

Native Plant of the Week

Each week throughout 2017 the Port is featuring one native plant that can be found along its properties. The Port uses these featured native plants along with others as part of its sustainable landscape management program.

Look for these native plants along the Port's properties:

WEEK 12

Common Name: Pacific Wax Myrtle

Scientific Name: *Myrica californica*



Wax Myrtle is a large evergreen shrub or small multi-stemmed tree that grows 2-10 meters tall. It has sturdy green leaves 4-13 cm long that give off a spicy scent on warm days. It has greenish flowers born on a spike about 3 cm long. The fruits are small wrinkled purple berries 4-6 mm wide. The fruit have a waxy coating hence the common name Wax Myrtle.

Birds eat the fruit. The wax extracted from the fruit can be used for candles or soap, but the Pacific Wax Myrtle produces less wax than other bayberries so it was rarely used for this purpose. This plant is called “monkey bush” in Stl’atl’imx probably because it was used for some purpose by sasquatches.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Wax myrtle is an important nitrogen fixing species. It is generally found in wetlands or boggy swampy areas at low elevations. Here it can be found in front of the JKL dock bathroom facility at Swantown Marina.

WEEK 11

Common Name: Pacific Ninebark

Scientific Name: *Physocarpus capitatus*



Ninebark is a multi-stemmed deciduous shrub that grows to 4 meters tall with brownish bark that peels and shreds on the older stems. The shiny green leaves are alternately arranged, 3-5 lobed, sharply toothed, and deeply veined. The flowers are small and white with 5 petals, and are borne in dense round pom-pom clusters. The fruit are inconspicuous 1 cm reddish berries.

The Nun-chuh-nulth used the wood for children’s bows and other small items. The Cowichan made knitting needles from it. It was generally considered poisonous and a tea from the bark was used as an emetic or purgative. It provides cover, nesting sites and food for birds and small mammals. Deer and elk browse the foliage and bears eat the berries.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Ninebark likes moist to wet sites and is frequently found next to water. It has excellent soil binding qualities. At the Port it is found along the shoreline at Swantown Marina between the BC and DEF dock areas and behind the boat launch pay station.

WEEK 10

Common Name: Roemer's fescue

Scientific Name: *Festuca idahoensis* ssp. roemerii



Roemer's fescue is a short, fine textured, native, cool season, perennial bunchgrass. The fine textured leaves are about 10 cm long and come in a wide spectrum of greens and blues. The seed heads are open and found on a stiff stem 35 to 100 cm long. The stem color varies from light green to purple and reds.

Roemerii is a sub-species of Idaho fescue that is native exclusively to the west of the Cascades from Vancouver Island to northern California. It prefers full sun and well-drained soil. It is a good forage plant. It is an important native grass for upland prairie restoration in Western Washington. Bundles of rye grass roots are used by the Makah to rub the body after bathing. The Quinault layer the leaves under Salal berries while they are drying.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Roemer's Fescue can be found in the Port's native prairie garden at the corner of Olympia Ave and Marine Dr.

WEEK 9

Common Name: Douglas Fir

Scientific Name: *Pseudotsuga menziesii* ssp. menziesii



Douglas fir is a large pyramidal evergreen conifer with a stiffly erect leader and long spreading to drooping branches. Its dark brown bark is thick and corky and becomes deeply furrowed in older trees. The yellowish green needles are 2 to 3 cm long and have 2 white bands of stomata on their under side. They are spirally arranged around the branches. Its distinctive cones are 8 to 12 cm long with brown scales and are easily recognized by their protruding, papery, three pointed seed bracts.

Douglas fir is the state tree of Oregon. First described by Dr. Menzies, it was named for explorer-botanist David Douglas. The native populations used the plant for various things besides fuel. It was made into spear handles, harpoon shafts, dip-net poles, fish hooks, salmon weirs, and utensils. The pitch was used as a medicinal salve for wounds and skin problems. The pitch was also used as caulk for boats and buckets and as fuel for torches. The cones were thought to have magic powers and were warmed by the fire by the Chehalis and Cowlitz to stop the rain.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Douglas fir is found throughout the northwest except in the wettest or driest places. It grows best in deep sandy loam soils and full sun. It is a very important timber tree and is often grown as a Christmas tree. It can be found on almost all the Port properties in Lacey, Tumwater and Olympia.

WEEK 8

Common Name: Oregon Stonecrop

Scientific Name: *Sedum oregonum*



Stonecrop is a sprawling succulent perennial growing from rhizomes with fleshy, egg to spoon shaped leaves. The leaves are 2.5 cm long and are green becoming bronze in the fall and winter. The yellow flowers have 5 lance shaped petals that are up to 12 mm long and are united basally.

This plant is known to the Makah as water plant because of its succulent nature. It was eaten on journeys if there was any doubt about the safety of the water in the area. The Makah women ingested the leaves to promote menstruation.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: It is typically found on dry rocky open slopes from low to subalpine elevations throughout the Cascades. Here at the Port it can be found in the perennial beds around the Boat launch information kiosk.

WEEK 7

Common Name: Kinnikinnick

Scientific Name: *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*



Kinnikinnick is a trailing evergreen groundcover that grows up to 3 meters long staying under 20 cm tall. The leaves are small alternate dark green ovals about 3 cm long. The flowers are small pink-white bells. The 8 mm fruit are bright red and persist into the winter.

The leaves of the Kinnikinnick were historically used as the principle smoking mixture of the Northwest. It was said to impart an intoxicating drunken feeling. Some tribes ate the berries fresh or dried and mixed with oil or fish eggs.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Kinnikinnick is fairly common and widespread in Western Washington. It likes sandy and rocky well drained soil and is drought tolerant in the summer. It hosts butterfly caterpillars. The fruits are eaten by birds, small mammals, deer, elk, and bears. They can be found at the Port on the uplands associated with the BC and DEF docks at Swantown Marina.

WEEK 6

Common Name: Madrona

Scientific Name: *Arbutus menziesii*



The Madrona (strawberry tree in Spanish) is a magnificent small to medium, spreading evergreen tree with heavy branches. It has alternate oval shiny green leaves up to 15 cm long. White flowers in the spring are followed by orange/red fruit in the fall. Its attractive reddish bark peels off in strips revealing the younger green bark beneath.

The Salish cooked the reddish bark with camas bulbs to color them pink. Various other tribes used teas made from the bark and roots medicinally for colds and stomach problems.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Madronas like growing in well drained rocky soils in full sun. They are drought and salt-spray tolerant and often found at or near sea level. They provide habitat for caterpillars and birds. Flowers are a nectar source for bees and butterflies and the fruit is eaten by birds and small mammals. There is a significant self seeding population found along the shoreline at Swantown Marina downtown Olympia.

WEEK 5

Common Name: Evergreen Huckleberry

Scientific Name: *Vaccinium ovatum*



Evergreen huckleberry is an attractive bushy evergreen shrub growing 1 to 2 meters in sun and up to 5 meters in deep shade. It is easily recognized by its shiny green alternate sharp toothed 4 to 7 mm leaves. The leaves are distinctly 2 ranked and horizontally disposed. In spring there are 8 mm clusters of pink bell shaped flowers followed by small deep purple berries. The edible fruit are sweet with a somewhat musky taste.

The berries were eaten by many of the coastal tribes. They were eaten fresh, or sun and smoke dried, mashed, pressed into cakes, and wrapped into leaves or bark.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: It is found in low elevation coniferous forests especially at edges and in openings. It is often found at the beach fringe in the salt spray zone. At the Port you can find it by the Swantown Marina boat launch, the gates to BC docks and various spots around.

WEEK 4

Common Name: Vine Maple

Scientific Name: *Acer circinatum*



Vine maple is a large shrub or small deciduous tree growing to 8 meters. They are often multi-stemmed with slender branches. The leaves are 5 to 10 cm in diameter, opposite, round in form with 5 to 9 (usually 7) finely toothed lobes.

They are known for their striking red and yellow fall colors. The flowers are attractive with red sepals and white petals. The wings of their classic maple double seeds are spread wide, almost in a straight line.

Vine maples have very dense, hard wood that is flexible when fresh and tough when dry. As such, it was used to make baskets, snowshoes, drum hoops, and fish traps. It was also used to make a variety of small implements like spoons, salmon tongs, and bowls. It was used as firewood and the charcoal was mixed with oil to make black paint.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: It is a common understory plant in coniferous forests, clear cuts, and burnt areas in the PNW. It provides good roosting habitat and food for birds. There are a dozen or more vine maples along the shoreline trail downtown as well as many more on our undeveloped areas in Tumwater.

WEEK 3

Common Name: Salal

Scientific Name: *Gaultheria shallon*



Salal is an evergreen shrub with alternate, shiny, egg-shaped leaves that grows 1-2 meters tall.

One of the most common under story plants in the forests of our area. It has white, urn shaped flowers and then reddish blue to dark purple berries. (that are actually fleshy sepals) 6 to 10 mm broad and edible.

The berries were an important food source for aboriginal peoples. They were eaten fresh or dried into cakes and dipped in whale or seal oil. Besides its food value, the roots and bark were used for medicinal purposes. Today the leaves are harvested for use in floral arrangements.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Salal is found in many of our landscape beds throughout Swantown Marina and the Port plaza and in many of our Tumwater property locations.

WEEK 2

Common Name: Sword fern

Scientific Name: *Polystichum munitum*



A big evergreen fern growing from a woody rhizome with erect to arching once-pinnate leaflets. It is very common on the west slopes of the Cascades.

The leaves were used by the northwest coast peoples to line traditional pit ovens and berry drying racks. They were also used as flooring and bedding. The rhizomes were roasted or steamed and eaten as a starvation food.

FIND IT AT THE PORT: Sword ferns can be found in part sun to full shade with moist to dryish soil. They tolerate the seasonally dry conditions under big conifers. They are found throughout the Port properties in Downtown Olympia and Tumwater.

WEEK 1

Common Name: Oregon grape

Scientific Name: *Mahonia aquifolium*



Oregon grapes are evergreen shrubs with pinnately compound leaves and prickly leaflets that resemble holly. Growing to 4 meters tall, it has yellow blooms in short racemes in the spring followed by dark blue berries with a waxy coating in the fall.

The sour but edible fruit were eaten by Native Americans, usually mixed with salal or other sweet berries. It was not a major food source. The dark yellow bark was used to make dye. It was used medicinally for gall bladder and eye problems.

FIND IT AT THE PORT Mahonia grows well in dry shady areas and can be found along the shoreline trail at Swantown and in our native garden on the corner of Marine and Olympia. It is easy to maintain and provides great bird habitat.