

Gray Barn Green Thumb Guide



Northwest Newbies



Welcome to Western Washington, the Evergreen State and the Great Northwest! With our mild maritime climate, it's possible to plant and garden all year long. Summer features bright blooming perennials, Autumn offers fiery fall colors, Winter captivates us with flowering Witch-hazel and Hellebore, and Spring shows off a rainbow of Rhododendrons and flowering trees. Every month brings new activity, growth and color.

Northwest Weather: This is often the number one topic among gardeners. The average summer high temperature is in the 70's (F) and the average winter low is in the low 30's. The growing season lasts between 165 to 200 days and annual rainfall averages 38 inches. The last frost date is usually at the end of March. It's not warm enough to grow tomatoes outdoors until May!

We live in USDA zone 8, with lows averaging between 10-20° F. This zone includes many of the world's most spectacular gardens. Other parts of the world with our climate include the British Isles, parts of Chile and Argentina, New Zealand, parts of Australia, Japan and South Africa. This means that we are fortunate enough to grow plants from all over the world right here in the Pacific Northwest!

Gardening Challenges: These occur with every location and gardening in the Pacific Northwest is no exception. Quoting Ann Lovejoy "Dirt must come first" speaks to the first challenge...soil.

Our soil is often heavy clay, with poor drainage and an abundance of rocks. It can be difficult to dig in, plant in and grow in. The best solution is to continually add organic matter to improve fertility, texture, and drainage. This can be bulk or bagged compost, shredded leaves, grass clippings or manure. Building raised beds can also help with drainage.

Summer drought is another challenge. Spring can be quite wet, but come July and August, the rains stop. Plants that we didn't think about watering all year, such as rhododendrons, can begin to droop and dry out. Extra irrigation is needed during this time to maintain many landscape plants. Exceptions include native plants which are adapted to our wet winters and dry summers and drought tolerant plants.

Older landscapes are another difficulty. Sometimes plants are put in with no thought to their mature size and can quickly overgrow their home. If you move into a house with a tired or overgrown landscape, don't be afraid to remove, prune and make changes. Put the right plant in the right place and you will have success!

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Easy Care Plants for the Pacific Northwest

Annuals

Impatiens
Easy wave petunia
Zonal geranium
Pansy
Million bells
Sweet potato vine

Perennials

Black-eyed Susan
Coreopsis
Hosta
Campanula
Astilbe
Hellebore
Jack Frost Brunnera
Viola (etain)
Heuchera
Heucherella
Shasta daisy
Lavender
Geranium

Shrubs

Rhododendron
Azalea
False cypress
Viburnum
Pieris
Spirea
Barberry
Burning bush
Nandina
Weigela
Smoke bush
Ninebark
Sarcococca

Trees

Japanese maple
Magnolia
Conifers
Dogwood
Birch
Snowbell
Katsura
Vine maple
Yew

Resources: Gardening in the Northwest by Sunset Publications, 2003
The Ann Lovejoy Handbook of Northwest Gardening by Ann Lovejoy, 2003