



## Northwest Native Ornamental Gardening Without Summer Watering

*By Wallace W. Hansen*

The threat of water shortages continually hovers over the Pacific Northwest - agriculture, commerce, industrial, residential – all have legitimate needs and claims. This paper suggests ways of reducing the demand for water for residential ornamental gardens and plantings.

Early Europe, mostly England, created an insatiable appetite for ornamental plants from the new world. For example, Red Flowering Currants from the Northwest were in huge demand. The demand for exotic plants still dominates the list of plants most folks want in their private ornamental gardens and grounds. Stroll through a modern Garden Center – Can you find a native plant? The demand for exotics includes new creations from the skills of modern botanists and plant growers – bigger, brighter, neon colors, perfect “shapes” often tailored to special “days” of the year. – Christmas, Easter, etc – how depressing! (The stately “manor” lawns of England still mold our desire for generous lawns around our homes. Why not small lawns only for picnics, etc. and the rest in natives? )

If you live in the Northwest, if you love the Northwest Forests, the Hills and Mountains, the Rivers, Lakes, Seaside - the giant cedars and firs, the beautiful maples and dogwoods, the shrubs and exquisite native flowers: then, acknowledge that to yourself. Understand that Nature has designed and adapted NW plants to the NW climate and that you can use this wonderful information direct from Nature in the Northwest!



The general climate in Western Oregon and Western Washington consists of mild, wet winters, cool wet springs and warm, dry summers. From late Fall through mid spring, temperatures range from 15 degrees to 65 degrees. From mid spring through summer to late fall, temperatures range from 60 to 95 degrees (F.) with very little rainfall.

WINTER – Rain and Snow – maximum plant dormancy (Evergreens will tide you over.)

Prepare for Spring.

SPRING – Rain - Exuberant Spring Growth and flowering – Energy.

SUMMER – Dry, little rainfall – maturing of Spring growth, hardening of plant tissue, setting of seeds - a “hold on” period.

FALL – Some Rain - Many plants close down – a riot of leaf color and relief from Summer

heat. Prepare for Winter!

Within this large area are many microclimates – colder, warmer - drier, wetter. Nature, the “Master Gardener”, over eons of time, has skillfully and patiently adapted plants for major and minor changes in the environment. The first step in Native Plant Gardening is to determine the native plants growing in your own microclimate. Explore your neighborhood – your County. Ask your County Extension Agent for help (Dept of Agriculture.) Buy a good book on Native Plants such as “Plants Of The Pacific Northwest Coast by Pojar & Mackinnon, available (order from) any bookstore. This book lists the areas in which the plants are found, within Northwest WA and OR. Make a list of plants native to your micro-climate. Make up a list of common native plants available from native plant nurseries. There are many native plants in Western OR and WA that will do fine in your area even if not on your micro-climate list. You can also grow your own plants from cuttings and seeds and division.

The famous painter, Monet, grew native roses in his Gardens in France. Many hybrid roses were available, but Monet grew and painted mostly wild roses. He felt that simple, single petal wild roses with their pure color and texture had real beauty and character.

Each year more Rose cultivars appear on the market, with new brilliant colors. To me, they are artificial – not the real thing – make believe – copies of the Mona Lisa, not the original! Nootka Roses are single petal, pink wild roses. They grow their own roots and spread vigorously. They are tough survivors through the centuries. I love Nootka Wild Roses – they have genuine class and color and character and even mystery – the Mona Lisa of Roses. Nearly all NW Native Plants have a place in the garden – from Giant Doug Firs to Tiny Fawn Lilies. And, once established, your native plant garden does not need to be watered all summer!!!

### **About the Author**

Wallace W. Hansen is a Professional Industrial Engineer with a life long interest in and a hobby of Northwest Native Plants since the early 1930's in rural Whatcom County, WA. After too much inter-time zone travel as an Engineer, Wally started the Wallace W Hansen Native Plant Nursery and Gardens about 15 years ago, near Salem, Oregon. Wally is a leading supplier of Northwest Native Plants and a key source of Native Plant Information His email is [plants@nwplants.com](mailto:plants@nwplants.com) and his web site is [www.nwplants.com](http://www.nwplants.com).