

BEST PRACTICES



Fall Planting Ideas to Enhance Urban Wildlife Winter

Native wildlife rely on plants for food and cover and in the urban environment, this can be a challenge. There is much controversy about whether non-native plants provide the same habitat as native plants. In general, native trees, shrubs and other plants are preferred to non-native plants, as non-native plants affect the entire food web.

How is the food web affected by non-native plants? Insects that feed upon our native plants are greatly reduced, which reduces the amount of food available for wildlife. These insects provide essential food resources for our native birds, reptiles and mammal species. Our native birds' diets are made up mostly of insects and during nesting season young birds feed exclusively upon nutrient rich insects.

Studies have shown that native insects, which have evolved with our native plants, lack the ability to overcome the chemical defenses of an ornamental non-native plant. What does this mean? Butterflies may visit and feed upon the nectar of the flowers on your ornamental shrub, but its larvae or caterpillar is unable to feed on the leaves, as they may not have the ability to overcome the chemical defenses of the ornamental plant. You may think it is good that your plants are not being eaten, but it may have an impact on native wildlife species. If all things are in balance, a healthy plant will seldom have life threatening damage from the insects that rely on it for food.

To help support wildlife, some scientific resources suggest planting your landscape with at least 75% or more native plants. Remember that during the summer food sources are more available than winter, making winter a more difficult time for urban wildlife to find food to forage upon. If you have a bare winter garden, you can liven it up for yourself and for the neighboring wildlife. By planting native or non-spreading shrubs that produce berries or seeds, you can provide cover and much needed winter forage for wildlife.

Shown in this article are a few native plants and non-spreading ornamentals that can provide habitat for wildlife and color for your winter garden.

As always, please avoid planting varieties that are invasive, such as English hawthorn, Norway maple, and Asian honeysuckles to name a few.

For more information on native plants visit Washington Native Plant Society <https://www.wnps.org/landscaping/herbarium/index.html>

Snowberry

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) provides white berry until the first hard frost. **Nootka rose** (*Rosa nutkana*), grows well in western Washington gardens and has beautiful red rosehips well into winter. The hips are edible even after they have shriveled from frost. Native roses, as well as ornamental roses, will produce hips, both providing a winter food source and color to your garden.

Evergreen Huckleberry

Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*), is another shrub that provides habitat, with beautiful evergreen foliage and dark blue-black berries.



Pacific Ninebark

Pacific Ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*) is a drought tolerant deciduous shrub with white flower clusters in spring that offers browse for wildlife and seeds for birds in winter.

Cornelian Cherry

Cornelian Cherry (*Cornus mas*) is a large deciduous shrub in the dogwood family. It has bright red berries that can be eaten by birds and humans alike. More than one plant is necessary for cross-pollination if fruit is desired.

Red-Osier Dogwood

Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) is attractive year round with its red bark, clusters of white flowers and golden fall foliage. It can form thickets, which birds, bees, butterflies and small mammals will use while also creating a summer screen.

Blueberries

Blueberries, grapes and other fruiting cultivars such as apple, crab apple and pear trees can provide cover and fruit late into the fall for wildlife to use.

Highbush Cranberry

Pacific Northwest Viburnums such as **highbush cranberry, mooseberry** (*Viburnum edule*) and **American cranberry bush** (*Viburnum trilobum* or *V. opulus americanum*) has bright red fruits (not actual cranberries) that last well into winter. This family also has non-invasive ornamentals that can also provide valuable wildlife habitat throughout the year. These shrubs do well in full sun and can tolerate partial shade, such as hydrangeas.

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