

Five Good Reasons for Landscaping with Native Plants

-by Dennis “Whitey” Lueck (Revised December 1997)

Aesthetics: Plants native to this area simply *belong* here. They seem a natural part of the local landscape because they *are* a part of that landscape. Moreover, by planting them around our homes and businesses, we help prevent the “McDonald-ization” of American landscapes where, within a given plant hardiness zone, we tend to see the same kinds of plants used for landscaping whether we’re in Oregon, Texas, or Virginia.



Compensation: Agriculture, industry, commerce, housing, and roads have already displaced native plants (and the animals that depend on them) from vast areas. When we plant exotic plants around our homes and businesses, those plants take up yet more of the space once occupied by native plants and ecosystems. It is thus important for us to make every effort to compensate for this loss of natural habitat by restoring the native landscape wherever and whenever we can.

Ecology: Plants indigenous to a particular area (e.g., the upper Willamette Valley, or the Puget lowlands) have typically evolved there over many thousands of years and have developed myriad ways in which they interact with other native plants and animals. They thus *participate* in the local environment to a far greater extent than do most exotic plants which have been largely removed from the organisms with which they evolved. And unlike some imported plants (e.g., English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, Scot’s broom), native plants have evolved with a variety of natural controls that prevent them from overtaking extensive areas and becoming “weeds.”

Economy: Because native plants do not generally require specialized growing conditions (nor are they grafted or protected by plant patents), and because many of them lend themselves to being sold bare-root during the dormant season, they cost less to produce and ship than many exotic plants that need to be coddled in nurseries and shipped with a heavy ball of soil around their roots. Furthermore, established native plants do not require supplemental irrigation, fertilizer, and pesticides in order to thrive, so those costs are not incurred.

Practicality: *If properly selected and sited*, native plants tend to be easier to care for and, once established, are quite capable of fending for themselves with very little human intervention. They are also much easier to know how to “use” in the landscape, as one needs only to observe where and how they grow best in local natural areas. Finally, if you properly design, plant, and care for native landscapes, Nature will happily do most of the “work” for free!



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