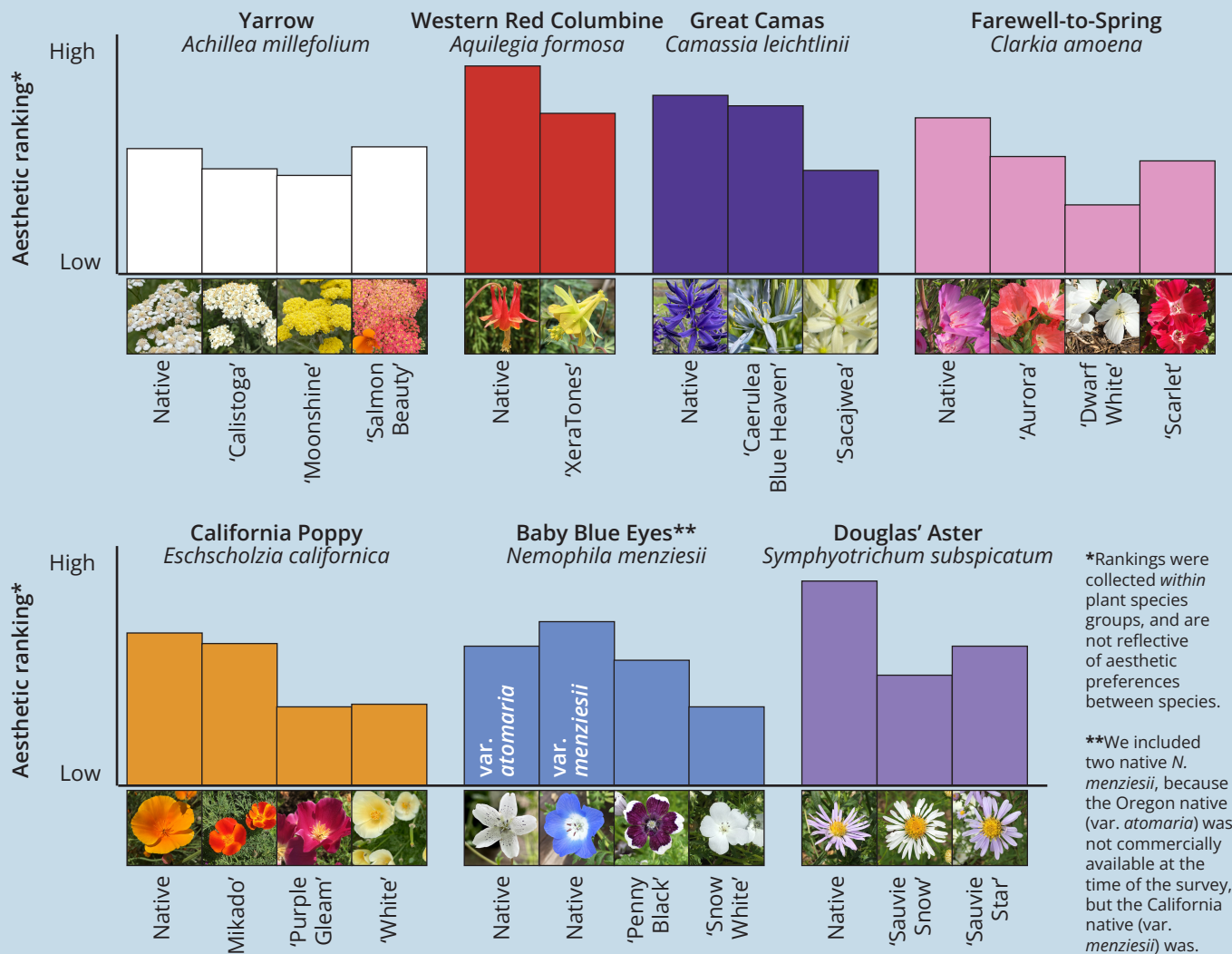


Gardeners Do Not Prefer Native Cultivars

Our research

A rise in ecological gardening has increased demand for native plants. Many native plants, however, are difficult to propagate. This narrows the species available in retail markets. To meet demands, nurseries and breeding programs have produced cultivated varieties (native cultivars, or “nativars”) of some species, which may be easier to propagate. Our lab’s research has found that wild-type native plants tend to be preferred over cultivars by pollinators¹, but no studies have asked gardeners about their preferences. We created a survey to understand gardeners’ aesthetic preferences for seven Pacific Northwest native plant species and their cultivars. We asked gardeners to rank native plants and cultivars of the same species by aesthetic preference, without labelling which plant was which.

What we found





We found that, on average, gardeners ranked native plants as more attractive than cultivars, except in the case of yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), where the cultivar 'Salmon Beauty' had the highest aesthetic ranking. This suggests that native plant cultivars may not represent aesthetic improvements in native plant species, and that breeders and nurseries producing native cultivars may be missing an opportunity to cater to the preferences of the ecological gardening movement.

How does this relate to your garden?

Our research suggests that both gardeners and pollinators tend to prefer wild-type native plants over native plant cultivars. In addition to aesthetic beauty, gardeners in our survey reported that they grow native plants for the benefits to local ecosystems, pollinators, and other wildlife. They also found native plants to be low maintenance and hardy additions in gardens. Native plant sales and local nurseries were the most preferred places to buy native plants, followed by ordering plants online and getting seeds from seed swaps.

See our list of places to buy native plants in Oregon, linked below. Native plant societies, gardening groups, and conservation districts may have information on the timing of local native plant sales for other regions. For guidance on identifying native plants from native cultivars, see our documents on buying native plants and reading plant labels (below).

Additional Information

- ¹Hayes JJ-M, Bell NCS, Best LR, et al. 2025. Pacific Northwest native plants and native cultivars Part I: Pollinator visitation. *Environmental Entomology*. 54(1):199–214. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ee/nvae126>
- Hayes JJ-M, Bruttig C, Langen Swartzendruber LF, et al. In prep. Gardeners' aesthetic rankings of wild-type native plants meet or exceed those of native cultivars.
- Where to buy native plants in Oregon: beav.es/Nyv
- For resources on identifying native plants and reading plant labels, and other Garden Ecology Briefs, visit the "For Gardeners" page from gardenecology.oregonstate.edu

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Contact your local extension office for Master Gardener advice, or look for Master Gardeners at local farmers' markets.
- For more 10-Minute University™ handouts, videos, and the class schedule, visit cmastergardeners.org.



This Garden Ecology Lab brief was created with support by members of the Garden Ecology League and Garden Ecology Circle. To learn how you can support garden research and outreach, scan the QR code.



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