



Springtime Spotlight: Planning & Planting



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Using the Shore Steward Guidelines

Spring marks the beginning of the planning and planting season. As you consider updates or improvements to your property, the WSU Shore Stewards Guide for Shoreline Living offers valuable guidance. While all ten guidelines support effective property management, this issue highlights a few of the resources from several of the specific guidelines to get you started.

Designing with Nature

Nature can work for you! By working with nature you can cool your home, save energy, provide privacy, reduce your water bill, save time, avoid introducing invasive species and increase bird and wildlife activity. You can also prevent erosion and water runoff. Many Shore Stewards find that with careful site planning, nature can provide all of these things, inexpensively and attractively. By observing and understanding your property you can begin to design with nature, taking full advantage of the benefits it provides.

For example, if you keep trees like big leaf maple, vine maple and bitter cherry on the south side of your house, your home will be shady and cool in the summer. Dense existing vegetation can maintain your privacy and provide a screen from future development on neighboring properties. Dead trees or snags can be attractive and will provide homes for many birds such as woodpeckers, flickers, osprey, and bald eagles. Keep them if they are not a hazard. Carefully planning pathways to the beach can prevent erosion. Maintaining your views can be accomplished by carefully pruning limbs, instead of cutting down or topping a tree. Start by creating a map. Once you have your map you will start to see ways to work with nature.

Observe your property over a few months to see the conditions in your yard. This will help you decide which plants would thrive on your property. One of the best ways to get nature working for you is to simply keep existing soils and native plants, shrubs, and trees. Next, we'll talk about native plants.



WHERE TO FIND NATIVE PLANTS: A great way to increase native plants in landscape is to dig seedlings from your yard and transplant them elsewhere. There are several excellent native plant nurseries in the region. Most local conservation districts have annual native plant sales in mid-winter, and many have guides on their websites. WSU Master Gardeners also have plant sales. The Washington Native Plant Society has plant sales, classes, field trips, and online resources. On their website you'll find [Native Plants for Western Washington Gardens and Restoration Projects](#), with a link to "Native Plants for Saltwater Shoreline and Saltwater Habitats".

Choosing Native Plants

Benefits of native plants

Native plants are ideal for home gardens. They provide interest and diversity to a landscape and create habitat for wildlife. These plants thrive in our nutrient-poor soils, unique temperature and moisture conditions, and rarely, if ever, need fertilizer. Native plants usually don't succumb to fungi and molds, which occur naturally in our region. Besides improving water quality by filtering out pollutants and sediment, some of the other benefits of native plants on shoreline properties include:

- **Increased soil stability.** The best way to maintain soil stability is to retain existing native vegetation. Plant roots can reinforce the soil, increasing the lateral soil shear strength and cohesion during wet or saturated conditions. In addition, plants absorb and remove water from soils. Evergreen trees and shrubs are ideal choices since they continue to use water from the soil even in our wet winter months when deciduous plants have gone dormant.
- **Increased shade.** Temperature and moisture conditions on beaches are greatly impacted by the availability of shade from overhanging vegetation. Sand lance and surf smelt lay their eggs on the highest part of the beaches just below or among driftwood. In 2001, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Dan Penttila found much higher mortality of spawning sites on sun-exposed beaches than on shady beaches. Forage (or bait) fish such as these are an important part of the food chain that supports marine mammals and salmon. Many other species dependent on cool, moist environments experience increased stress or mortality when tree cover is lost.
- **Increased salmon food.** Marine fish, like salmon, have been found to eat insects from the terrestrial environment that are provided by overhanging vegetation. More research is still needed to determine the true extent of salmon dependence on these terrestrial bugs. However it is believed that as vegetation is eliminated along our marine shorelines, the food supply is diminished for a range of fish.

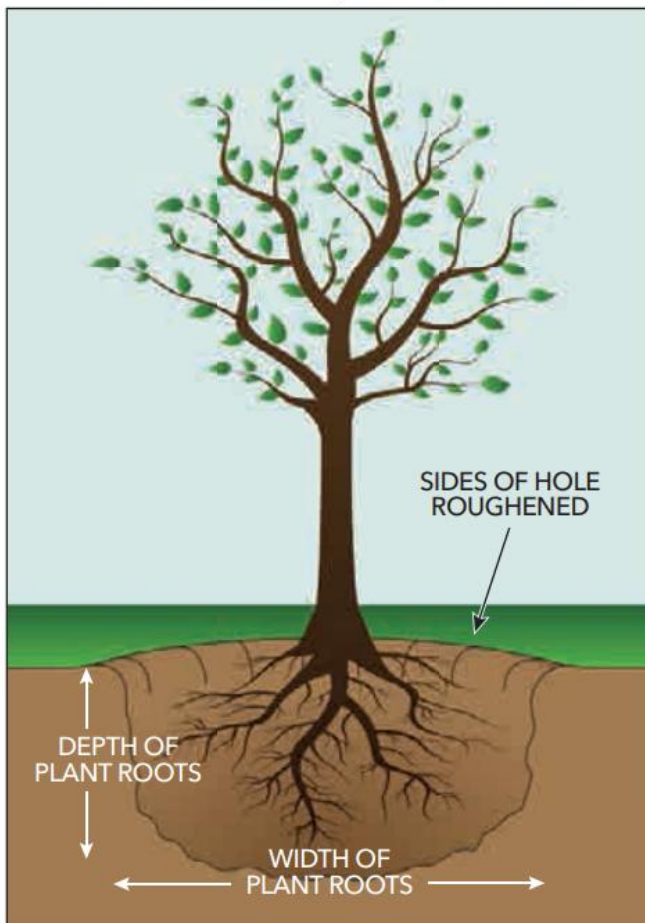
Selecting native plants

To increase plant survival rate in your yard, do some research before you buy any plants. Some native plants like dry rocky soils and others like moist, humus-rich soils (like the duff in a forest). It's important to know what the cultural requirements are for each plant. Things to consider include soil type, water requirements, sun/shade requirements, and potential for contact with salt spray. Placing the wrong plant in the wrong place—whether native or not—may result in plants that are unhealthy, scraggly and unattractive due to stress and inability to thrive vigorously.

Choosing Native Plants (cont.)

Planting tips

- **Don't plant too deep.** The top of the root ball or plant crown should be at the same level or just one-half inch above the surrounding soil. If planted too deep, the plant stem can rot and the roots suffocate.
- **Disturb roots.** Remove the plant from the pot and pull loose roots outward and cut or straighten any that are encircling the root ball. This encourages the roots to grow into the surrounding soil. If it no longer looks like a root ball, you've done well.
- **Don't dig your hole too deep.** Dig a saucer-shaped hole that is 2-3 times the width of the root mass. Build a mound of soil at the bottom of the hole. Splay out the roots so they are pointing to the surrounding soils.
- **Don't add soil amendments.** Coastal plants are adapted to low-nutrient soils. Adding fertilizer or compost in your planting hole will encourage weeds as well as discourage the roots from spreading into native soils.
- **Don't stomp!** We were taught to really pack those roots down—sometimes even pushing down with our feet. This can tear the



Planting Tip: Note height and width of plant roots, and roughened soil along sides of hole.

roots off your plant, which definitely isn't good for them. Compact the soil with your hands.

- **Water plants immediately.** Watering will settle the soil and eliminate air pockets. Add more soil to holes that appear. If you are adding mulch as a weed suppressant, be sure to keep the mulch from touching the stem of the plant. Newly planted natives need regular watering their first two to three years until they're established in a landscape. Water more the first summer, and much less with each passing year so the plants adapt to the drought conditions they'll ultimately have to endure on their own.

For more home gardening information go to gardening.wsu.edu.

Disposing of Yard Waste – Lenz Composting in Stanwood!

Disposing of Yard Waste Dumping yard waste over a bluff, into a lake or stream, or into the marine water for the tide to take away was once a common practice. Today we know that leaves and grass clippings dumped into these areas can cause algal blooms and reduce oxygen levels in the water. The recommended option for disposing of leaves, grass clippings and other yard waste is to compost them at home or use a yard debris collection service, which may be offered by your local solid waste collector. Your WSU Extension or local Conservation District offices are good sources of information on home composting. For more information visit: gardening.wsu.edu/compost-and-mulch. You don't have to compost in your backyard. Other options include self-haul to Lenz Composting in Stanwood, curbside collection from WM on Camano, and there are several locations available on Whidbey listed on the Island County website as referenced below. Be sure to check your local collector to see what is accepted.



Yard Waste Disposal

Whidbey Island:

- [Coupeville Transfer Station](#), fees apply. Yard waste includes grass clippings, brush, leaves, branches, and tree limbs. Yard waste does not include sod, dirt, gravel, rocks, plastics, wood, lumber or garbage; these items are accepted as garbage, construction or, depending upon size, hard-to-handle waste.
 - The [City of Oak Harbor](#) offers curbside yard waste pick-up in addition to garbage and recycling services.
 - The [City of Langley](#) accepts yard waste and storm debris at the Treatment Facility on Coles Road. Yard waste tickets must be purchased in advance at City Hall.
 - [Mailliards Landing Nursery](#) in Oak Harbor accepts yard waste, fees apply.
 - [All Whidbey Topsoil](#) in Freeland accepts branches and stumps, fees apply.
-



Do you need help making your shoreline property more resilient?

If you are a shoreline property owner and have a concern or question related to **failing hard armoring, erosion, vegetation planning, or drainage issues**, we can help with design assistance, technical reviews, permitting support, and education opportunities at no cost to you.

We provide the technical resources needed to turn Shore Friendly ideas into action, but it all starts with a **free site visit** with our coastal professionals.

Learn More

360-720-4173

k.zupich@islandcountywa.gov

www.islandcountywa.gov.com

Shore Friendly Webpage



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Calendar of Events

WSU Island County Master Gardener Foundation – Annual Plant Sales – Save these Dates!

Saturday, May 9th (Whidbey) May 16th (Camano)

9:00 am – 1 pm

Greenbank Farms (Whidbey)

Island County Multipurpose Building (Camano)



Local Beach Stewardship Events

Clayton Beach Stewardship - Northwest Straits Foundation

Tuesday, March 24th

9:45 am - 12:15 pm

WSU Island County Extension

CLCP Beach Litter Volunteer Opportunities

Tuesdays, 1 – 3 pm

- March 24- Grasser's Lagoon (Penn Cove area)
- March 31- Dugualla Bay



Want to participate?

We would love to add you to our CLCP volunteer email list. Please get in touch with the CLCP Coordinator, Jana McGehee, jana.mcgehee@wsu.edu, or call the WSU Extension Island County office at 360-639-6060.

Salish Sea Scholars Symposium - Northwest Straits Foundation

April 3, Wisteria Hall, UW Botanical Garden

2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Learn more: [CGScholars26](#)



WSU Waste Wise Camano Community Meeting

Monday, April 6, 11:30–12:30 (note the time change for April only)

Sno-Isle Camano Library

reduce • reuse • rot • recycle • rethink!



Waste Wise
WSU Extension, Island County

[WSU Climate Stewards Certificate Program](#)

Starts Thursday, April 2nd through June 4, with graduation on June 6.

Join us for 10 Thursdays, 6–8 pm via Zoom

Open to Island, Skagit, and Whatcom residents.

Scholarships available upon request.

More info/apply: [Climate Stewards | Washington State University](#)

[WSU Eco Book Group](#) – Meets the 2nd Monday of Each Month

Monday, April 13,

12:00–1:15 pm

Sno-Isle Camano Library Meeting Room

Book: [The Buy Nothing, Get Everything Plan](#).

All are welcome—reading the book is optional.

[WSU Waste Wise Community Education Training](#)

Mondays, April 13th – May 18th

4–6 pm in person at the Multipurpose Center

More info and application: [Waste Wise Education and Sustainability Training | WSU](#)

Zero Waste WA Legislative Update (via Zoom)

Monday, April 20

4–5:30 pm

Latest news on the Bottle Bill and other waste-related legislation.

Contact **WSU Waste Wise Camano Coordinator Heather Vitiaz** for the zoom link

[Camano Homesteading Fair](#)



Saturday, May 16

10 am–2 pm

Camano Commons at “Terry’s Corner”

Free, family-friendly event on self-reliance and resources.

Hosted by Sno-Isle Library and WSU Island County Waste Wise

[Plastic Plant Pot Exchange](#) hosted by WSU Waste Wise Camano

Saturday, May 30

10 am–12 pm

Can Ku Road behind CASA/Island Transit on Camano Island

Bring and/or pick-up pots to be reused!

“...by the end of the course, I had a renewed sense of purpose as I plan what actions to take.”
Fall 2025 Student

Washington State University Climate Stewards April 2 - June 6, 2026

The WSU Climate Steward certificate course offers classroom, online, and field experiences, with 10 sessions addressing:

- Social-emotional resilience and environmental justice
- Trauma-aware communication and community building
- WA Climate systems, modeling, and ecosystems
- Climate solutions in Ag, Forestry, Energy, and Water
- Climate policy and mitigation programs

Open to Island, Skagit and Whatcom county residents, this course equips you with practical tools to take climate action today in your community.

- Expert guest speakers
- Guided place-based tours
- Curriculum curated by Washington-based scientists

Course Fee - \$225
Early Bird Discount (Before March 15, 2026) - \$175.00
Scholarships Available

Classes meet virtually on Thursday evenings from 6:00 to 8:00 PM, and in person on Saturday, June 6, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM for stewardship project presentations.

Apply Today!
<https://climatestewards.extension.wsu.edu>

WSU Extension programs and activities are available on a non-discriminatory basis to all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, age, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. Report non-compliance to WSU Extension.

Join us!
Be the change YOU want to see in the world because there is no planet B.

Become Waste Wise with WSU

Easy steps for a simpler, affordable lifestyle that also benefits the planet.

Sustainability & Waste Wise Training

- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**
Practice responsible consumption and recycling.
- Carbon Footprint & Climate Change**
Understand how waste contributes to climate change.
- Composting Yard & Kitchen Waste**
Learn basic and advanced composting.
- Low Impact Living**
Consider your carbon footprint.
- Toxics Reduction**
Properly dispose of hazardous materials.
- Educate Others**
Help others in your community be more Waste Wise.

\$50 to participate - Scholarships available. No experience needed.

Island County
More info: 360-639-4608
Heather.vitiaz@wsu.edu

Waste Wise
WSU Extension, Island County

Plastic Plant Pot Exchange!



Bring your used plastic plant pots—pick up ones you need. Help keep reusable plastics out of the landfill and support other local gardeners by dropping off clean, usable plastic plant pots of all sizes. Take what you can use—**ALL FREE.**

Reduce • Reuse • Recycle • Rethink
Saturday, May 30th 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Can Ku Road — Behind Island Transit & CASA

Island County
More info: <http://extension.wsu.edu/island>
Heather.Vitiaz@wsu.edu

Waste Wise
WSU Extension, Island County

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

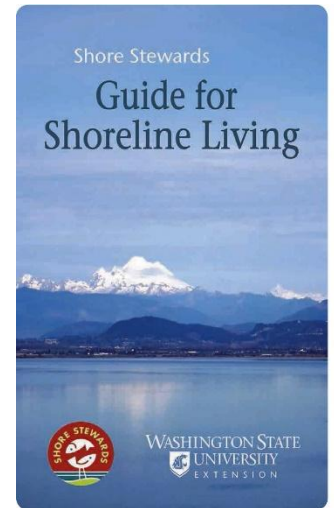
[Resources in Your County | Shore Stewards | Washington State University \(wsu.edu\)](#)

How do I join WSU's Shore Stewards?

Simply complete this [application to become a Shore Steward](#) online and click "submit." It'll just take a few moments. WSU staff in your county will review your application and notify you of acceptance into the program. You can pick up your "Shore Steward Tool Kit" at either the Camano or Coupeville WSU Extension Offices.

To learn more about the **FREE Shore Stewards Program**, visit [WSU Extension Shore Stewards](#) or contact WSU Island County Program Coordinator:

Heather.Vitiaz@wsu.edu | 360-639-4608



Newsletter access: If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters, please visit <https://shorestewards.cw.wsu.edu/news/>

Support Shore Stewards!

If you would like to see this program continue to make a difference, please consider donating to the [WSU Shore Stewards Excellence Fund](#). Your tax-deductible donation will help ensure future funding for newsletters, demonstrations at local events, and to make sure that the program and educational materials continue to be free for shoreline landowners and others interested in protecting our islands. Thank you for your contribution!

Thank you for reading Shore Stewards News. WSU Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local WSU Extension office.