

Native Plants Identification Guide



Columbia
Slough
Regional
Stormwater
Treatment
Facility

Trees



Big leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*)

Native habitat: Near rivers, lakes, streams; grows in mixed groups with red alder, cottonwood, Douglas-fir and western red cedar.

What to look for: Height: 20-75 ft.

Shape: Broad, rounded crown with spreading or drooping branches.

Leaf: Dark, glossy-green, deciduous. This tree has the largest leaf of all maples – more than 12 inches wide.

Clues: Squirrels, mice, birds eat the seeds; deer & elk eat the twigs. Native peoples used the wood to make dishes, paddles & pipes; the inner bark to make baskets & rope. Sap was used to make syrup (similar to the maple syrup you eat but the flavor is different). The wood is used commercially for furniture & musical instruments.

What's in a name? The Latin word *macrophyllum* means big leaf. *Macro* = big; *phyllum* = leaf.



Varied thrush.
Dave Menke/USFWS



Black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*)

Native habitat: Open woods, stream banks and meadows.

What to look for: Height: 6-35 ft.

Shape: A much-branched shrub or small tree, compact, rounded crown of stout, spreading branches.

Leaf: Smooth, long, broad, dark green, shiny; serrated at the tip.

Thorns: straight, strong, ½ -1 inch long.

Flowers: Clusters of dense white flowers from May - June.

Berries: Blue-black.

Clues: Cattle & sheep browse the leaves; many birds eat the berries. Deer, small mammals & other wildlife eat the leaves and twigs. Several butterflies use the tree during caterpillar stage. Native peoples ate the berries fresh or dried, or mashed into cookies that were dried. Wood used as digging sticks for edible roots. Spines used as pins, fishhooks.

What's in a name? The Latin word *douglasii* refers to its discoverer, David Douglas.



Above: Unripened black hawthorn fruits (top) and thorns (bottom). Courtesy Greg Rabourn

Right: Mule deer. Gary Zahm/USFWS



Above: Pacific dogwood in bloom. Courtesy Greg Rabourn

Right: Pacific dogwood flowers. © Stan Shebs



Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttalli*)

Native habitat: Woods and stream banks.

What to look for: Height: 12-36 ft.

Shape: Dense conical or rounded crown.

Leaf: Oval, 3-4½ inches long.

Flowers: Tree is covered with large white flowers from April to July.

Fruit: Red, 1 inch round.

Clues: Native peoples used the wood for tools such as bows and arrows, handles and harpoons. Charcoal was used for tattooing. Leaves were dried and smoked. Tea made from the bark was taken for stomach trouble and the bark was also boiled to make a brown dye used for baskets. The fruits attract many species of birds as well as squirrels.

What's in a name? The Latin word *nuttalli* refers to early explorer/botanist Thomas Nuttall.



Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)

Native habitat: Moist, well-drained, mountain sites.

What to look for: Height: 15-150 ft.

Shape: Narrow, pointed crown, branches droop slightly.

Cones: 3-4 inches long, with pointed bracts on scales

Clues: One of the world's most important timber trees, Douglas-fir ranks first in the U.S. in total volume of timber and for veneer for plywood. The seeds are an important food for many birds, squirrels, chipmunks, mice and other

mammals. Grouse, deer and elk eat the needles; the twigs are eaten by mountain beaver, deer, elk and rabbits. Douglas-fir provides a home and nectar for the pine white butterfly.

What's in a name? Scottish botanical collector David Douglas (1798-1834) is commemorated in the common name. The Latin name *Pseudotsuga* (*pseudo* = false; *tsuga* = Japanese word for hemlock) notes that the Douglas-fir is not a true fir. *Menziesii* recognizes Archibald Menzies, an early naturalist/discoverer (1754-1842).



Above: Pileated woodpecker. George Washington Memorial Parkway/NPS
Left: Elk. Bruce Eilerts/USFWS

Trees

Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*)

Native habitat: Dry, wooded slopes and prairies.

What to look for: Height: 25-60 ft.

Shape: Wide, round crown of stout, spreading branches.

Leaf: Leathery, oblong, with round lobes. Green on top, dull beneath.

Fruit: Acorns are oval, 1 inch long.

Clues: Wood is commercially important for furniture, shipbuilding, construction, cabinetwork, interior finish & fuel. Acorns eaten by livestock, wildlife and, for thousands of years, were one of the most important foods for native peoples. Acorns are very nutritious, but bitter when raw, so they had to be cooked. This tree provides home and shelter for deer, birds, small mammals.

What's in a name? Also known as Garry oak, the tree is named after Nicholas Garry, deputy governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1822-35.



Downy woodpecker.
Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Pine siskin on red alder. Lee Karney/USFWS



Red alder (*Alnus rubra*)

Native habitat: Along streams, often in thickets

What to look for: Height 100-130 ft., spreads 20-30 ft.

Shape: Pointed or rounded crown.

Leaf: Oval with serrated edges, 2-3 inches long.

Bark: Smooth, mottled, light gray to whitish.

Cones: ½ to 1 inch long, grow in clusters.

Clues: Native peoples made tea from bark & root to treat a cough; tea from bark used for headache and other maladies. Bark was used for dyes. Wood used for furniture, veneer, cabinets. Deer and elk eat the leaves, twigs, and buds. The seeds attract many bird and small mammals. Most of the seeds stay on the tree in winter, providing valuable resources for seed-eating birds, insects and mammals when other foods are scarce. Beavers eat the bark and build dams and lodges with the stems.

What's in a name? The common name describes the reddish-brown inner bark and heartwood.





Vine maple
(*Acer circinatum*)

Native habitat: Moist woods; stream banks.

What to look for:

Height: 10-20 ft.

Shape: Shrub or small tree with several branches turning and twisting from base; often leaning or sprawling. **Leaf:** Almost round with 7-9 palmate lobes. Deciduous; fall colors range from yellow-orange to red.

Flowers: Small, loose clusters of flowers with white to pink petals.

Clues: Native people used the wood to make baskets, snowshoes, fish traps, boxes, bowls, drinking containers & bows. Vine maple charcoal was mixed with oil and used as black paint. The sap was eaten fresh & dried. The seeds are eaten by songbirds, game birds, and large and small mammals. Provides home and nectar for the western tiger swallowtail butterfly.

What's in a name? The Latin name *circinatum* means rounded or circular, referring to the leaf shape.



Western tiger swallowtail.
Luther C. Goldman/USFWS

Shrubs



Chestnut backed chickadee.
Lee Karney/USFWS



Blue elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea*)

Native habitat: Cool, moist, open areas.

What to look for: Height: 6-24 ft.

Shape: A large shrub or small tree.

Leaf: Deciduous, pinnately compound.

Flower: Flat-topped clusters of fragrant, creamy white flowers; bloom June – September.

Berries: Blue-black.

Clues: Birds eat berries. Native peoples used dead stalks to make a steambath for arthritis. Tea of roots taken for stomachaches. Berries eaten fresh, cooked, dried or made into jam. Stems used to make flutes & as whistles for calling elk.



Red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)

Native habitat: Open or partly shady areas.

What to look for: Height: 4-10 ft.

Shape: Erect shrub with many upright stems from the base.

Leaf: Dark green, lobed; deciduous.

Flower: Clusters of flowers along stem range from pale-pink to dark-red. Blooms March – April.

Fruit: Bluish-black.

Clues: A nectar source for hummingbirds, butterflies, bees. Native peoples ate the berries raw, stewed, canned & dried.



Rufous sided hummingbird. Dean Biggins/USFWS

Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*)

Native habitat: Open woodlands and open shrub wetlands.

What to look for: Height: 6 – 12 ft.

Thorns: Curve backwards on stem, are larger & thicker than those of other native roses.

Flower: Solitary, fragrant pink flowers bloom May - July, 2 -3 inches wide.

Fruit: Orange-red, pear-shaped hips, about ½ inch wide.

Clues: High in vitamin C, rose hips are used to make jam and tea. Native peoples mashed leaves to treat bee stings; used roots to make an eyewash. Birds and mammals eat the hips; the thickets provide nesting and escape habitat for songbirds. This plant is an important source of food for 2 species of butterflies.



Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)

Native habitat: Deep conifer forests and open, rocky woods.

What to look for: Height: 3 – 6 ft.

Leaves: Evergreen, leathery, shiny, look like holly.

Flowers: Clusters of small yellow flowers in spring.

Fruit: Bunches of small purplish-black fruit.

Clues: This is the state flower of Oregon. Birds like to eat the fruit, which is also edible for people. However, since the fruit is quite tart, it is typically used to make jelly. Not related to grapes, this plant gets its name from the cluster of purple berries that look like grapes. The inner bark and roots produce a yellow dye.

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)

Native habitat: Wooded hillsides and rocky, open slopes.

What to look for: Height: 2-5 ft.

Shape: Sparsely branched with slender, wiry twigs. Shrubs form a thicket 4-6 ft. wide.

Leaf: Small, oval, opposite leaves.

Flower: Inconspicuous tiny, pinkish-white, bell-shaped clusters.

Berries: Large, white, poisonous to humans.

Clues: Songbirds, game birds, small mammals use this plant for food, cover, and nesting sites. Native peoples rubbed berries on skin for rashes, sores; leaves used as a wash for injuries.



Red squirrel. Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Other Plants



Above: Common spikerush. Robert H. Mohlenbrock, USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / USDA SCS. 1989.

Common spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*)

Native habitat: Wet meadows, seeps, springs, lake margins and other wetland environments. The plants can grow in permanent water up to 3 ft. deep.

What to look for: Height: 1-3 ft.

Stems: Upright and round.

Flower: The small, cylindrical spike at the tip of the stem is many-flowered and light green to dark brown. Plants flower from June – September. The seeds are yellow to brown.

Clues: Spikerush spreads rapidly by rhizomes and will fill in large areas. It develops a thick root mass that helps stabilize soils and control erosion. The root mass also holds many beneficial bacteria that help clean water. This plant provides cover for young fish as well as nesting cover for waterfowl. Ducks eat the seeds and geese graze the shoots.



Male green-winged teal. Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*)

Native habitat: Damp conifer woods.

What to look for: Height: 3-5 ft.

Shape: Massive clump of dark-green fronds that resemble a palm tree top cut off.

Leaf: The fronds are evergreen, and grow in clumps of 75-100.

Clues: Native peoples ate the leaves for sore throats or tonsillitis. Basal leaves and rhizomes were steamed, peeled and eaten. Leaves were tied with maple bark and used for mattresses; leaves were also used to line cooking pits, food storage boxes, berry picking baskets and berry drying racks. Native children played an endurance game by pulling leaves off the plant.



White clover (*Trifolium repens*)

Native habitat: Cool, moist areas.

What to look for: Height: Up to 6 inches tall.

Leaf: Each leaf is made up of three leaflets, which may have a light crescent shape on the upper surface.

Flower: Each flower head has 40 to 100 florets that are white but may have a pink hue.

Clues: Stands of white clover form a good erosion-controlling cover. White clover is a tasty, nutritious food for deer and elk. Native peoples brewed a tea of this plant to treat colds, coughs and fever.

What's in a name? The Latin word *trifolium* means three leaves. *Tri* = three; *folium* = leaves.



Fawn. W.J. Berg/USFWS



Great blue heron. Lee Karney/USFWS

Check any wetland or field and chances are you'll see one of these big wading birds hunting for a tasty meal. They mostly dine on fish, but eat a variety of animals, including snakes, frogs and mice.

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Front cover photographs

Top, center: Unripened black hawthorn fruits. Courtesy Greg Rabourn

Red squirrel. Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

Western tiger swallowtail. Luther C. Goldman/USFWS

All other photos: City of Gresham