

New beginnings

Missed this week's brutal heatwave. Instead, my husband and I are spending our first days and nights on Orcas Island in our new vacation home. We took possession last Wednesday and will be returning to So Cal next Wednesday. It has been very exciting but beneath it all I have the nagging feeling that I am cheating on our 105 year old Craftsman house in South Pas.

We love living in Southern California - noise, grit, heat, and all - but we often long for dark nights, clean air, and quiet. That is what we have here in the San Juan Islands. Still as I sit here - on a webbed beach chair because we have no furniture - I can't shake the feeling that I should be doing something. Wonder how long it will take to learn to relax.

Nevertheless, I took a spin around the property. The house is on a steep slope with Doug-fir and western hemlock all around. I am not familiar with the plants here, though I know some and have even tried - unsuccessfully - to grow a few in my hot, dry yard in Southern California. For example, I had a small ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) that struggled along for a few years, never achieving the glory I had envisioned. I also planted serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) hoping for a harvest of delicious blueberry like fruits. Alas, no luck. But now all of that is changed! Armed with a great new resource, [Wild Plants of the San Juan Islands](#) by Scott Atkinson and Fred Sharpe, I am planning my attack.

How different this is going to be from my South Pas yard! This garden is on a small island in the Pacific Northwest. It is heavily wooded with conifers and although there is the disturbance that goes with development, the pristine environment is still evident everywhere. This leads me to my first determination: I will only use locally (from this type of wooded area on this island) native plants. Nothing gets brought in from anywhere else. If I can't get these plants, I won't plant anything except what I propagate myself.

So here I sit absorbing the view and the quiet, and wondering when, or if, I will feel at home here. I walked around the house with a pruner and tidied up the front foundation shrubs. That helped. I pulled a weed or two and removed some Doug-fir sprouts. The trees want so much to close the clearing that gives us a view. My husband cooked, his way of settling in.