

Selected Plants for Residential Rain Gardens in Western Washington

The following table includes both native and non-native plant species that are suitable for rain gardens and are commonly available in western Washington. Rain gardens generally have three planting zones characterized by soil moisture.

Zone 1: Area of periodic or frequent standing or flowing water. Zone 1 plants should also tolerate the seasonally dry summers in the Northwest without extra watering and may also be planted in Zones 2 or 3.

Zone 2: Periodically moist or saturated during larger storms. Plants listed under Zone 2 can also be planted in Zone 3.

Zone 3: Dry soils, infrequently subject to inundation or saturation. This is an area where the rain garden planting can blend to the existing landscape if desired.

These lists, for a **sunny to partly sunny rain garden** and for a **shady to partly shady rain garden**, contain just a few of the many beautiful plants you could include, especially for Zone 3. For additional ideas, please check other lists of drought-tolerant perennials, shrubs, and trees provided by local government agencies and sustainable gardening advocates. Remember that depending on your garden's layout, it may have some sections that are partly shady and others that are sunny.

Special Considerations:

Drought tolerance – Plants included on the list are tolerant of dry conditions when planted and sited appropriately. Nonetheless, summer irrigation will be necessary for one or two seasons to establish these plants, and may be necessary during particularly stressful periods in subsequent years.

Placement of large trees – Consider height, spread and extent of roots at maturity. Use caution in plant selection for areas with buried pipes or other structures. If placed close to a road or driveway, consider the potential for lower limbs to cause visibility or safety problems.

* denotes native species

Plants for a Sunny to Partly Sunny Rain Garden

Zone 1 Deciduous Shrubs Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Cornus sericea</i> * Red-osier dogwood Red-twig dogwood	Sun/partial sun	To 15 feet	May - June	Prefers wet to moist organically rich soils, but is adaptable; tolerates seasonal flooding; small white flowers in clusters; berrylike bluish-white fruits
<i>Cornus sericea</i> 'Kelsey' Dwarf red-twig dogwood	Sun/partial sun	To 1.5 feet	June - August	Prefers wet to moist organically rich soils, but is adaptable; small white flowers; berrylike fruit; low-growing, compact form; good ground cover
<i>Cornus sericea</i> 'Flaviramea' Yellow dogwood	Sun/partial sun	6 - 8 feet	May - June	Prefers wet to moist organically rich soils, but is adaptable; easily transplanted and grown; small, white flowers; yellow stems and reddish/purple fall color
<i>Cornus</i> 'Midwinter Fire' Blood-twig dogwood	Sun/partial sun	5 - 6 feet	May - June	Prefers wet to moist organically rich soils, but is adaptable; tiny white flowers clusters; bright red stems in winter
<i>Physocarpus capitatus</i> * Pacific ninebark	Sun/partial shade	6 - 13 feet	May - June	Moist or dry soils; drought-tolerant; "snowball" shaped shrub; white flowers; seeds persist into winter
<i>Rosa pisocarpa</i> * Clustered wild rose	Sun/partial shade	6 - 8 feet	May - July	Moist soils, tolerates seasonal flooding but also tolerant of dry conditions; pink clustered flowers; fruits persist; spreads aggressively
<i>Spiraea douglasii</i> * Douglas spirea Steeplebush	Sun/partial shade	4 - 7 feet		Moist or dry, to seasonally inundated soils; spikes of small, pink flower clusters; may spread in wet soils
<i>Salix purpurea</i> 'Nana' Dwarf Arctic willow	Sun/partial shade	3 - 5 feet		Grows well in poor soils; moderately drought-tolerant; small yellow flowers in the fall
Zone 1 Evergreen Shrubs Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Myrica californica</i> * Pacific wax myrtle	Sun/partial shade	To 30 feet	May - June	Evergreen shrub preferring moist soils; inconspicuous spring flowers

Plants for a Sunny to Partly Sunny Rain Garden, continued

Zone 1 Emergents ** Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Carex obnupta</i> * Slough sedge	Sun/partial shade	1 - 5 feet		Moist to seasonally saturated soils; shiny foliage; excellent soil binder
<i>Juncus acuminatus</i> * Taper-tipped rush	Sun/partial shade	1 - 2 feet	Summer	Handles shallow inundation in winter, and summer drought
<i>Juncus ensifolius</i> * Dagger-leaf rush	Sun	12 - 18 inches		Stems resemble irises; small, rounded "pom-pon"-like flowers
<i>Juncus tenuis</i> * Slender rush	Sun	6" – 2.5 feet		Delicate flowers
<i>Scirpus microcarpus</i> * Small-fruited bulrush	Sun/shade	2 - 4 feet		Wet soils; tolerates prolonged inundation; good soil binder; spreads aggressively

Zone 1 Deciduous trees/ Large Shrubs Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i> * Western serviceberry	Sun/partial shade	10 - 20 feet/ 25 ft. spread	April - May	Moist to dry, well-drained soils; drought-tolerant; large white flower clusters; purple to blue-black berries
<i>Corylus cornuta</i> * Beaked hazelnut	Sun/partial shade	20 - 30 feet/ 15 ft. spread	April - May	Moist, well-drained soils; edible nuts; intolerant of saturated soils; male catkins throughout winter add interest
<i>Rhamnus purshiana</i> * Cascara	Sun/shade	20 - 30 feet/ 20 ft. spread	April - May	Moist to fairly dry soils; small greenish-yellow flowers; shiny black fruits; yellow fall color
<i>Acer circinatum</i> * Vine maple	Filtered sun/shade	To 25 feet	Spring	Dry to moist soils; tolerant of shade and clay soils; excellent soil binder; beautiful fall color

**Emergents are plants that "emerge" from standing water and can be partially covered with water during the wet season.

Plants for a Sunny to Partly Sunny Rain Garden, continued

Zone 2 Deciduous Shrubs Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Rubus parviflorus*</i> Thimbleberry	Sun/partial shade	4 - 10 feet	May - June	Moist to dry soils; white flowers; red berries; makes thickets and spreads easily
<i>Symphoricarpos albus*</i> Snowberry	Sun/shade	2 - 6 feet	April - June	Wet to dry soils, clay to sand; excellent soil binder; provides good erosion control; spreads well in sun; white berries; flowers attract hummingbirds
<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatis*</i> Coralberry	Sun/shade	3 feet tall/5 ft. spread	April - June	Similar to snowberry, but produces purple fruits; species has wide, mounding/spreading habit; some cultivars are more upright, have brighter, larger berries
Zone 2 Evergreen Shrubs Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Mahonia aquifolium*</i> (<i>Berberis aquifolium*</i>) Tall Oregon-grape	Sun/partial shade	6 - 10 feet (or 2 - 3 ft. for 'Compacta')	March - April	Dry to moist soils; evergreen; blue-black fruit; bright yellow flowers; 'Compacta' form averages 2 feet tall; great low screening barrier
Zone 2 Herbaceous Perennials Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Aquilegia formosa*</i> Western columbine	Sun/partial shade	1 - 3 feet	Spring	Tolerates soils of varying quality; tolerant of seasonal flooding; red and yellow flowers attract hummingbirds and butterflies
<i>Aster chilensis*</i> Common California aster	Sun	1.5 – 3 feet	June -September	Moist soils; white to purple flowers
<i>Aster subspicatus*</i> Douglas' aster	Sun	6" – 2.5 feet	June - September	Moist soils; blue to purple flowers
<i>Camassia quamash*</i> Common camas	Sun/partial shade	To 1.5 feet	May - June	Moist to dry soils; loose clusters of deep blue flowers

Plants for a Sunny to Partly Sunny Rain Garden, continued

Zone 3 Evergreen Shrubs and Groundcovers Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Arbutus unedo</i> 'Compacta'	Sun/partial shade	To 10 feet	Fall	Prefers well drained soils; tolerant of poor soils; good in climate extremes; white to greenish-white flowers; striking red-orange fruit
<i>Fragaria chiloensis</i> * Wild/Coastal strawberry	Sun/partial shade	10 inches	Spring	Sandy well-drained soils; flowers white; small hairy strawberries; evergreen; aggressive spreader
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i> Sunrose	Sun	6" - 2 feet/ 2 ft. spread	May - July	Will tolerate various soils; low-growing, sub-shrub; many varieties are available with flowers in salmon, pink, red, yellow and golden colors; great evergreen ground cover
<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> Lavender	Sun/partial shade	To 2.5 feet	June - August	Does best in well-drained soils without amendments; blue, lavender, pink to white flowers, semi-evergreen aromatic perennial
Zone 3 Deciduous Shrubs Species/Common Name	Exposure	Mature Size	Time of Bloom	Comments
<i>Holodiscus discolor</i> * Oceanspray	Sun/partial shade	To 15 feet	June - July	Dry to moist soils; drought-tolerant; white to cream flowers; good soil binder
<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i> * Mock-orange	Sun/partial shade	5 -10 feet	June - July	Adapts to rich moist soils or dry rocky soils; drought-tolerant; fragrant flowers
<i>Ribes sanguineum</i> * Red-flowering currant	Sun/partial shade	8 -12 feet	March - April	Prefers well-drained soils, but will accept clay; drought-tolerant; rosy-red flowers attract hummingbirds; dark-blue to black berries; thornless