

All plant species known to humans have been designated with a unique Latin binomial (two part name) including genus and specific epithet (for example, western snowberry is known the world over as *Symphoricarpos albus*, the genus is *Symphoricarpos* and the specific epithet is *albus*). The genus forms the larger grouping. Different species that belong to the same genus have similar genetic structure and somewhat similar appearance but usually cannot interbreed. A particular species includes only those plants that can interbreed and have very similar genetic structures, as well as similar appearance and phenology. In general, the genus is usually derived from a Latin noun, whereas the specific epithet is derived from a Latin adjective. In the case of western snowberry, *Symphoricarpos* is derived from the word symphorein, meaning “borne together” and karpos, meaning “fruit” and the specific epithet, *albus* means “white” (indicating the clustered white berries of this species). These days, DNA mapping is able to substantiate different evolutionary/genetic links and species are frequently reclassified and renamed with a different binomial. Plant species may also be further subdivided into subspecies (ssp.) and/or varieties (var.). Both of these distinctions indicate a variation of a plant species that naturally occurs (in contrast to “cultivars”, varieties that are cultivated by humans).

Native plants are those that naturally occur in an area. Plants that have been brought to a new area by humans (in this sense, “humans” usually refers to European settlers and those that followed) are referred to as non-native, exotic, alien or introduced. Humans spread plants intentionally (for example, through ornamental or agricultural plantings) often due to a unique or robust characteristic of an exotic plant. For example, Scot’s broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) was originally introduced to the western states as an ornamental. Because of its ability to spread rapidly and root deeply, it was also planted along roadsides to prevent erosion. Humans also spread plants unintentionally, in the hulls of ships, on car tires, or on livestock. New introductions often gain an initial foothold in disturbed areas. Plants that out-compete other plant species in order to spread are known as invasive. To determine the range of a particular species, check *Flora of the Pacific Northwest* by Hitchcock and Cronquist or two websites: the University of Washington’s Herbarium site ([biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection.php](http://biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection.php)); and the USDA Plants Database ([plants.usda.gov/index.html](http://plants.usda.gov/index.html)). It can help to know the variety or subspecies that is local to the area (again, see *Flora of the Pacific Northwest*). For example, black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *trichocarpa*) is native to Washington state, while balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *balsamifera*) is not.

Because every species adapts to the varying environment over time by changing genetically from generation to generation, plants of the same species that live in a geographically-isolated area can be very different from each other. While the two plants may appear similar or would technically be able to interbreed if placed side by side, they may flower or fruit at different times, be able to better handle drought or saturated soils, or be more or less susceptible to various diseases. Western snowberry occurs throughout the northern United States, from Washington and Oregon to Maine and North Carolina. Because western Washington is very different, environmentally, from Maine, or even from eastern Washington, we emphasize the importance of using plant material with a local genetic origin. If one defines local as a very small area right around the project site, it can be impossible to purchase sufficient quantities of plant material. Therefore, Sound Native Plants carries plant material that is native to lowland western Washington and we sell our plants to projects being installed throughout lowland western Washington and as far south as Portland. We also contract grow separate batches of plants if a more local source is required for particular projects.