

Landscaping in and around native areas

The Pacific Northwest is abundant in beautiful places. Many of these sites are unique and tourists from all over the world come here just to admire these natural treasures. We, who live here, often forget how special this part of the world is and that we are responsible for it. We can enjoy it everyday without paying for expensive plane tickets, but we are also the caretakers, who have to ensure that others in the coming generations can enjoy it as well.

Many of us live right by some sort of native, protected or sensitive area, like a low beach by the Puget Sound or high bluff, small stream, lake or the woods. Whether a house is on the beach or in the forest, people live there to escape the concrete jungles of the large cities and immerse themselves in serenity. The question comes up: what can be done with the native part of a property?

Consulting with professionals is very important before any change is made to a native area. These places are complex ecological systems where even unintentional and small alterations can trigger chain reactions in further changes, often for the worse, so sometimes several different professionals are required to create a plan. The actions have to be planned out and phased with care for soil conditions, water issues, existing vegetation, and wildlife. It is not recommended to create a traditionally landscaped garden in a native area. Only restorations, enhancements, and habitat improvements are legally possible landscaping options in many of these places. A good design uses native plants, wildlife observation areas, paths, and habitat enhancement to match the surrounding and the original natural sites.

Most of these places show signs of some disturbance because weeds are overgrowing everything. The areas can be reclaimed from noxious or unwanted weeds and restored to natural health. The removal of blackberries for example is supported by counties and cities as well. Removal though is best done by hand or light weight machinery to reduce negative environmental impacts to a minimum. Chemicals are not recommended in any native settings to kill brush. Blackberries do provide food to many animals. Once they are taken out, the food source has to be replaced by something else, preferably native plants that produce berries or other food and shelter for birds and small critters.

Once a native area is restored, it shares its treasures with every visitor and observer all year around. These property sections can become just as beautiful as large national parks are, only, on a smaller scale. It is hard to imagine a more beautiful sight than eagles, perching on trees while waves are crushing restlessly on rocks below or herons, fishing in the wet bogs. The most special reward for any of us though is to know that our actions will benefit generations after generations of plants, animals and humans to come.

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