Native Herbaceous Plants in Our Gardens

A Guide for the Willamette Valley

Native Gardening Awareness Program
A Committee of the Emerald Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Oregon

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Table of Contents

Native Herbaceous Plants in Our Gardens........................................ 5

Shady Woodlands............................................................................ 7
  Baneberry – *Actaea rubra* .......................................................... 7
  Broad-leaved Bluebells – *Mertensia platyphylla* ......................... 7
  Hound’s-tongue – *Cynoglossum grande* ..................................... 8
  Broad-leaved Starflower – *Trientalis latifolia* ......................... 8
  Bunchberry – *Cornus unalaschkensis* (formerly *C. canadensis*) .... 8
  False Solomon’s-seal – *Maianthemum racemosum* .................... 9
  Fawn Lily – *Erythronium oregonum* ......................................... 9
  Ferns ......................................................................................... 10-12
  Fringecup – *Tellima grandiflora* and *T. odorata* .................... 12
  Inside-out Flower – *Vancouveria hexandra* .............................. 13
  Large-leaved Avens – *Geum macrophyllum* ............................... 13
  Meadowrue – *Thalictrum spp.* .................................................. 14
  Pacific Bleeding-Heart – *Dicentra formosa* ............................... 14
  Pacific Waterleaf – *Hydrophyllum tenuipes* ............................ 15
  Scouler’s Corydalis – *Corydalis scouleri* ................................ 15
  Stinging Nettle – *Urtica dioica* ................................................. 15
  Strawberry – *Fragaria spp.* ...................................................... 16
  Tiger Lily – *Lilium columbianum* ............................................. 17
  Twinflower – *Linnaea borealis* .................................................. 17
  Violet – *Viola spp.* ................................................................ 17
  Western Columbine – *Aquilegia formosa* ................................ 18
  Wild Ginger – *Asarum caudatum* ............................................. 19
  Wood Sorrel – *Oxalis oregana* .................................................. 19
### Table of Contents

**Open Sunny Slopes** .......................................................... 21
- California Poppy – *Eschscholzia californica* ......................... 21
- Checkered Lily – *Fritillaria affinis* .................................. 22
- Checkermallow – *Sidalcea spp.* ........................................... 22
- Deltoid balsamroot – *Balsamorhiza deltoidea* ....................... 23
- Douglas’ aster – *Aster subspicatus* ....................................... 23
- Elegant Tarweed – *Madia elegans* ....................................... 24
- Farewell-to-spring – *Clarkia amoena* ................................... 24
- Globe Gilia – *Ipomopsis capitata* (formerly *Gilia capitata*) ... 25
- Goldenrod – *Solidago canadensis* ....................................... 25
- Idaho Blue-eyed Grass – *Sisyrinchium idahoense* var. *idahoense* 25
- Onion – *Allium spp.* ....................................................... 26
- Oregon Iris – *Iris tenax* ..................................................... 26
- Oregon Sunshine – *Eriophyllum lanatum* .............................. 27
- Pearly-everlasting – *Anaphalis margaritacea* ......................... 27
- Shooting Star – *Dodecatheon hendersonii* ............................. 27
- Showy fleabane – *Erigeron speciosus* .................................. 28
- Stonecrop – *Sedum spp.* ................................................... 28
- Yarrow – *Achillea millefolium* ........................................... 29

**Soggy Bottomlands** .......................................................... 31
- Buttercup – *Ranunculus spp.* .............................................. 31
- Camas – *Camassia spp.* ..................................................... 32
- Harvest Brodiaea – *Brodiaea coronaria* ssp. *coronaria* ....... 33
- Larkspur – *Delphinium spp.* ............................................... 33
- Lupine – *Lupinus spp.* ...................................................... 34
- Monkeyflower – *Mimus spp.* .............................................. 35
- Mule’s Ears – *Wyethia angustifolia* ..................................... 35
- Showy Milkweed – *Asclepias speciosa* ................................ 36
- Skunk Cabbage (or Swamp Lily) – *Lysichiton americanum* .... 37
- Tufted Hairgrass – *Deschampsia cespitosa* ............................ 37
Growing native herbaceous plants in our gardens may preserve or re-introduce many of the diverse plants that weave natural tapestries across the Willamette Valley. Herbaceous plants are annuals and perennials that lack woody stems; they include bulbs, grasses, sedges, rushes, evergreen and deciduous ferns, and broad-leaved flowering plants. Historically, these native plants thrived in the Willamette Valley landscape – an open savannah with interspersed fir and oak woodlands and wetlands.

Early in the growing season spring beauty and trout-lily announce the coming of spring and the rebirth of plants emerging from the warming soil. An abundance of native plants growing and blooming in the spring delights our senses. In summer, the foliage, flowers, and fruits grace our gardens with a carnival of colors, textures, and fragrances. The value and interest is further elevated as insects, birds, and mammals find homes and nourishment in the resources of the native garden. Cornerstones of the winter landscape include evergreen perennials, ferns, and ground covers that hold soils, allowing rain to percolate. Evergreens sustain animal life, and during the grayness of winter refresh the human spirit.

In this guide, you will find short descriptions of selected herbaceous plants of the Willamette Valley and tips for growing them. We have included species that can be grown successfully with ordinary gardening and that have horticultural or ecological value. Availability of responsibly propagated plants is a further criterion. No rare or difficult-to-grow plants have been included. Plant descriptions include the most common or showy representatives; however, related plants may be mentioned in the descriptions.
When buying native plants, ask nurseries and suppliers about the sources of their plants. Choose plants from our eco-region, in the Willamette Valley, and plants that originated as close to your home as possible. Follow the NPSO gardening guidelines (see http://www.npsoregon.org/pos/gard.htm). Plants listed on the Lane County, state, or federal threatened or endangered lists are not recommended but may be mentioned in this guide to inform the reader of their special status. Do not disturb populations of native plants in the wild or on public grounds. Populations are easily devastated by over-picking of seed and digging of plants. Unforeseen damage can occur in the interdependent communities of native plants and animals. Responsibly collected and propagated native plants are becoming more easily available through local nurseries as demand increases.

This guide is divided into three sections based on broad habitat types: **Shady Woodlands**, **Open Sunny Slopes**, and **Soggy Bottom Lands**. Some plants may be appropriate for more than one habitat but have been placed in the most typical section with notes. Planting in the most natural habitat will reduce the amount of care needed to establish native plants. Remember that native plants are adapted to their unique natural habitats.
Trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants form a natural layered architecture that characterizes the woodland areas of the Willamette Valley. In natural woodlands, deep soils are built by the decomposing bounty of fallen trees and leaves, lichens, and other organic matter, which retain moisture and create ideal homes for evergreen ferns, leafy shrubs, and many other plants. In an urban landscape, buildings often provide shade and imitate the canopy of trees, but urban soils usually need rebuilding with natural compost, soil, and plant material.

Shady woodlands occur in uplands or lowlands and can vary from dry slopes to wet stream sides. These woodlands typically have edges and openings where many plants find special niches.

Baneberry – *Actaea rubra*

The berries of this distinctive plant are poisonous, perhaps accounting for its common name. The unbranched stems, up to 3 feet tall, look underclothed, bearing 2 or 3 very large spreading, compound leaves. The impressed veins of the leaflets give them a leathery look. Plumes of small white flowers give way to conspicuous red or white fruit in early fall. Baneberry dies back in winter to sprout again in spring. Typically found in moist, shady places on the lower slopes of woodlands and along streams, baneberry works well in the garden under conifers with companions such as fairy bells, vanilla leaf, inside-out flower, and ferns. Plant baneberry away from foot traffic as it can be easily knocked over.

Broad-leaved Bluebells – *Mertensia platyphylla*

On display from April through May, these flowers remind one immediately of the bluebells of traditional gardens. In a sunny, moist bed, the plants can grow up to 3 feet tall, with stems that are leafy right up to the clusters of blue (sometimes pink when young) bell-
shaped flowers. They can spread vigorously by underground stems. Once established, the plants can be divided easily in winter.

**Hound’s-tongue – *Cynoglossum grande***

Hound’s-tongue is a borage family member of the open forests at lower elevations. Its blue, saucer-shaped flowers are like forget-me-not, which are in the same family. The shape and texture of its large basal leaves vaguely resemble a dog’s tongue, which may explain its common name. However, in his herbal, published in 1653, Culpeper said, “It is called hound’s-tongue because it ties the tongues of hounds; whether true or not I never tried; yet I cured the biting of a mad dog with this only medicine … the leaves being applied to the wound.” Hound’s-tongue is a relatively early bloomer in the native garden.

**Bold French-blue flowers above broad basal leaves make hound’s-tongue very showy**

**Broad-leaved Starflower – *Trientalis latifolia***

On the open forest floor, in May through July, charming pink-to-white, star-shaped flowers rise above whorls of elliptical leaves. Each flower, about a half inch across, sits atop a thin, 4 to 8 inch stalk that extends from the center of the leaf whorl. The herbaceous tops of the plants die back in winter, emerging from a web of rhizomes the following spring. Broad-leaved starflower spreads to form a ground cover at the base of conifers. Northwest Native Americans are said to have eaten its small tubers.

In the garden, starflower grows well with bunchberry and twinflower but may be overwhelmed by more vigorous plants such as wood sorrel.

**Bunchberry – *Cornus unalaschkensis* (formerly *C. canadensis*)**

The bunchberry blossom is not a typical flower, but consists of 4 whitish bracts surrounding compact clusters of tiny flowers. On the floor of coniferous and mixed deciduous forests, the blossoms perch on rosettes of evergreen ovoid leaves 2 to 8 inches tall. Blooms last from June through August and are followed by pithy, bright red berries, greatly prized by birds such as forest vireos.

In the wild, bunchberry is often found growing on fallen logs and stumps where it spreads slowly through the decaying wood. It often chooses to grow under azaleas or vine maples. In our gardens,
it prefers partial shade in cool, humus rich acidic soils containing rotting wood. Twinflower, starflower, and Prince’s pine make good companion plants for bunchberry.

**False Solomon’s-seal** – *Maianthemum racemosum*

When the graceful arc of this perennial emerged from the leaf litter of the moist forest floor each spring, settlers in the Northwest were reminded of the Solomon’s-seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) they had known in the East. But here the clusters of creamy white flowers bloom from April to June from the tip of the stem, rather than hanging beneath, and the reddish berries are edible, though not particularly flavorful.

Of all the understory wildflowers of the forest, false Solomon’s-seal (formerly, *Smilacina racemosa*) is perhaps the easiest to grow in your garden. In winter, plant the sturdy rhizome an inch or two underground where it will be shaded through the summer. The plant will spread slowly and grow to 3 feet tall.

Two similar species serve similar functions in the garden. Fairybells (*Prosartes hookeri*, and *Prosartes smithii*, formerly *Disporum spp.*) let their creamy, bell-shaped blooms dangle from stems of 1 to 2½ feet until they turn to bright, orange-red berries.

Two other more vigorous species form denser groundcovers. Star-flowered Solomon’s-seal (*Maianthemum stellatum*), a smaller cousin, grows to only about a foot high and spreads more rapidly. Its delicate separate blooms yield blue-black berries in the fall. False lily-of-the-valley (*Maianthemum dilatatum*), which has 1 to 3 broadly heart-shaped leaves and hugs the ground, is common in the Coast Range. It can become a dominant, even invasive, ground cover if given summer irrigation.

Mix these perennials with inside-out flower, ferns, and wild ginger under native trees.

**Fawn Lily** – *Erythronium oregonum*

This lovely, oak-woodland lily has 6 long, pointed, creamy white petals above beautifully marbled pairs of basal leaves. Over time, the petals curve back and expose a 3-part, green capsule that ripens to
wheat color and opens in early summer, sprinkling many black seeds over the ground. Fawn lilies are easily kept and can spread across a lawn or meadow if the flowers are left to develop fully and distribute seed naturally before mowing.

Fawn lilies usually occur in communities of native oak woodland plants, where summer drought and winter rains encourage healthy conditions. Collect seeds only from private plantings with permission from other gardeners. Native populations are easily devastated by over-picking seeds. Sowing seed in undisturbed, undisturbed places will produce a population of flowering plants within 3 years. The first year the new leaves will resemble blades of grass but are more tender. Take care not to weed them! Allow seeds to ripen before mowing.

A similar lily, the pink fawn lily (E. revolutum), is native to the Oregon coast. It has larger pink flowers and larger, more boldly marbled leaves. The Emerald Chapter of the NPSO lists this species as rare and endangered in Lane County. Neither seeds nor plants of this species should be collected from the field.

**Ferns**

Coastal wood fern (*Dryopteris arguta*) is a medium-sized evergreen fern that tolerates drier and more open woodland habitats than do many other local ferns. It has dark green, finely cut, airy fronds up to 2½ feet tall. Coastal wood ferns require good drainage and should not be irrigated once established. This local fern is a very attractive plant for the native garden, but is often overlooked.

Deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*) has dark green fronds of two kinds. Evergreen sterile fronds make a spreading clump. Deciduous fertile fronds rise up to 3 feet tall from the center of the clump. Deer ferns grow in moist woods and can survive brief periods of standing water. They are an interesting and choice selection for the well-watered shade garden.

Although deer do not commonly eat ferns, deer fern gets its name because it can be important winter food for deer and elk. Deer rub their antler stubs on the fern after their antlers have fallen. Native Americans used the leaves as a salve for skin sores.
Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) is a dramatic, lacy deciduous fern, 3 to 6 feet tall, which grows in moist to wet woodlands, where it spreads fan-like from a clustered base. Not always behaving like a lady, lady fern is quick to colonize disturbed, moist, shady sites and may need to be controlled in small gardens.

The short leathery fronds of licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*) reappear annually on mossy branches of big-leaf maple and other deciduous trees and on north slopes of the forest floor just as the trees are losing their leaves. They remain lush and green through the winter and spring. By mid-summer the fronds wither and drop but the hairy creeping rhizomes remain alive and well under the moss. Although usually seen on branches, logs, stumps, and rocks, licorice fern can be successfully grown as a groundcover in the mossy floor of a shade garden. The licorice-flavored rhizomes were chewed for the flavor by several Native American tribes, who also used the rhizomes as medicine for colds and sore throats.

Maidenhair fern (*Adiantum aleuticum*) is an airy, apple green, deciduous fern with 5 to 7 finger-like branchlets splaying out from each arm of Y-shaped, dark, wiry stems. In nature, maidenhair is often found in the spray zone of waterfalls, at streamside, or on moist, shady slopes. But such demanding situations are not necessary. In the garden, maidenhair can grow with health and vigor in any humus-rich, shaded soil with moderate moisture. Historically, maidenhair fern was used to make cough medicine and also is said to have emetic properties. Its tough, dark stems were used in Northwest Native American basketry.

The sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*) may be the quintessential Pacific Northwest woodland herbaceous evergreen. Up to 100 dramatic 3- to 5-foot shiny dark green fronds spring fountain-like from tufted clumps in shade to part sun and from moderately moist to dry soils. A wonderful replacement for English ivy, sword fern can densely clothe a bank where it consorts happily with fringecup, false Solomon’s-seal, fairybells, and inside-out flower, all in a carpet of moss. Although generally quite easy to grow, it doesn’t appreciate
soggy soils. Sword fern is a joy year-round, from spring when its furry golden fiddleheads begin to unfurl through winter when most of its companions are hiding underground.

Sword fern leaves were used by many northwest native people as a protective layer in pit ovens, between layers of food in storage baskets, and even as flooring. The rhizomes were eaten as a starvation food by several tribes, and at least one group ate the cooked rhizome as diarrhea medicine.

Trim back these fronds each winter for a more formal aspect in the garden, or allow sword ferns to build in mounds over aging fronds. This will keep the roots cooler, reduce the need for summer irrigation, and create grand masses of foliage.

Fringecup – *Tellima grandiflora* and *T. odorata*

Fringecups form evergreen mounds with coarsely toothed, heart-shaped leaves typical of many members of the saxifrage family. Up to 35 little greenish-white frilly-edged bells, often touched with red and frequently fragrant, hang loosely on 1 to 2½ foot stems during spring and early summer. The soft, slightly hairy leaves are occasionally prettily veined in contrasting browns and purples.

In moist-to-dry woodlands, fringecup grows with sword fern, snowberry, inside-out flower, trillium, and fawn lily. It thrives on roadsides and disturbed areas, making it an excellent choice to plant where English ivy has been removed. Once established in humusy forest duff, fringecup should need no additional care and may provide benefits beyond its attractive appropriateness. For instance, elves are said to eat fringecup to improve their night vision.

Several similar woodland saxifrages are desirable plants for the shady garden. Mitella (from which *Tellima* gets its anagram name) is much smaller and usually grows in higher elevations. Small-flowered alum root (*Heuchera micrantha*) has smoother leaves and tiny white flowers in clusters on tall stems. It is a parent of the showy horticultural heuchera “Palace Purple.” About the same height as alum root, coast boykinia (*B. occidentalis*, formerly *B. elata*), which grows in moist woodlands and along stream banks, has a
loose habit, with maple-shaped leaves seeming to float beneath open clusters of tiny white flowers. Piggy-back plant (Tolmiea menziesii) has comparatively more pointed leaves often developing buds at its base. These buds can root to form new plants, making a dense carpet in moist woodlands. Foamflower (Tiarella trifoliata) is smaller than fringecup and has looser, 3-parted foliage and tiny, delicate, white flowers at the end of wire-like stalks. It is frequently found in moist ash woodlands, along stream banks, and near red alder. Massed plantings of foamflower can bloom throughout the summer in a moist shade garden.

**Inside-out Flower – Vancouveria hexandra**

Inside-out flower forms a foot-tall layer of delicate, light green, deciduous foliage in shady places in the forests of western Oregon, Washington, and California. Its leaves are divided into numerous, small, duckfoot-shaped leaflets. Small, white flowers are borne on stalks arising from the base of the plant, the petals turning back to expose its stamens (hence, the name inside-out flower).

Intolerant of hot sun, inside-out flower grows best in shade under conifers or deciduous trees. It needs a mulch of fir needles or bark to protect and promote its underground stems. It grows nicely among huckleberry, ferns, and trillium. It does not need watering once established, and can spread to form a thick ground cover.

**Large-leaved Avens – Geum macrophyllum**

The bright yellow flowers of large-leaved avens are displayed from late spring through mid-summer. The flower petals are small, averaging $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length, contrasting with the distinctive leaves, which have many unevenly toothed lobes, with the terminal lobe usually the largest. The leaves have small, stiff hairs that can prickle the arms of a gardener. This species is found in moist meadows and along stream banks.

Plant large-leaved avens in moist, partly shady spots in the garden. It will do well in deep soils, but can also tolerate rocky soils. Large-leaved avens seeds freely and prefers disturbed sites. Each flower produces numerous hooked seeds that can catch easily on clothing and the fur of passing animals. The plants can be aggressive colonizers, so it is best to plant them in isolated places in the garden.
Meadowrue – *Thalictrum spp.*

When meadowrue is not in bloom, its delicate, multiply-divided leaves with 3-lobed leaflets are sometimes mistaken for columbine. However, meadowrue’s foliage grows from the stem, while columbine leaves grow mostly around the base of the plant. Any confusion ceases when the plants begin to bloom. *Thalictrum* bears female and male flowers on separate plants. Female flowers are small with greenish-white sepals and no petals; males have hanging yellow anthers on purple stamens that dangle like a swarm of fairy insects. Meadowrue is rhizomatous, forming colonies in open forests or at the forest’s edge. Western meadowrue (T. occidentale) grows from 2 to 3 feet tall, while tall meadowrue (T. polycarpum) can reach 5 or 6 feet and has stouter stems and larger leaflets.

Meadowrue brings a delicate airy texture to a garden and becomes a pool of gold in the fall. It is particularly at home in dappled shade under deciduous trees or at the woodland’s edge.

Pacific Bleeding-Heart
– *Dicentra formosa*

The Pacific bleeding-heart is a lovely herbaceous perennial with fern-like, finely divided foliage. It prefers to grow under deciduous trees. Pale to dark pink, heart-shaped flowers rise above the foliage on 10 to 20 inch leafless stalks in spring to early summer, with blooms often continuing into July and August. In moist, shady places, bleeding heart tends to creep along its underground stems, forming lacy colonies. Or help it spread where you would have it grow by planting segments of its underground stems an inch or so under humusy soil. Pod-like capsules contain several black seeds with oily white appendages that attract ants. The seeds are dispersed when the ants carry them home. This is the only plant species upon which the Clodius Parnassian butterfly has been observed to lay its eggs.

Periodic watering will keep the foliage from dying back until late summer. Once the foliage dies back, it can be removed. New foliage and flowers will reappear the next spring.
Pacific Waterleaf – *Hydrophyllum tenuipes*

Bristly purplish balls of flowers and large, soft, hairy leaves divided into five or more segments characterize this vigorous foot-tall ground cover. Curled terminal clusters of little bell-shaped flowers exert their pistils and stamens like feathers among the soft leaves.

Pacific waterleaf is a good choice for moist, shady woodland gardens where generous drifts of dense groundcover are desired. It grows vigorously then dies back during the summer drought to reappear the following spring.

Scouler’s Corydalis – *Corydalis scouleri*

Three large, lacy, much-divided leaves float on stems up to 5 feet tall. Above them, numerous spurred flowers are arranged in spike-like clusters. The colors on a single bloom range from white to deep rose or even purple. Thick rhizomes allow corydalis to form colonies in moist woodlands.

Corydalis is delicate in texture but bold in scale and should be planted in shade in a part of the garden where its fragile stems won’t be trampled. It needs rich, humusy, moist but well-drained soil. Corydalis flowers from April to July and looks particularly at home under conifers, rising through carpets of mosses, wild ginger, evergreen violet, and ferns. The word corydalis is Greek for “crested lark,” in reference to the bird-like form of these flowers.

Stinging Nettle – *Urtica dioica*

“Stinging nettles in my garden? You’ve got to be kidding!” Well, certainly not along a path or where the children play. The coarsely toothed leaves have stinging hairs
containing formic acid and cause painful welts when they touch the skin, and there are more stingers along the stems. The tall – up to 8 feet – unbranched plants bear drooping clusters of tiny, greenish flowers where the leaves join the stem and at stem tips.

Stinging nettles are caterpillar host plants for red admiral, satyr comma, and Milbert’s tortoise shell butterflies and are important to several other Willamette Valley butterflies. So, when we are fortunate enough to establish a nettle colony in a quiet spot, the butterflies will thank us.

In springtime, young nettle shoots and leaves (harvested with gloves on) are tasty and nutritious in soups and stews, and the leaves can be collected for tea. Native Americans used nettle fiber for making fishing nets and snares. Nettles are often recommended as a spring tonic.

Strawberry – *Fragaria* spp.

Though our local wild strawberries are tiny, you’ll find them delicious if you can beat the critters to them. Even without flowers or fruit, these semi-evergreen to evergreen plants are valuable for their own sake. Their smooth, coarsely toothed leaves rise a few inches from the ground to provide a background for 5-petaled white flowers with gold centers. In nature, strawberries send out runners to spread gently through meadows or sunny open woodland floors. In the garden they do not spread aggressively enough to be annoying, but well enough to serve as ground cover. Woodland strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) grows in the shade. Its medium green leaves are pointed at the tip. Wild strawberry (*F. virginiana*) is quite similar but has leaves that are a bluer green with a shorter tooth at the tip. This species is usually found in sunnier site. You may find a third strawberry available locally. The coastal strawberry (*F. chiloensis*), native to coastal sand dunes and bluffs, has deep green, thick, leathery leaves, shiny above but hairy beneath.

The modern cultivated strawberry originated as a result of crosses produced in Holland in the 1750s from plants that included
the wild strawberry and the coastal strawberry.

**Tiger Lily – *Lilium columbianum***

This most widespread of our native lilies presents several large, well-spaced, orange flowers with reddish spots on petals strongly turned back. The flowers face downward from atop 2- to 4-foot stems that bear leaves in whorls.

Tiger lily occurs naturally in a variety of habitats. In moist, sunny areas, it can become tall and vigorous, with many flowers, but it is also happy in woodland situations where ferns and trilliums flourish. Eventually, the bulbs grow so deep that transplanting becomes difficult, so place tiger lily in a permanent location in your garden.

**Twinflower – *Linnaea borealis***

Twinflower blossoms perfume the summer air where this glossy ground cover carpets deep woodlands. Pairs of trumpet-shaped pink flowers nod from tips of thin Y-shaped erect stems clad with opposing half-inch rounded evergreen leaves. The many flowering stalks rise only an inch or two above long, spreading runners.

Twinflower is native to the boreal regions of the northern hemisphere. This was the favorite flower of Carl Linneus, the father of modern plant taxonomy, so his benefactor Gronovius named this beautiful plant after him.

When happy, twinflower makes a dense groundcover, growing in moss with such plants as evergreen violet and ginger. When conditions are not ideal, it sulks, making only sparse, thin strands. The difference appears to be due to location. For best results, plant in a shady north or east-facing woodland and add a thick layer of leaf mold if the natural organic top layer is insufficient.

**Violet – *Viola spp.***

Three species of violets are native to the Willamette Valley. The low-growing evergreen violet (*V. sempervirens*) is a wonderful ground cover for shady, well-drained places, sending out slender runners to form dense mats. Light yellow flowers grace the small, heart shaped leaves; the lower 3 petals have penciled purple veins, and the lateral
petals have yellow throats. Although it needs watering to become established, once it is settled into a shady area, little summer watering is needed. Violets and twinflower make good companions. Violets are host to the larvae of fritillary butterflies.

The yellow wood violet (V. glabella) needs some watering in the summer unless planted in a naturally moist site. Its shiny dark green heart-shaped leaves, 1 to 2 inches wide, are deciduous and grow a bit taller than those of other violets. The yellow flowers have 5 petals, the lowest with purple veins. The lateral petals are white-bearded.

The Western blue violet (V. adunca) is found in dry meadows and open woods. The flower stem rises just above evergreen leaves with blue to deep purple flowers that begin to bloom during February in a mild winter. The 3 lower petals are often white at the base and purple penciled, while the lateral pair of petals is white-bearded.

**Western Columbine – Aquilegia formosa**

With graceful blue-green basal leaves, 3-times divided and ferny, and stunning 5-part red and yellow flowers, columbine is an asset to any garden. The sepals are held out horizontally and red petals, modified into nectar spurs, point straight back. The rims and the anthers are yellow, adding a colorful contrast. The whole package dangles tantalizingly on 2 foot stems, attracting long-tongued hummingbirds, butterflies, and bumblebees to long nectar spurs. Frustrated honeybees, with their shorter tongues, sometimes cheat and bite a hole in the side of the flower to take a drink. These plants die back in winter to reemerge in the spring.

Columbine thrives best under dappled shade and in well-drained sandy loam. It has a long blooming period, from May through August. If left to self-sow, columbine may spread. Cutting the flower stalks after flowering will prevent self-sowing and will retain a clump of beautifully delicate green foliage. Or you may want to collect the seeds and give them to friends to scatter in the fall. The seeds need to be kept at low temperature for 60 days.
days (stratification) before they germinate well. Plants may also be propagated by division, but they have long taproots, so they should be transplanted when young.

**Wild Ginger – Asarum caudatum**

The shiny, deep green, heart-shaped leaves of wild ginger grow in pairs (each on a 2 to 6 inch stem) from rhizomes that creep through the leaf mold in our moist, shady forests. Beneath its leaves, it hides its flowers, strange brownish-purple thimbles, each with 3 thin tentacles. Rather than compete with other plants in the woodland by trying to attract flying pollinators, wild ginger tempts terrestrial insects with its exotic scent. The tapering lobes of its flower serve as “on-ramps” for ants and other insects finding their way to the bloom.

Although it is not related to the tropical spice ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), the whole plant smells somewhat like ginger when crushed. Northwest Native Americans attributed numerous medicinal qualities to the plant.

Once established, you can give segments of wild ginger rhizome to friends to plant in their garden in the winter. Ginger leaves will rise in the spring and spread to form mats beneath huckleberry or snowberry. Be advised that, unfortunately, slugs and snails like wild ginger, too.

**Wood Sorrel – Oxalis oregana**

Gardeners should consider this lovely native only for areas where it can be allowed to dominate the ground layer. It spreads rapidly by means of underground stems, making a dense, light green carpet of 3-parted leaves in shady habitats. Leaves fold prettily at night and unfold in the morning. Showy, white to light pink flowers with veined petals are borne individually on slender stems from each rosette in spring. Wood sorrel is easily grown in woodland gardens in a heavy mulched soil. The plants may die back in winter to return in the spring. It is easily propagated from pieces of its scaly, pinkish rhizome.
In an open field, yard, or meadow where few trees give shade, a richly diverse combination of native herbaceous plants thrive – from broad-leaved flowering plants to bulbs, grasses, and sedges. Drifts of iris and patches of checker-mallow in fields of fescue typified the open savanna landscape documented at the time of European settlement of the Willamette Valley. Native Americans used a variety of strategies - including burning, weeding, and harvesting - to keep these open areas free of woody plants. But over time and without management, trees and shrubs colonize open slopes and eventually become dominant.

In the Willamette Valley, open, sunny slopes border river valleys between the wooded hills and soggy bottomlands. These areas may be seasonally either wet or dry but are generally well drained. In urban landscapes, these habitats can be imitated in the sunny open yards and patios of our homes.

**California Poppy – *Eschscholzia californica***

This poppy, the state flower of California, lights whole valleys in brilliant orange. It ranges north to the Columbia Gorge and into Washington. It is a cheery plant with fern-like, blue-green foliage delicately tipped with red. The single orange flowers are born on 1 to 2 foot stalks. California poppies bloom from April through September with the blossoms becoming smaller as the season progresses.

The flowers have 4 silky petals, each 1 to 2 inches long, surrounding numerous stamens. Their color is typically bright orange to yellow, but a few cultivars are white and salmon

*The flowers of California poppy are mostly bright orange and yellow*
pink. The seed ripens in a long, curved pod that springs open when dry, flinging the small, dark brown seeds willy-nilly.

Most often, California poppies behave as annuals, although they can survive a mild winter. A deep taproot makes transplanting difficult. The best bet is to purchase or collect seeds and sow them where they are to grow. They will grow in almost any soil as long as it’s open and sunny. The plant has a tendency to flatten out in the center and continue blooming on the edge. If this form is unbecoming, cut the plant back or pull it out. Seedlings will pop up around the “mother” plant, but they are easy to thin if they are not welcome.

**Checkered Lily – *Fritillaria affinis***

A wonderful Willamette Valley native, the checkered lily, occurs as single plants or in small groups in oak or coniferous woodlands and occasionally in grassy meadows. Six petals shape a nodding, bell-like flower. The dark maroon flowers are checkered with chartreuse, which is especially vibrant on the inside. One or a few flowers bloom on a single stalk with long tapering leaves beneath. Rice root lily, another common name, refers to the rice grain appearance of the underground offset bulbs, which form near the fleshy, scaled main bulb.

Protect these plants by allowing seeds to mature on the stalk and disperse naturally. If you have bulbs from a local nursery, plant them in the fall. These plants may not bloom every year, so plant them in groups in your garden, selecting a site with good drainage.

*F. meleagris*, a European species, looks similar to our native species and is more readily available. It prefers a moist site.

**Checkermallow – *Sidalcea spp.***

Rosy checkermallow (*Sidalcea virgata*) is a member of the mallow family, as are hollyhocks and hibiscus. Mounds of large circular leaves remain green in winter. In mid-spring the plants display spikes of inch-wide, light pink to deep pink flowers usually about a foot or two above the foliage. This species, native to the dry Willamette Valley prairies and foothills likes lots of sun, will tolerate clay soils, and need no watering once established. Bees and butterflies are attracted to these plants for their nectar, and caterpillars of at least two species of local butterfly feed on the plants.

Three Willamette Valley checkermallow species are rare and should be protected in their native settings. These are meadow
sidalcea (Sidalcea campestris) found on grasslands, Cusick’s checkermallow (Sidalcea cusickii) of wet meadows and ditches, and Nelson’s checkermallow (Sidalcea nelsoniana) also found on wetter sites.

Deltoid balsamroot – Balsamorhiza deltoidea

Deltoid balsamroot grows in dry, open habitats at low elevations from British Columbia southward to California. In the Willamette Valley, it is found on sunny hillsides, meadows, and oak woodlands. It has large (up to 1 foot long) triangular, or deltoid, basal leaves, from which it gets its name. Showy, yellow-to-orange mini sunflowers, 4 to 5 inches across, on 1 to 3 foot stems appear in spring and last through early summer.

Balsamroot can be grown from seed sown in spring in deep, well-drained soil. It does not like its root disturbed and should only be transplanted when very young – just big enough to handle. It will not transplant well once established. Generally slow growing, it may take several years for plants to flower.

Douglas’ aster - Aster subspicatus

Douglas’ aster should be a staple in every native garden. Not only is it well adapted to our summer drought – as are all Willamette Valley native plants – but it has a long-lasting display of bright lavender flowers that begins in mid-summer and continues well into fall. It starts easily from seed and may spread (by seed) to nearby unoccupied areas in your garden. Skipper butterflies sip the nectar from asters in August and September, and possibly into October during warmer, drier years. Douglas aster is also an occasional host plant for the field crescent, a delightful, little, brown-and-orange-patterned butterfly of summer.

Douglas’ aster grows to about 2½ feet tall and has numerous flowers on each stalk. Once started, it needs little care. In our area, it naturally prefers slightly moist conditions such as riparian areas,
but it can thrive without irrigation. Giving it sun and maybe a little water during severe drought will promote even more flowering. Then just sit back and enjoy the show!

Hall’s aster (A. hallii) is somewhat smaller than Douglas’ aster, growing to no more than 2 feet. The flowers are a lighter color, typically pale pink to almost white. In nature, it is a plant of moist to wet prairies. It loves the sun and will do fine in a seldom-watered native garden. It tends to spread moderately by underground stems as well as by seed.

Our native asters may hybridize with one another, and possibly with other non-native asters. Plants grown from seeds of garden plants may not grow true to their parents.

**Elegant Tarweed – Madia elegans**

Bright sunny daisies, often with maroon centers, open when the sun is well up in the sky and close as the afternoon light dims. These are the flowers of elegant tarweed, a cheery 3 foot annual with sticky glands that exude a fragrant resin. Tarweed grows in dry, open sites and is easy to establish in new, sunny plantings. It will then self-sow to maintain for the future its diurnal gaiety.

Some madia species were important sources of food for Native Americans. Madia sites were burned and the roasted seeds collected in baskets.

**Farewell-to-spring – Clarkia amoena**

When spring flowers are only a memory, and the grass has begun to brown when dry, sunny banks and hillsides suddenly take on a blush of pink. These welcome summer blossoms belong to farewell-to-spring, a lovely annual with pink to rose-purple flowers about the size of California poppy. Like fireweed and other members of the evening primrose family, farewell-to-spring has 4 petals with a seed capsule below the floral parts. The plant itself is quite variable depending on growing conditions: it ranges in height from just a few inches to over 3 feet, and from a single stem to a well-branching plant.
Farewell-to-spring plants are still only occasionally available in nurseries, but the homeowner who finds one should have good success sowing its seeds directly onto a sunny bank in the fall. Assuming that conditions are favorable, the plants will self-sow, repeating their beautiful blush for many years.

**Globe Gilia – Ipomopsis capitata (formerly Gilia capitata)**

Atop each bare branch of the globe gilia sits a light blue ball made of small, densely packed, light blue flowers. Each plant is from a single slender stem 5 to 30 inches tall with lacy compound leaves reminiscent of yarrow leaves.

To add globe gilia to your garden, set plants or seeds in dry open spots that mimic the habitat of the meadows and clearings where it grows happily in the wild. This annual may self-sow in your garden.

**Goldenrod – Solidago canadensis**

Bumblebees, butterflies, and syrphid flies visit the pyramidal, yellow plumes of goldenrod in mid- to late summer. Later on, birds feast on their seeds. Goldenrod grows from 1½ to 5 feet tall and forms colonies on long, creeping rhizomes. The numerous lance-shaped leaves make a beautiful contrast to the yellow flowers at a time of year when few other plants are blooming.

An important plant to wildlife, this attractive perennial is easy to grow in unamended and unirrigated sunny meadows, roadsides, and forest openings. Be cautious of the creeping underground stems, which can spread quickly in watered gardens.

**Idaho Blue-eyed Grass - Sisyrinchium idahoense var. idahoense**

Blue-eyed grasses are actually perennials in the Iris family. Idaho blue-eyed grass is the most likely species to be found in the Willamette Valley. It grows in seasonally wet prairies and open grasslands, blooming in summer. Blue-eyed Grass forms small clumps of flattened iris-like leaves, each clump with several flowering stalks, which can spread slowly by seed or by short underground stems.
Beautiful blue-eyed grass (S. bellum), with slightly lighter colored petals, is also found in the Willamette Valley and into the surrounding hills. The 2 species are similar in appearance, with blue-green flattened leaves, typical of irises and lovely ¾ to 1 inch purple flowers on 1-foot stalks. The petals are dark purple with bright yellow centers.

There has been considerable confusion in the naming of blue-eyed grasses. Both these species have incorrectly been called S. angustifolium and may be labeled as such in nurseries.

Yellow-eyed grass (S. californicum) has yellow flowers and is native to California and the Oregon coast. It is not considered native to the Willamette Valley. In this eco-region, it spreads excessively by seed and is not recommended in garden settings.

Onion – Allium spp.

Several species of wild onions are native to the Northwest; all grow from bulbs, and all have the characteristic smell and taste of the cultivated onion. From May through June, Hooker's onion (A. acuminatum), with its cluster of up to 25 small, urn-like, deep rose-purple flowers on one-foot stalks, can be found in dry, sunny, open situations. Slimleaf onion (A. amplectens) is similar, but its flowers are white, often tinged with pink. It is found in dry open habitats, but also in seasonally wet prairies and roadside ditches in the Willamette Valley.

Onions are best propagated by seed in early spring and by offsets or by planting bulblets in the spring or fall. They are easy to grow in the garden and require no special treatment.

Oregon Iris – Iris tenax

This beautiful grass iris, with its purple to lavender, yellow-centered blooms, graces moist meadows, paths, and roadsides throughout the valley each spring. Its stems rise to a foot tall from basal grass-like leaves. Stephen Douglas suggested that the plant be named “tenax” or “tenacious,” having found that the ropes and nets that Northwest Native Americans made from its leaves were particularly strong.
Oregon iris adapts easily to moist, sunny areas of the garden. It will grow to form clumps, which can be carefully divided and given away to friends every 2 or 3 years in the late fall when the plant is dormant. Its short, thick rhizomes are poisonous, making this iris one of our few deer-resistant plants. *I. tenax* was crossed with other Pacific coast species to generate Pacific hybrid irises.

**Oregon Sunshine - *Eriophyllum lanatum***

The midsummer blossoms of Oregon sunshine are an essential part of the native garden. This low-growing plant in the sunflower family can be started fairly easy from seed or by dividing another plant. It grows rapidly; each plant can produce many flowers. The woolly leaves “erio-phyllum” with long, whitish-green lobes are interesting in themselves. Each plant spreads out to occupy vacant space around it. Profuse, yellow, daisy-like flowers attract a multitude of native bees. This plant will do well in just about any sunny garden situation, as it is found in nature in both wet and dry prairies.

**Pearly-everlasting – *Anaphalis margaritacea***

When in summer bloom, pearly clusters of tightly closed flowers are shiny white. Later, the papery flowers open up and persist into winter. The long narrow leaves are widely spaced on long stems; their whitish, woolly undersides are sometimes sticky with resin. New plants are easily established by spreading seeds in summer. The plants quickly establish communities, spreading by shallow rhizomes through Duffy soils. Rhizomes can be effectively transplanted at the time of the fall rains. These drought-tolerant plants frequently occur in forest openings and woodland edges. They are also pioneer species in disturbed or cleared areas and roadsides. Pearly everlasting thrives in irrigated areas and may out-compete other plants.

Used in wedding bouquets, the flowers symbolize everlasting love. To use them in your own dried flower arrangement, pick them just before blooming and let the bouquet dry upside-down in a well-ventilated, cool place.

**Shooting Star – *Dodecatheon hendersonii***

Encountering a meadow full of shooting stars is one of the most joyous moments of an early spring hike. Five to 15 flowers dangle from stalks ranging in height from 5 to 18 inches. Each flower
stalk rises from a rosette of smooth, thick leathery, oval leaves. The flowers point downward with the 4- to 5-parted petals swept back revealing dark filaments (male floral parts) that are fused into a tube. The effect is like a black-tipped dart with a yellow band fading to white and finally dark pink.

These plants are found in sloping, grassy meadows or open woods from southwestern British Columbia to California. They can be a bit tricky to grow in the garden, needing well-drained soil and dappled shade. In soggy soils, they tend to die out. A semi-shady lawn with sparse grasses and plenty of mosses might be the best location to try growing shooting stars. Avoid mowing areas with shooting starts until the seeds have ripened and dispersed. If your garden proves to be a suitable place for them, they are a true early spring delight.

**Showy fleabane – *Erigeron speciosus***

In early summer, showy fleabane becomes a mass of pink, purple, blue or occasionally white daisies rising 6 to 30 inches above foliage mounds in open woods and clearings. Though easy to grow in sun to partial shade, this pretty plant will better live up to its name with plenty of sun. In too much shade, it will produce fewer, less showy flowers.

Its perennial taproot stores water, helping it survive summer droughts. Ranging from southern British Columbia to Baja California, showy fleabane is adoptable to many climates. But we have a special claim to it, as its alternate common name is Oregon daisy.

**Stonercrop – *Sedum spp.***

Stonecrops are succulent-leaved perennials found in nature on rocky outcrops and gravelly hilltops. In late spring, the flowering stalks rise above...
the foliage, bearing sprays of small yellow or pink flowers. They are tough little plants with water reserves in their leaves and waxy, thick skins that protect them from drying out. Stonecrops are great plants for rock gardens. Grown in pots, they won’t wilt while you are away on summer vacation, and they tolerate the cold of winter as well. For the best foliage, provide good drainage, moderate watering, and partial shade or half-day sun. If grown in pots, add some sand or gravel to the potting mix.

Broad-leaved stonecrop (S. spathulifolium) is a very low-growing, pale, bluish-green plant with wedge-shaped leaves forming rosettes at the stem tips. It is native from low to fairly high elevation sites west of the Cascade/Sierra summits, ranging from northern California to British Columbia.

Oregon stonecrop (S. oreganum) has small pearl-shaped leaves, forming a carpet of rich green in partial sun or bronzy red when in full sun. It is found on rocky ledges and gravelly ridges at middle to high elevations in our area and is native to the west Cascades from northern California to Alaska. Oregon stonecrop may spread in the garden, but it is easy to remove and is easily contained in planters.

Yarrow – Achillea millefolium

A sun-loving plant, yarrow is common throughout the northern hemisphere. The finely divided feathery leaves are aromatic when crushed, and the flowering branches form lacy, white umbels (think of umbrellas) well above the dense basal foliage.

Yarrow is found in fields and open grasslands in western Oregon and can be thought of as somewhat weedy. However, it is not too aggressive and on pathways may form velvety mats that are a delight to walk on with bare feet. Yarrow needs good drainage but is not particular about soil types. Once established, yarrow will not require summer watering.
The Willamette Valley landscape is abundantly blessed with soggy bottomlands. Upland hillsides and sloping meadows drain to these bottomlands. Soggy bottomlands are sometimes created in our backyards and in urban areas where water is trapped by structures or soil compaction.

Two distinct types of plant communities are found in soggy bottomlands. Some native plants are adapted to anaerobic conditions, where they thrive in still water and in pungently fragrant soils. Other plants thrive where water is present but drains to create aerobic soil conditions. Both areas support thick, often rampant plant life. Wetlands are dynamic places. A wet meadow or swamp of native plants such as sedges, rushes, and swamp lilies will fill in and blanket an area, inhibiting invasive plants. Plants are an important part of the water and air exchange system of soggy bottomlands and can filter pollutants and minimize downstream pollution of rivers.

**Buttercup** – *Ranunculus spp.*

Our native meadow buttercups are rather small and delicate, but they nevertheless create a bright yellow display in early spring, mixing beautifully with purple-blue camas, and pink shooting stars. The flowers typically have 5 shiny petals on thin stems. They are available from nurseries selling native plants but can also be propagated from seed. The seeds mature into clusters in mid-summer. When they are medium to dark brown, they surrender easily to the outstretched hand. They grow best in full sun in wet meadow-like situations. Because they bloom early, buttercups may finish their display before grasses completely engulf them. If you must, mow; but if you wish them to seed naturally, wait until their seed matures. Buttercup foliage disappears in early winter to emerge again in late winter.

Western buttercup (*R. occidentalis*) is a delicate perennial found in moist, sunny meadows. Leaves and stems are covered with fuzz, giving them a bluish tinge. Flowers bloom from March to early May;
the tiny half-inch petals form cups of gold on stalks up to 2 feet tall. Each seed has a curved hook; several seeds together form a round cluster.

Straight-beaked buttercup (R. orthorhynchus) is very similar to western buttercup, but it blooms later, is a little taller, and has slightly larger flowers. The flowers typically don’t open all the way, and the sepals are bent backwards. The seeds of this species have a straight beak, hence the common name.

When bringing a buttercup into your garden, be sure it is a native species. Unlike some exotic buttercups, native buttercups are not aggressive and will not take over flowerbeds and lawns. Avoid the very invasive creeping buttercup (R. repens).

Camas – Camassia spp.

Six-pointed stars shine along tall flower spikes reaching 1 to 2 feet tall on the common camas (C. quamash) and 2 to 4 feet on the great camas (C. leichtlinii). The blooms are generally blue, but range from nearly navy to a blush of pink or even white. Both species grow in sunny, winter-wet meadows. Great camas also grows on hillsides. The leaves, like broad blades of grass, wither soon after the plant blooms in spring.

Before European settlers began farming in the Northwest, camas painted the land so blue that in 1806 Meriweather Lewis described a camas field he was looking down on by writing, “At first sight, I could have sworn it was water.”

Camas bulbs were an important food for Native Americans, who kept camas beds free of brush by regular burning. The fires preserved oak savannas that are rapidly disappearing. Native Americans were aware that the bulbs of death camas (Zigadenus venenosus) are indistinguishable from those of common and great camas, so they removed or carefully marked death camas when their much smaller, cream-colored flowers were in bloom.

Camas is a beautiful addition to the sunny garden border. It is quite happy in heavy soils (and even rocky knolls) that are wet in
winter and spring and dry out in summer. Mix plantings of camas with harvest brodiaea and fool’s onion.

**Harvest Brodiaea - *Brodiaea coronaria ssp. coronaria***

This treasure of Willamette Valley prairies has 6-petaled, vase-shaped, inch-long, white-throated, purple flowers, usually occurring in loose clusters of 3 to 5 flowers on stalks up to a foot tall. Harvest brodiaea blooms in mid-summer after its narrow, grass-like leaves have died back and most of the surrounding grasses have dried. Once established in the garden, it is drought tolerant. Native Americans and early European settlers ate the underground bulbs both raw and cooked.

Another summer-blooming bulb that grows in similar habitats is fool’s onion (*Tritelia hyacinthina*, formerly *B. hyacinthina*), which somewhat resembles an onion in appearance but lacks its characteristic flavor and odor. It has papery, white, densely clustered flowers with a prominent green to blue-green mid-vein on the petals. Fool’s onion grows to 2 feet tall in soil that is saturated in winter and bone dry by summer. It will flourish in a sunny place in your garden.

**Larkspur – *Delphinium spp.***

These glorious, spring-blooming plants with rich, blue-to-violet blossoms attract both butterflies and bumblebees. The petals and colored sepals form an irregularly shaped flower with a nectar-containing spur at the base of the upper petal. When grown from seed, they probably won’t bloom until early spring of the second or third year after planting. If flower stalks are cut, established plants may
bloom again (although not as impressively) in the late summer or fall. Larkspur contains alkaloids, which in large quantities are poisonous to people and cattle. The tops of the plants die back in winter to tuberous roots.

Menzie’s larkspur (*D. menziesii*) has flowers of an intense blue, with the upper two petals light or white, and stems one to two feet tall. In the garden, this species will prefer a more open, well-drained exposure. The leaves are basal, round to pentagonal, and 1 to 2 inches wide.

Poison larkspur (*D. trollifolium*) produces bright blue to violet-purple flowers on stalks from 2 to 6 feet tall. It prefers moist forested conditions and stream banks.

**Lupine – *Lupinus spp.***

Above its soft green leaves with many fingers splaying out from a central point, this species’ stately spires of dense blue, violet, or brownish-purple flowers attract bees and butterflies in springtime’s sunny sites. Large-leaved lupine’s (*L. polyphyllus*) typical pea-family flowers have boat-shaped bottoms with a nearly horizontal sail for a top petal. The well-known garden ornaments know as Russell hybrid lupines are progeny of our large-leaved lupine.

Streambank lupine (*L. rivularis*) is a well–branched plant with flowers and foliage of a much finer scale. It can grow in shadier locations than large-leaved lupine. It thrives in open woods, at woodland edges, along stream sides or in an open meadow. Broad-leaved lupine (*L. latifolius*) is a bushy plant, with two-toned, Bluish flower spikes up to 2 feet tall. It grows in open areas.

Lupines are host plants for several butterflies, particularly “hairstreaks” and “blues.” Kincaid’s lupine (*L. sulphureus, ssp. kinkaidii*) is federally listed as a threatened plant and is the sole host plant for the larvae of a rare butterfly, Fendler’s blue. The plants are being reintroduced in protected areas of the
Willamette Valley and may eventually re-establish their plant-insect relationship in our ecosystem,

**Monkeyflower – *Mimulus spp.***

Monkeyflowers are lush, water-loving plants with bright green foliage and distinctive brilliant flowers of yellow or red. The tube-shaped, two-lipped flowers are typical of the family they share with snapdragons and penstemons. The Latin name mimulus means “little actor.” The common name refers to the flower’s flared lips surrounding an open throat which resembles a happy monkey face.

Stunning, scarlet, bugle-shaped flowers on 12 to 30 inch stems attract all eyes and the hummingbird’s bill to the scarlet monkeyflower (*M. cardinalis*). Scarlet monkeyflower’s leaves clasp the stems in opposite pairs. Each leave grows to about 2 inches long and is heavily veined and coarsely toothed. Sticky hairs cover the stems and leaves. This beautiful plant adapts readily to the garden when planted in full sun or partial shade and given adequate water.

Yellow monkeyflower (*M. guttatus*) is extremely variable in height, growing from 4 to 30 inches tall in seepage areas, along streams, near springs, and in wet ditches. Its sunny yellow face is decorated with one or more red dots on its lower lip. Yellow monkeyflower grows easily when provided with a wet, sunny or partly shady garden large enough to accommodate its exuberance. Pink monkeyflower (*M. lewisii*) is a beautiful rose-red to pale pink monkeyflower that grows along streams and in wet clearings at higher elevations.

**Mule’s Ears – *Wyethia angustifolia***

Mule’s ears, a bold plant with large, coarse-textured leaves, is found in seasonally moist meadows at low to middle elevations west of the Cascades. It ranges from southern Washington to central California. The basal leaves are large and lance shaped, forming a hefty clump with 1 to 2 inch yellow sunflowers on 2 to 3 foot stalks. The showy flowers appear in late spring and persist through early summer.
Once established, Mule’s ears are slow growing and long-lived. The plants require full sun, and are drought tolerant. The tops turn crispy and dark brown by the end of summer, disappear in winter, and sprout anew from their large taproot the following spring. The seeds resemble small sunflower seeds. If the weevils don’t get them first, they can be sown in a deep pot or in the garden and will easily sprout in the spring. These plants generally do not transplant well. Planting them in a permanent spot in the garden while they are still young is more likely to be successful.

Showy Milkweed – *Asclepias speciosa*

Showy milkweed can be found in sunny meadows, wet prairies, roadsides, and open woodlands. From a distance, it appears as a lovely 2 to 4 foot bluish-green plant with clusters of whitish-pink flowers and elliptic leaves up to 6 inches long. The unusual flowers deserve a closer look, with their recurved sepals and petals revealing internal floral parts. The flowers mature into seedpods which split open when dry releasing a voluminous mass of silky hairs carrying the seeds aloft on the wind. The silken mass seems to defy physics, expanding and erupting from the pod like clowns tumbling from a phone booth. So light and fluffy are these hairs that they were used to stuff aviators’ life jackets during World War II.

Showy milkweed needs full sun and grows well in heavy soils. New plants can easily be started from seed. Seedlings must be protected from slugs, or they will be completely devoured in a garden setting. Young plants should be watered through the first two summers, but once taproots form the plants are drought tolerant. Milkweed is a perennial which dies back in winter. If sown from seed, it will bloom in 3 years.

These flowers are a popular nectar source for many species of butterflies.

True to its family name, milkweed bleeds copious amounts of white sap when damaged. Although this milky sap is poisonous to most animals, monarch caterpillars will happily devour it. Interestingly, the alkaloids make the monarchs unpalatable to birds.
Showy milkweed has become uncommon in the Willamette Valley since settlement, a critical situation because it is the sole host plant for the migrating monarch butterfly. Efforts are currently underway to restore it to the Valley.

**Skunk Cabbage (or Swamp Lily) – *Lysichiton americanum***

The large leaves of skunk cabbage form a basal rosette that becomes huge in shady marshes – up to 5 feet long by nearly 2 feet wide. In sunny, exposed areas, leaves may grow only one foot or so in height. Tiny, greenish-yellow, musky-scented flowers clothe a thick, fleshy, corn-cob-like spike called a “spadix,” which is hooded by a large showy butter-yellow bract (or “spathe”). Skunk cabbage blooms in late winter to early spring, before or just as the new leaves emerge.

Such a striking plant deserves the more flattering name “swamp lily.” Swamp lily colonizes wooded wetlands, swamps, marshes, and wet meadows. It frequently grows with Western red cedar and associates with sedges, small-fruited bulrush, and lady fern. By whatever name, this dramatic plant is perfect in a boggy area or water’s edge.

**Tufted Hairgrass – *Deschampsia cespitosa***

Tufted hairgrass, a classic bunchgrass, forms densely clumped, leafy tussocks. The flowering stalks, which support tiny, wind pollinated flowers, can grow to 4 feet tall. The flower heads range from purple to yellow and appear to shimmer in the breeze. Flowering begins in late May in the Willamette Valley.

Plant tufted hairgrass in very wet, sunny habitats; it tolerates standing water in the winter and prefers shallow groundwater during summer. If planted in appropriate sites, it requires no summer irrigation. To maintain a population allow plants to grow tall without moving them.

Historically, the Willamette Valley contained extensive wetlands with stands of tufted hairgrass. Gardeners with wet meadow habitats may want to plant species such as tufted hairgrass, camas, and other natives to help restore these lost Willamette Valley wetlands.
The Emerald Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Oregon, the Friends of Hendricks Park, the Native Plant Garden of Hendricks Park, and the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Division supported the design and printing of this booklet.

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