page).
- 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 (ordering information on back page).

Resources

Books

Ann Lovejoy's Organic Garden Design School by Ann Lovejoy; Rodale, 2004

Grow Your Own Native Landscape by Michael Leigh; MISC0273, Washington State University Extension, 2005

Home Landscaping: Northwest Region by Roger Holmes & Don Marshall; Creative Homeowner, 2002

Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest by Russell Link; University of Washington Press, 1999

Right Plant, Right Place by Nicola Ferguson; Fireside, 2005

Sunset Western Garden Book edited by Kathleen Norris Brenzel; Sunset Publishing Corp., 2007

Hotlines For Gardening Questions

- ❒ WSU Master Gardener Hotline, Snohomish County Extension, (425) 357-6010 or MG.help@wsu.edu
- ❒ Plant Answer Line, UW Botanic Gardens, (206) 897-5268

Demonstration Gardens

- ❒ WSU Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens; For locations visit: www.snohomish.wsu.edu/mg/gardemo.htm or call (425) 338-2400
- ❒ Soest Herbaceous Display Garden, Center for Urban Horticulture, 3501 NE 41st Street, Seattle
- ❒ The Waterwise Garden, Bellevue Botanical Garden, 12001 Main Street, Bellevue
- ❒ Waterwise Demonstration Garden, Woodinville Water District, 17238 NE Woodinville-Duvall Rd, Woodinville

Web Sites

- ❒ Great Plant Picks: www.greatplantpicks.org
- ❒ Native plant information: www.wnps.org, http://gardening.wsu.edu/nwnative
- ❒ Natural Lawn & Garden Care: www.naturalyardcare.info
- ❒ UW Botanic Garden: www.millerlibrary.org
- ❒ Washington State University Extension/Master Gardeners: http://gardening.wsu.edu, http://pnwplants.wsu.edu

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

The 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 *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.

Professional Assistance

Landscape Architects or designers can help you draw a full landscape plan, design an arbor, or simply check your sketches and suggest improvements. Nursery staff can often work with your map and suggest appropriate plants for each place.

- ❒ American Society of Landscape Architects, Washington Chapter, www.wasla.org
- ❒ Association of Professional Landscape Designers, Washington Chapter, www.apldwa.org
- ❒ The Irrigation Association, www.irrigation.org
- ❒ Washington Association of Landscape Professionals, www.walp.org
- ❒ Washington State Nursery & Landscape Association, www.wsnla.org

Refer to the back of this brochure for a list of all of the free Natural Lawn & Garden guides and to find out how to obtain them.

Photograph by Richard Hartlage

Waterwise Garden at the Bellevue Botanical Garden

To Request A Natural Lawn & Garden Guide, Contact:

- **Snohomish Conservation District**
  (425) 335-5634, ext. 4, www.snohomishcd.org
- **Snohomish County Public Works, Surface Water Management Division**
  (425) 388-3464, www.naturalyard.surfacewater.info
- **WSU Snohomish County Extension Master Gardeners**
  (425) 357-6010, www.snohomish.wsu.edu

The Natural Lawn & Garden Series

- Growing Healthy Soil
- Choosing the Right Plants
- The Plant List
- Smart Watering
- Composting at Home
- Natural Pest, Weed & Disease Control
- Natural Lawn Care
- Natural Yard Care (summary)

For Additional Information Visit:

www.naturalyardcare.info

Snohomish Conservation District

Washington State University Snohomish County Extension

Puget Sound Starts Here

Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management

Working together for people, streams & fish.

For TTY assistance, please call 711.

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