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Introduction

Forest plant communities are rich in understory plants in parts of the Pacific Northwest, United States, and coastal British Columbia, Canada. Over the past fifty years harvesting, processing and selling some of these plants and plant parts on the world market has developed into an industry. Products include mushrooms, edible berries, cascara bark, landscape transplants, mosses, lichens and floral greens. This bulletin focuses on eight major plants of the floral greens industry. The harvesting, processing and wholesale distribution of these plant materials is a multimillion dollar a year business that employs thousands of people. Land managers may increase revenues from forest lands by taking advantage of the special forest products industry.

Ethics

All lands are owned by someone. Harvesting forest products without the landowner’s permission is trespassing and stealing. A forest products harvest permit is required to harvest and haul special forest products in Washington State. You can obtain further information from county sheriffs’ offices.

Special forest product species should be properly managed to maintain long-term productivity. The amount that can be harvested indefinitely without depleting the resources of the forest floor system is not yet known. Because defective foliage has low value as floral greens, harvest only high quality foliage. Harvesters should avoid damaging other plants and resources on the site (prevent fire, soil erosion and compaction, littering and water pollution). Harvesters and landowners should fully discuss expectations and terms; a written contract may be preferred. Lessees sometimes patrol property, which decreases vandalism and littering.

Floral Greens

Plants harvested for floral greens are a forest crop, just as trees harvested for logs are a forest crop. An important difference is that properly managed floral greens plants are not destroyed by harvesting. Harvesters remove only desirable branches or shoots. In forests managed for the joint production of timber and understory plants, floral greens may be harvested annually or every two years throughout the life of the forest stand.

Floral greens include a variety of plant products used in the floral industry to accent and complement colorful flowers in floral arrangements. Evergreen boughs are used to manufacture wreaths, swags and other ornaments associated with the Christmas season. The list of products varies from year to year with new products continually appearing. In any given year, the list of new products could be as long as the list of old. Usually only a few of the new products become permanent additions to the industry. The most common plants used by the floral greens industry are listed on page 2.

Terms Used in this Guide

Names. Common plant names traditionally differ by region. What one person calls evergreen huckleberry may be huck or buck-brush to another. Within a single region the same species can have different common names for different growth forms. For uniformity, we use scientific names that consist of a genus name and a species name.

When recording data in the forest it is common to refer to plants by an abbreviation using the first two letters of each of the scientific names (the genus and the species). Thus, salal (Gaultheria shallon) is referred to as GASH. Common and scientific names in this bulletin follow those in the Flora of the Pacific Northwest by Hitchcock and Cronquist (1973).

Habit. Habit refers to the general form of the plant growing in the wild. This description generally includes total height, the type of stem, and whether it grows in clumps or singly.

Leaves. Leaves are one of the most important characteristics of floral greens. Similar species can be differentiated by leaf shape and form. Leaves also can be used to describe different products from the same species because leaves vary depending on growing conditions. For example, evergreen huckleberry produces long dark green leaves in shade, but short red leaves in direct sunlight.

Fruit. Although floral greens are generally harvested when the plant is not flowering or fruiting, old fruits and appendages can help you identify them.

Desirable Characteristics.

Desirable characteristics are qualities that buyers of plant materials look for in the product. Because requirements vary from one producer to another, the harvester should consult the buyer before harvesting plant parts for sale.

Undesirable characteristics include leaf blemishes. These are caused by a variety of factors. Pathogens or diseases infect plants creating blemishes that can spread to other plants of the same species and cause long-term problems. Other reasons for blemishes include sun scalding and insect or animal damage. Remove blemished leaves from harvested sprays to increase product quality.

Product Use. Knowledge of how plants are used in floral arrangements may help the harvester select products while managing the plant communities.

Ecology and Habitat.

Environmental factors such as moisture, soils, aspect, temperature, and biotic conditions determine the assortment of plants that grow on a given site. A group of plants is called a plant community. Plant community is a general term that describes forest zones and plant associations.

A forest zone is an area in which one or more tree species dominates, such as western hemlock forests. Within a forest zone, a forest site is a fixed location. Over time, the plant communities on that site change. For example, the vegetation that grows on a site immediately following a disturbance, such as fire or timber harvesting, thrives in direct sunlight. As trees grow and shade the understory, only those species that tolerate shade reproduce and grow.

Over time the plant community best suited to the environment stabilizes and dominates it. This process is called succession, and the final plant community is referred to as a plant association. The plant communities that precede the final plant association are called seral stages. The potential productivity of a site is reflected by its stable plant association. The term habitat type, described by plant associations, reflects potential
site productivity.

Plant association guides published by the U.S. Forest Service and other groups in Washington, Oregon and Idaho describe the range and abundance of some special forest product species. These guides, available from local National Forest offices or Forest Service Area Ecologists, discuss the relative abundance of each plant species throughout its range.

Shade Tolerance. Shade tolerance refers to a plant's ability to grow when shaded by other plants. Shade tolerance is rated from very tolerant to very intolerant. Intolerant plants grow in direct sunlight, while tolerant plants survive shading. A very tolerant plant will grow under dense canopies, receiving little, if any, direct sunlight. A very intolerant plant normally grows in direct sunlight, rarely shaded by other plants.

Range. The counties in which these eight species occur in the Pacific Northwest are shown on distribution maps, accompanied by descriptions of the areas.

Reaction to Silviculture. Understory plants respond to forest management activities. Management prescriptions for desired timber growth can sometimes be modified to enhance production of understory plants.

Forage. Wildlife eat the fruit and foliage of plants harvested as floral greens. This category includes information on bird and mammal use.

Plant Identification and Other Reference Books

Use the following list of resources to find out more information about given subjects. All of the wildlife information in this bulletin is from wildlife resources in this list.


Common, scientific and abbreviated names of the most widely used floral greens in the Pacific Northwest.

Common Name
- Dwarf Oregon-grape
- Deer fern
- Scotch broom
- Salal
- Pachistema, Oregon Boxwood
- Sword fern
- Evergreen huckleberry
- Beargrass

Scientific Name
- Berberis nervosa
- Blechnum spicant
- Cyttisus scoparius
- Gaultheria shallon
- Pachistema myrsinites
- Polystichum munitum
- Vaccinium ovatum
- Xerophyllum tenax

Abbreviation
- BENE
- BLSP
- CYSN
- GASH
- PAMY
- POMU
- VAOV2
- XETE
Dwarf Oregon-grape
Berberis nervosa
BENE

Habit:
A low-growing shrub with yellowish inner bark and wood, dwarf Oregon-grape grows from one main stem with numerous shoots. It is usually less than 2 feet tall.

Leaves:
Its evergreen leaves resemble holly, with spiny teeth on the margins. Compound leaves are 10 to 16 inches long with 9 to 21 dark green leathery leaflets. Leaflets form opposite pairs except for a single terminal leaflet.

Fruit:
Small purplish-blue berries cluster at the top of the main stem growing out of the center of the plant. The tart berries are edible.

Desirable Characteristics:
Quality leaves are blemish-free, deep green with a delicate main stem. Because red coloration from direct sunlight is not desirable, plants in dense shade are preferred for harvest.

Product Use:
Dwarf Oregon-grape shoots are used in evergreen arrangements as basal decoration to longer-stemmed plants. This plant is desirable because it is a dark green evergreen.

Ecology and Habitat:
Dwarf Oregon-grape is found in some plant associations of the mountain hemlock zone, usually where big huckleberry and fool's huckleberry grow. It grows well in most western hemlock plant associations, but is more frequently found in the understory of drier, warmer sites. It also does well in western red cedar and Douglas-fir associations. In grand fir plant associations it is more common in cooler wetter sites. It is found mainly on moderately dry to semi-moist, nitrogen-medium, coarse-skeletal soils. It is abundant in the understory of open woods on well-drained rocky sites. Normally it is associated with salal and sword fern.

Shade Tolerance:
Very tolerant

Range:
Dwarf Oregon-grape grows widely from southern British Columbia to central California, and mainly west of the Cascades in Washington and Oregon. It usually grows below 4000 feet elevation.

Reaction to Silviculture:
Dwarf Oregon-grape tolerates most disruptions in the forest stand. While the best foliage is from mature to overmature forests, acceptable foliage can be harvested from young timber stands and areas with young regeneration. Dwarf Oregon-grape is an early seral species that persists in the understory plant community as the forest matures.

Forage:
Birds and small animals often eat the fruit. Deer and elk browse the leaves.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deer Fern</th>
<th>Ecology and Habitat:</th>
<th>Range:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Blechnum spicant</em></td>
<td>Deer fern grows best on cooler wetter sites such as indicated by western hemlock and mountain hemlock associations. It is very common in almost all of the Pacific silver fir and western hemlock associations. Usually found on semi-moist to very moist soils, deer fern grows best on well-decomposed organic materials. It grows well in lower to mid elevations, but is found at high elevations. Deer fern is commonly associated with salal and Alaska huckleberry.</td>
<td>Deer fern grows in maritime climates from southern British Columbia to California. It is more abundant west of the Cascades, in the northern part of its range and below 4500 feet elevation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habit:</td>
<td>Forage:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer fern is small to medium sized, with leaves tufted on a stout rhizome. Individual fronds grow outward from a central point.</td>
<td>Black-tailed deer feed on the leaves in winter, spring and autumn when it is valuable forage. Deer fern ranks as light to moderate in forage importance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaves:</td>
<td>Shade Tolerance:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer fern produces two types of fronds: vegetative and reproductive. Vegetative fronds are dark green, leathery, compound and evergreen. The taller reproductive fronds have leaflets with rolled margins.</td>
<td>Very tolerant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spores are produced on the underside of the reproductive leaves.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Desirable Characteristics:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long, delicate vegetative fronds with neither blemishes nor torn leaflets are desired. Harvest entire fronds from the base, taking care not to bend or break the fronds, which should be at least 18 inches long.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scotch Broom

Cytisus scoparius
CYSC

Habit:
A tall, deciduous shrub attaining heights of 7 feet, Scotch broom has naturalized from ornamental plantings to form dense, almost impenetrable stands. It generally has a single base with many upward spreading branches.

Leaves:
Small dark green leaves are arranged spirally up the twigs. Leaves appear in the spring and usually are shed by winter.

Fruit:
In the spring bright yellow flowers near the ends of the shoots produce small legume pods containing several seeds. At maturity the pods split open, forcibly ejecting the seeds.

Desirable Characteristics:
Long straight shoots from 26 to 36 inches long, without leaves and flowers, are desired. Small black blemishes on the tips make Scotch broom unacceptable for sale. The blemishes, common in older stands of decadent plants, are less frequent on young vigorous plants.

Product Use:
Scotch broom is used in floral arrangements where its deep green color forms a backdrop for lighter plants.

Ecology and Habitat:
Scotch broom is an invader species found on warm, dry forest habitats. It is especially common in Douglas-fir and grand fir plant associations, and also occurs in the drier associations in the western hemlock zone. Scotch broom is common on glacial till and sandy soils with low moisture-holding capacity. It grows predominantly on cutover and disturbed sites. Airport ground crews and state road crews have used Scotch broom to prevent tree regeneration.

Shade Tolerance:
Very intolerant

Range:
Introduced from Europe, Scotch broom has naturalized from British Columbia to northern California on the west side of the Cascades. Scotch broom, a class B noxious weed under the Washington State Noxious Weed Law, is designated for control in all counties east of the Cascades. Contact the County Weed Coordinator for current policy concerning Scotch broom in western Washington counties.

Reaction to Silviculture:
Scotch broom invades following clearcut or heavy seed-tree harvests. Control is possible by applying appropriate herbicides with adjuvants in the spring. For current recommendations, ask your local Cooperative Extension Agent or refer to the Pacific Northwest Weed Control Handbook, an annually revised Cooperative Extension bulletin available from extension offices in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Pulling Scotch broom temporarily suppresses it, but plants often regrow from the roots the following spring. As trees grow above the height of the Scotch broom, the trees dominate by shading it. Scotch broom plants in old stands become decadent. Mechanical disturbance (by mower, disk, brushhog or land-clearing rake) stimulates vigorous new shoots that are free of disease and have desirable characteristics.

Forage:
Small mammals and birds use Scotch broom for cover.
Salal
*Gaultheria shallon*
GASH

**Habit:**
Salal, an evergreen shrub, usually grows 1 to 3 feet tall in diffused light, although heights of 5 to 8 feet are possible. It generally grows in wide, semi-clumpy expanses.

**Leaves:**
Shiny, dark green leathery leaves are 1.5 to 3.5 inches long, egg-shaped to oval. Leaves are alternate along the stem and horizontal. They have prominent veins and finely-toothed margins.

**Fruit:**
Fruits are small bluish-black to red berries, about \( \frac{3}{16} \) inch in diameter, produced on small shoots near the tip of the plant. Salal berries are edible.

**Desirable Characteristics:**
Each branch should be free from leaf blemishes and dirt and have dark green upward-facing leaves. Regular salal bunches are 24 to 30 inches long, while short bunches (tips, or Johnny bunches) are 18 to 20 inches long.

**Product Use:**
Salal is harvested all year except during mid-spring to early summer (the growing season). Two forms are harvested: long (regular) salal, and salal tips (Johnny bunches). The large leathery leaves of salal are generally arranged to accent bright colors of various flowers.

**Ecology and Habitat:**
Salal grows on a variety of sites but is most common on drier sites in the western hemlock, Pacific silver fir and Douglas-fir zones. On other sites it suffers intense competition from other vegetation. Salal also grows well under the canopy of western red cedar, and lodgepole pine. It grows on moist well-drained sites in sun or shade. Uncommon on sites with a deep snow pack, it prefers nitrogen-poor soils. Salal develops an extensive horizontal root system and is usually not found where soil is highly compacted. It commonly grows with evergreen huckleberry, devils club, dwarf Oregon-grape and sword fern.

**Shade Tolerance:**
Very tolerant

**Range:**
Salal grows west of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada mountains from British Columbia to central California, decreasing in abundance in the south. The largest salal plants occur in the fog belt of the Puget Sound lowlands and the Washington coast, mainly below 4000 feet elevation.

**Reaction to Silviculture:**
Because of its shiny leathery leaves, salal tolerates many herbicides. Spring cuttings followed by herbicide applications have suppressed but not eliminated salal. Only salal grown in sunlight diffused through a forest canopy is harvestable. Generally the plant is unharvestable following timber harvests for at least five years, depending on the amount of overstory material removed. Following clearcutting, the species will not be harvestable until it is shaded by tree crown closure. Usually, salal increases in young forests and on cutover lands. It is common in some forest associations, but usually decreases in abundance as stands become overmature.

**Forage:**
Many birds and mammals eat the fruit, while deer and elk browse the foliage. It is a major forage plant of black-tailed deer and Roosevelt elk west of the Cascades all year long. It receives moderate to heavy use in the winter and light to moderate use during the rest of the year.
Pachistima, Oregon Boxwood  
*Pachistima myristoides*  
PAMY

**Habit:**
Pachistima, a low evergreen shrub, grows in clumps up to 3 feet tall. It resembles evergreen huckleberry in form, but has finer leaves and occurs less frequently in direct sunlight.

**Leaves:**
Opposite evergreen leaves are 0.5 to 1.5 inches long, dark green above and paler underneath, oval to elliptical in shape, and horizontally spreading along the branch. Leaf margins are finely toothed.

**Fruit:**
The fruits are small, white to dark brown capsules borne in leaf axils. The flowers and fruits are inconspicuous.

**Desirable Characteristics:**
Pachistima sprays should be flat spreading branches 24 to 30 inches in length, free from blemishes. The leaves should be dark green and upward-facing.

**Product Use:**
Of minor importance, pachistima is used as a substitute for evergreen huckleberry in floral arrangements.

**Ecology and Habitat:**
Pachistima is distributed in most of the drier, relatively open forest associations of the Pacific Northwest. It is common in Douglas-fir and grand fir associations and some of the warmer subalpine fir associations. It grows densely on the eastern slopes of the Cascade range and on only the driest sites west of the Cascades. Although sites range from dry to moist, pachistima prefers sandy or gravelly loams, and soils low in nitrogen.

**Shade Tolerance:**
Tolerant

**Range:**
Pachistima is found in the Cascade Mountains, Okanogan Highlands, Blue Mountains, eastern Olympic Mountains and the Sierra Nevada range, eastward to the Rocky Mountains.

**Reaction to Silviculture:**
Pachistima tolerates most silvicultural treatments. Harvest activities that severely disturb the soil surface usually eliminate this plant for many years. It resprouts following less disruptive harvest activities. It is generally a successional species and is not abundant in overmature stands.

**Forage:**
During fall, winter and spring, deer and elk browse pachistima moderately to heavily.

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12 inches

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1 inch
**Sword Fern**  
*Polystichum munitum*  
POMU

**Habit:**  
Sword fern grows up to 3 feet high. Evergreen fronds are tufted on erect or creeping rhizomes and grow outward from a central base.

**Leaves:**  
Sword-shaped fronds taper to an acute tip. Individual leaflets of the compound leaf have an ear-shaped lobe near the stem and their margins are toothed. Leaves remain green for one year and new fronds grow each spring.

**Fruit:**  
Spores are produced on the underside of the leaves in two ranked rows.

**Desirable Characteristics:**  
Dark green fronds free from blemishes and discoloration are desirable. Each ‘sword’ should be 18 to 24 inches long with a consistent taper. Take care not to bend or break individual fronds.

**Product Use:**  
Sword fern is used in floral arrangements as a backing for colorful flowers. Due to its flexibility it is very versatile and widely used. Occasionally, lower leaflets are removed so that the upper stem can be accentuated and twisted.

**Ecology and Habitat:**  
Although sword fern grows in most forest associations west of the Cascades, it is not harvestable in all habitats. In the western hemlock and Pacific silver fir zones it is more abundant on the wetter cooler sites. It commonly occurs in the western red cedar zone in scattered populations. It is dispersed only fairly well in grand fir and Douglas-fir plant associations. Sword fern usually grows in well-drained fertile soils. It prefers toe slopes and stream bottoms where subsurface water flows and a thick duff of leaves and needles accumulates. It does not usually grow where the snowpack is deep or prolonged.

**Shade Tolerance:**  
Tolerant

**Range:**  
West of the Cascades from Alaska to California, sword fern grows from near sea level to 4500 feet elevation. It also grows in northern Idaho and northeastern Washington, but not usually in harvestable quantities.

**Forage:**  
In winter, spring and autumn, deer and elk browse sword fern lightly to moderately. Its use is limited during summer when other plant species are comparatively more palatable.
**Evergreen Huckleberry**

*Vaccinium ovatum*

**Habit:**
An evergreen shrub with glossy, somewhat waxy leaves, evergreen huckleberry can grow up to 10 feet tall. In diffused sunlight it usually grows only 5 feet tall.

**Leaves:**
The evergreen leaves, 0.5 to 1.5 inches long, are dark green and leathery. Leaves have a pointed tip and a rounded base with finely toothed margins. Leaves are alternate and flat on the twig and stem.

**Fruit:**
Berries are round and bluish-black, about 1/4 inch in diameter. Fruit is usually produced on the uppermost shoots in sunlight. These huckleberries are edible and tasty.

**Desirable Characteristics:**
Harvest evergreen huckleberry sprays as spreading branches 24 to 30 inches long, flat and free from blemishes. The leaves should be dark green and upward-facing. Evergreen huckleberry tips look like the longer sprays, but are 18 to 20 inches long. When evergreen huckleberry grows in direct sunlight, its shoots are arrow-straight with red leaves arranged spirally on the shoots. Harvest these shoots 18 to 28 inches long. They are called red-huck.

**Product Use:**
Evergreen huckleberry is harvested all year except during mid to late spring (the growing season). Three forms are harvested: huck sprays, huck tips and red-huck. In each form the sprays are used singly or in small groupings as backdrops to colorful main attractions in floral arrangements.

**Ecology and Habitat:**
Common associates are western hemlock, western red cedar, lodgepole pine, Sitka spruce and sometimes western red alder. Evergreen huckleberry is limited to warm-dry to cool-dry environments. Evergreen huckleberry grows on moist well-drained sandy and gravelly loams, often on glacial till. It grows in sun or shade. In direct sun it is very red and spiky, growing as short dense bushes.

**Shade Tolerance:**
Very tolerant

**Range:**
Evergreen huckleberry is confined to the west side of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada ranges from British Columbia to central California. It is more abundant in the northern part of its range and at elevations below 1000 feet.

**Reaction to Silviculture:**
Evergreen huckleberry generally requires an evergreen forest canopy to produce the best foliage. When grown in the open, such as in Christmas tree plantations, the red-huck form is most common. Similar results occur when timber stands are harvested using seed tree or open shelterwood regeneration methods. Harvesting the overstory timber generally damages the marketable traits of evergreen huckleberry. After three to five years, you may harvest huckleberry foliage, increasing to levels common before timber harvest. More abundant in early seral to mature forests, evergreen huckleberry decreases as timber stands age and become old growth. Nitrogen fertilizers increase the growth of evergreen huckleberry.

**Forage:**
Birds and mammals eat the berries. Elk and deer browse the leaves as a major forage species in the autumn, winter and spring.
Beargrass
*Xerophyllum tenax*

**Habit:**
Beargrass is not a grass, but a perennial member of the lily family. It grows in large tufts or clumps of tough wiry leaves.

**Leaves:**
The long narrow leaves are evergreen, growing up to 30 inches long. Blades are rough with sharp edges (minute rigid teeth on the margin), with bright green surfaces and lighter green undersides.

**Fruit:**
The showy flowers are borne on a tall stalk rising above the clump of leaves. Small 3-lobed capsules are produced by small white flowers in a cone-shaped raceme at the stalk tip.

**Desirable Characteristics:**
Undamaged leaves up to 30 inches long with bright green upper surfaces are desired. The center leaves of older plants are preferred because they are younger than outer leaves.

**Product Use:**
Individual leaves are dried and often dyed for shipment to Europe and the eastern United States. Although fairly new, this product is economically very important.

**Ecology and Habitat:**
Beargrass appears in most mountain hemlock, Pacific silver fir, subalpine fir, western hemlock and Douglas-fir associations. In western Washington, it does best on drier sites and especially well on warm-dry sites. It is usually found in open woods and clearings.

**Shade Tolerance:**
Intolerant

**Range:**
Beargrass is widely dispersed from British Columbia to California, and from the Pacific Ocean to Montana. It has been found from sea-level to over 7000 feet in elevation. It is more abundant at higher elevations.

**Reaction to Silviculture:**
Beargrass requires a fairly open canopy to grow at marketable quality. Generally this occurs at high elevations and in extreme conditions. Although timber harvesting generally damages beargrass, harvest can usually resume the next year with a small reduction of product quantity. Where adapted, beargrass commonly increases in clearcuts. It may persist in mature forest stands, but decreases in abundance over time. Beargrass successfully regenerates following fire or timber harvest.

**Forage:**
Elk browse beargrass lightly during winter and eat the flowers in the summer.
Use pesticides with care. Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. If pesticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

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Front cover photographs from under the & clockwiser:
Salal; Evergreen Huckleberry; Scotch Broom; Beargrass; and Deer Fern. The large cover photograph is a patch of Salal.

Back cover photographs from the top left corner clockwise:
1) Red Huckleberry; 2) Sword Fern; 3) Dwarf Oregon-grape; 4) Deer Fern; 5) Salal; 6) Evergreen Huckleberry; and 7) Beargrass in the center. All are shown as cut floral greens.