Alternatives
A Washington Toxics Coalition Fact Sheet

HOME SAFE HOME

Appropriate Plants for Northwest Landscapes

by David Johnson

Birch trees are notorious for attracting aphids. While the aphids do not usually threaten the health of the tree itself, the honeydew they secrete forms a sticky coating on everything below. If you want birch trees, don't plant them near houses, decks, or driveways.

Birch trees are beautiful, but anyone who owns one knows that they attract aphids like a magnet. Many varieties of roses are highly susceptible to various types of mildew and fungus. And some rhododendrons are plagued by root weevils. In trying to grow these plants which are especially prone to pest problems, gardeners often resort to extensive applications of pesticides. One way to avoid such problems is to choose plants that are more pest-resistant.

Does this mean you can't grow rhododendrons in the Northwest without using pesticides? Not at all. Actually, many varieties of these favorite plants are quite resistant to pests. There is also a wide range of other interesting plants, some familiar and others not so well known, that can thrive in our climate zones.

When selecting a plant for the home landscape, it is necessary to consider the conditions under which it will be growing. Any plant that does not get the right growing conditions will not thrive and can be prone to pest attack. This chapter will look at the factors to consider when selecting plants with a view to reducing pest problems. It will also give some specific recommendations for plants to avoid and plants to try.

Factors in Plant Selection

There are many factors to consider when selecting plants for the home landscape. Aesthetic qualities such as flowering time, flower size and color, leaf shape and color, fall color, plant height, width, and growth form are usually considered first. It is just as important to consider the more functional factors that determine whether or not a plant will thrive in a specific location. These include soil fertility, drainage, moisture content, soil depth, and drought tolerance. Also very important is the amount of light a plant receives, as well as the length of exposure each day. Exposure to wind or salt spray and the effect of surrounding plants are other considerations. All too often plants are purchased without full knowledge of the conditions they require to thrive. The result can be a disappointing landscape with stunted or declining plants that never have the opportunity to maximize their potential. This situation encourages pest and disease problems.

A concern of growing importance is the availability of water for garden watering. Although the region west of the Cascades is noted for its rain, it also experiences a period of summer drought from mid-June to mid-September. Many landscape plants require additional water during this period. To conserve water and maintain plant health during times of drought, it is important to consider drought tolerance. Landscapes or specific portions of landscapes can be designed to minimize or completely eliminate the need for supplemental water.

To make the most of your landscape investment, be aware of the environmental factors that will affect the plants in your landscape. Know how your soil drains; look at how light patterns change both daily and seasonally. Use this knowledge when selecting plants to make sure the environmental conditions of the site match the environmental requirements of the plant.

Recommended Plants

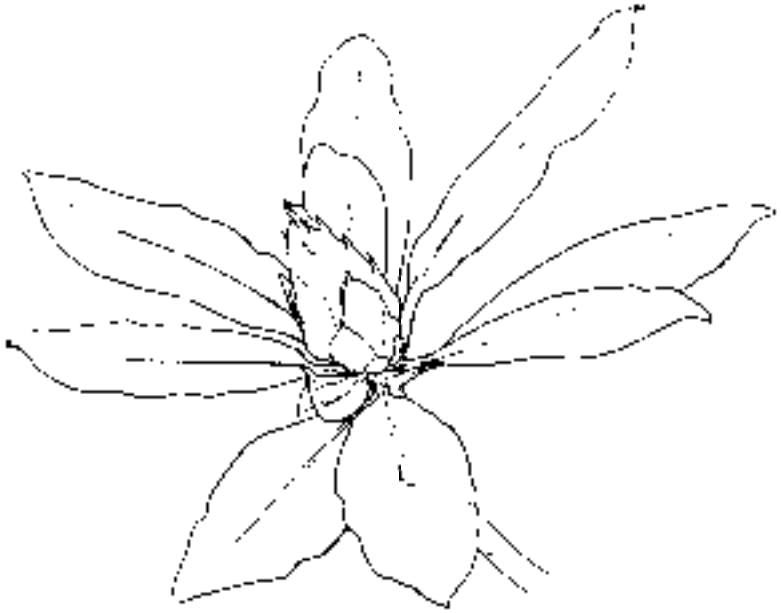
There are literally thousands of plants that will thrive in our region. Table 1 lists a few of those that have proven themselves in the Northwest, both from an aesthetic perspective and in terms of adaptability to our environmental conditions. These plants are not bothered significantly by pests nor do they require much maintenance. Let this list serve as an introduction to what to look for when selecting plants to add to your landscape. When selecting plants from this list, look carefully at each plant's characteristics and needs and choose those which match your own environment. Be aware that plants listed as drought tolerant can only withstand dry conditions once they have become established. For more suggestions of drought tolerant plants, see the King County Cooperative Extension Bulletin entitled "Low Water Use Plants."

Rosemary has no serious pest problems, but it is not reliably cold-hardy in many parts of western Washington.

Table 1. **Appropriate Plants** (see also Substitute Plants in Table 3.)

Plant Name	Common Name	Type*	Height	Width	Exposure	Soil	Withstands Drought
Groundcovers							
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi	Kinnikinnik	BE	6"	5'	full sun	well drained	yes
Pachysandra terminalis	Japanese Spurge	BE	8"	spreads	shade	moist	no
Gaultheria procumbens	Wintergreen	BE	6"	3'	shade	moist	no
Thymus species & Cvs.	Thyme	P	2"-12"	2'-6'	sun/part sun	well drained	yes
Epimedium grandiflorum	Bishop's Hat	P	1'	spreads	part sun	most soils	yes
Hypericum calycinum	St. Johnswort	BE	1'	spreads	sun/part sun	most soils	yes
Cotoneaster dammeri	Bearberry	BE	6"	spreads	sun/part sun	most soils	yes
Shrubs							
Abelia 'Ed Goucher'	Ed Goucher Abelia	D	3'-5'	2'-3'	sun/part shade	most soils	no
Acuba japonica	Japanese Acuba	BE	5'-8'	2'-5'	shade	most soils	yes
Eleagnus species	Silverberry	BE-D	10'-12'	10'-12'	sun/part shade	any	yes
Gaultheria shallon	Salal	BE	3'-6'	2'-3'	sun/shade	most soils	yes
Lavandula angustifolia	English Lavender	BE	3'	3'	sun	well drained	yes
Mahonia nervosa	Low Oregon Grape	BE	2'	18"	part sun	most soils	yes
Myrica californica	Pacific Wax Myrtle	BE	6'-15'	4'-8'	part sun	most soils	yes
Osmanthus delavayi	Delavayi Osmanthus	BE	2'-3'	3'-4'	part sun	most soils	yes
Pinus mugho	Mugho Pine	C	1'-4'	2'-3'	sun	well drained	yes
Rosa rugosa	Rugosa Rose	D	3'-8'	3'-8'	sun	most soils	yes
Rosmarinus officinalis	Rosemary	BE	2'-4'	1'-3'	sun	well drained	yes
(Rosemary is not reliably winter-hardy in much of western Washington. Check local conditions for suitability.)							
Trees							
Acer circinatum	Vine Maple	D	6'-15'	3'-10'	sun/shade	most soils	yes
Cercidiphyllum japonicum	Katsura	D	15'-30'	10'-20'	part sun	moist	no
Cornus kousa	Kousa Dogwood	D	10'-15'	5'-10'	part sun	moist	no
Nyssa sylvatica	Tupelo	D	20'-30'	15'-20'	sun/part sun	any	yes
Parrotia persica	Persian Parrotia	D	10'-20'	5'-15'	sun/part sun	most soils	no
Pseudotsuga menziesii	Douglas Fir	C	50'-100'	10'-20'	sun	well drained	yes
Stewartia koreana	Korean Stewartia	D	20'-25'	10'-15'	part shade	moist	no
Styrax japonicus	Japanese Snowdrop	D	15'-20'	8'-12'	part sun	well drained	no
Koelreuteria paniculata	Goldenrain Tree	D	10'-20'	20'-35'	sun/part sun	any	yes

*Key to plant type: BE=Broadleaf Evergreen, C=Conifer, D=Deciduous, P=Perennial



Rhododendrons

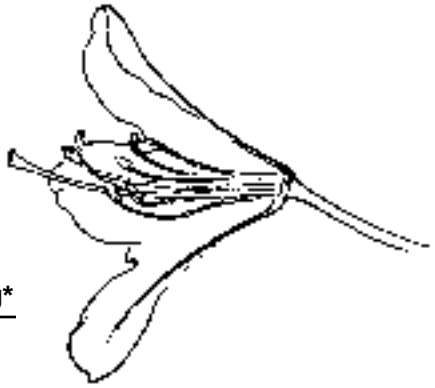
Rhododendrons are a mainstay in gardens west of the Cascades. Many people say they are overused, but their lush blossoms are hard to resist. Two problems frequently affect rhododendrons. First, almost all of them require additional water during the summer. Second, most rhodies can become the feeding ground for root weevils, which chew on the roots and the leaf margins. There are a number of species and varieties which are resistant to root weevil attack. Table 2 is a fascinating comparison of the relative resistance of different types of rhodies. It is excerpted from the Cooperative Extension Bulletin "Root Weevil Control on Rhododendrons" (EB0970). Notice that a wide range of blossom colors is available even within the most resistant types.

Table 2. **Rhododendrons Showing Resistance to Feeding by Adult Root Weevils**

Species Rhododendrons

(Table courtesy of Cooperative Extension)

Species	Series	Possible Bloom Colors	Rating*
heliolepis	Heliolepis	white, rose	100
impeditum	Lapponicum	purplish blue	100
scintillans	Lapponicum	purplish blue	100
burmanicum	Maddenii	yellow to greenish white	100
dauricum	Dauricum	lavender-rose	97
intricatum	Lapponicum	mauve	97
minus	Carolinianum	rose, white	93
desquamatum	Heliolepis	rose, violet	93
ferrugineum	Ferrugineum	rose, white	93
hemsleyanum	Fortunei	white	93
cuneatum	Lapponicum	rose	90
fastigiatum	Lapponicum	lilac, purple	90
yakushimanum	Ponticum	white, rose	90



Hybrid Rhododendrons

Hybrid	Possible Blossom Colors	Rating*
P. J. Mezzitt (P.J.M.)	pink	100
Jock	pink	92
Sapphire	blue	90
Rose Elf	white, flushed violet-pink	89
Cilpinense	white	88
Lucky Strike	deep salmon-pink	83
Exbury Naomi	lilac-tinged yellow	81
Virginia Richards	Chinese yellow with crimson blotch	81
Cowslip	cream, pink	80
Luscombei	rose-pink	80
Vanessa	soft pink	80
Oceanlake	deep violet-blue	80

*The higher the number, the less feeding is expected. A 100 rating indicates complete resistance.

Inappropriate Plants for Northwest Landscapes

Any plant growing under conditions to which it is not accustomed may become stressed and subject to pest problems. There are, however, some plants that seem to be plagued by pests no matter where they are growing. To maintain such plants in a healthy condition often requires repeated applications of pesticides. To avoid this situation, select plants that do not suffer from serious pest problems. The list below consists of plants that are frequently grown in the Northwest and always seem to be plagued by pests. It also includes English Ivy, which is a pest itself because it spreads rapidly and invades where where it is not wanted.

Table 3. **Plants to Avoid**

Plant	Problem	Substitute
Birch (*Betula sp.*)	Aphids. The tree's health usually is not affected, but the dripping honeydew can be a problem.	English Oak (*Quercus robur* 'Fastigiata'), Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)
Spruce (*Picea sp.*)	Spruce aphid in late winter	Any other conifer
Dwarf Alberta Spruce (*Picea glauca* 'Conica')	Spider mite	*Thuja plicata* 'Striblingii'
English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)	Invasive. Damaging to trees.	Any of the groundcovers in table 1.
Crabapple (*Malus sp.*)	Aphids, Mildew, Scab	Plant resistant varieties
Skimmia japonica	Spider and Skimmia mite	Evergreen Azaleas or Sarcococca
Subalpine Fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*)	Aphids & adelgids cause eventual decline.	Mountain Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*)
Hybrid Tea Roses	Aphids, Mildew, Black Spot	Resistant Varieties
Native Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*) Eastern Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)	Dogwood Anthracnose	Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*)
Prunus 'Autumnalis' *Prunus* 'Whitcombii'	Mildew, Blossom Blight	*Prunus yedoensis* or *P. y.* 'Akebono'

Other Plant Lists for the Pacific Northwest

The Plant List. A Better Way to be Beautiful. The Saving Water Partnership. (http://www.savingwater.org/docs/PlantList.pdf)
Attractive and useful list of appropriate plants for the Pacific Northwest.

Great Plant Picks (http://www.greatplantpicks.org)
A plant awards program designed to help home gardeners identify unbeatable plants for their Pacific Northwest gardens. Contains well over 300 Great Plant Picks with helpful information and pictures.

Debra Prinzing & Mary Robson. *Washington & Oregon Gardener's Guide: Proven Plants for Inspired Gardens*. Cool Springs Press, 2005. 272 pages. $24.99

The Washington Toxics Coalition is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting public health and the environment by preventing pollution. Please write or phone for information: WTC, 4649 Sunnyside Ave N, Suite 540, Seattle, WA 98103. Phone: 206-632-1545. Visit our Internet Web site at www.watoxics.org.