

# HOW TO BUY A NATIVE PLANT

A few steps to help you find wild-type native plants, online or in-store.

## STEP 1: Select your plant



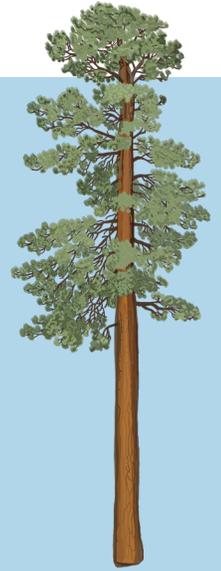
Annual



Perennial



Shrub



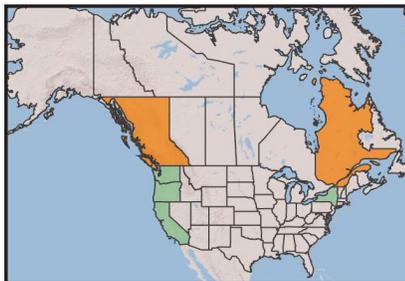
Tree

## STEP 2: Check to see if your plant is native to your region

We'll use farewell-to-spring (*Clarkia amoena*) as an example. Enter your plant's name into the USDA PLANTS Database ([plants.usda.gov](http://plants.usda.gov)), or a guide to native flora, like Oregon Flora, Calscape (CA), Burke Herbarium (WA), E-Flora BC, and others. Below are maps (© 2014 ESRI) from USDA PLANTS, which show farewell-to-spring's range across four different scales. Farewell-to-spring is native to British Columbia, but some non-native ecotypes established in the region, which is why it's listed as native and introduced.

Legend  Native range  Introduced range  Both  Not present or no data available

North America



Pacific Northwest



Oregon



Willamette Valley





# HOW TO BUY A NATIVE PLANT

Practice reading and interpreting plant labels.

## STEP 3: Identify wild-type native plants



**Plant type:**  
Cultivar

**How to tell:**

The plant's scientific name (genus & specific epithet) is listed, but there is also a name in single quotation marks ('Dwarf Scarlet').



**Plant type:**  
Subspecies

**How to tell:**

The plant's scientific name is followed by "ssp." and a subspecies name listed in italics. **This plant is a wild-type!**



**Plant type:**  
Straight Species

**How to tell:**

The plant's scientific name is listed, without any additional names in single quotation marks. **This plant is a wild-type!**



**Plant type:**  
Cultivar Mix

**How to tell:**

The packet has many different color forms of *C. amoena* that aren't typical of the wild plants!



**Plant type:**  
Cultivar

**How to tell:**

The plant's scientific name (genus & specific epithet) is listed, but there is also a name in single quotation marks. ('Calistoga').



**Plant type:**  
Hybrid Cultivar

**How to tell:**

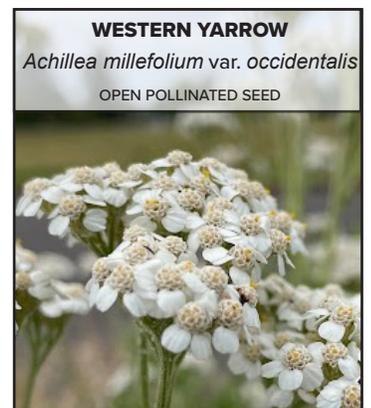
Only the plant's genus is listed, followed by a name in single quotation marks ('Moonshine').



**Plant type:**  
Straight Species

**How to tell:**

The plant's scientific name is listed, without any additional names in single quotation marks. **This plant is a wild-type!**



**Plant type:**  
Variety

**How to tell:**

The plant's scientific name is followed by "var." and a variety name listed in italics. **This plant is a wild-type!**



# HOW TO BUY A NATIVE PLANT

Genetic considerations for buying native plants.



## STEP 4: (Optional) If you want to buy a regional ecotype

### What's an ecotype?

An ecotype plant that is adapted to grow in a specific ecological region. Its form, function, and growth habits are well adapted to the place where it grows.

### When would I want an ecotype?

You might want an ecotype if you're buying a long-lived plant, like a shrub or a tree! For example, did you know that Ponderosa pines (*Pinus ponderosa*) are native to nearly half of the United States? Imagine you ordered a Ponderosa pine from a nursery in Texas, and then planted it in eastern Oregon. This tree wouldn't be nearly as cold-hardy as one grown in Oregon, which could impact its health and chances at surviving the winter!

### How do I know if a plant is an ecotype?

Look for these phrases:

- "Seed collected from (your region)"
- "Sourced from (your region)"

Or, ask nursery staff these questions:

- Where do you source your (plant name) from?
- Is this plant locally adapted?

## STEP 5: (Optional) If you're concerned about the plant's genetic diversity

### Why would I worry about a plant's genetic diversity?

If you're going to plant multiples of a single species, or are working on a restoration project, it's important to consider the genetic diversity of your plants. If your plants are all clones of one another, they will likely respond to diseases, pests, or extreme weather events similarly. That means, if one dies, they might all die! If your plants have different genes, then some of them may be more resilient to disturbances than others, leading to greater longevity of your plantings.

### How do I find genetically diverse plants?

Look for these phrases:

- "Open pollinated"
- "Seed saving"
- "Seed grown"
- "Seedling stock"

Or, ask nursery staff these questions:

- How do you propagate (plant name)?
- Is your (plant name) from open-pollinated seed?
- Do you have seedling stock of (plant name)? I am not interested in clonal stock or cultivars.



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Vocabulary and resources to help you locate native plants.

## Components of a scientific name

*Clarkia*  
Genus name

*amoena*  
Specific epithet

### Straight Species

Example: *Clarkia amoena*

A plant species that has not been bred or modified in any way. These plants should look exactly like a plant of the same species growing in the wild (i.e., wild-type). A plant that is a straight species is not necessarily a native plant, or harvested from a local population.

### Subspecies

Example: *Clarkia amoena* ssp. *huntiana*

A plant population geographically isolated from others of the same species. Denoted with 'ssp.' between the species and subspecies name.

### Variety

A variety is a naturally occurring form of a plant population within a species, such as a white-flowered form of a normally pink-flowered plant. Varieties are denoted with 'var.' between the species and variety name.

### Cultivar

Example: *Clarkia amoena* 'Aurora'

Cultivar = cultivated variety. Cultivars are plant forms developed by humans, rather than those that are naturally occurring. Sometimes cultivars are developed from naturally occurring varieties, but they are bred to be distinct, uniform, and stable, and they are also named. A cultivar name is listed in single quotation marks following the scientific name of a plant.

### Hybrid Cultivar

Hybrids are plants with parents from 2+ different species or genera. Like cultivars, hybrid cultivars have a name listed in single quotation marks, but they typically only have the genus listed before the cultivar name. Some hybrid cultivars have an 'x' in their name as well.

### Ecotype

A plant that is adapted to grow in a specific ecological region. Its form, function, and growth habits are well adapted to the place where it grows. For example, if you're planting in BC, sourcing local seed will be better adapted to the climate, compared to seed from grown in the Willamette Valley.

## Resources

- [Oregon Native Plant Nurseries](#)
- [Native Plant Picks for Bees](#)
- [Selecting Native Plant Materials for Restoration Projects](#)
- [Selecting Native Plants for Home Landscapes](#)
- [Gardening with Oregon Native Plants West of the Cascades](#)
- [Planting, Design, and Establishment of Native Ornamental Landscapes](#)
- [Native Plants for Pollinators: What do we know about native cultivars?](#)