Consistent with policy in the SMP, the County encourages the use of native plants throughout your shoreline property. Native plants provide a low-maintenance alternative to ornamental plantings, and can be integrated with the natural landscape and active-use areas of your yard to be aesthetically pleasing. Native plants will improve water quality, stabilize soils, and attract wildlife, all while being more resilient to molds and fungus that come with wet Northwest winters and drought periods during summer.

For more information on choosing native plants, see Island County Shore Stewards' Guide for Shoreline Living, WDFW's Your Marine Waterfront guide, and plant sales, classes, field trips, and online resources provided by The Washington Native Plant Society.
What if I want to clear and thin trees to maintain my shoreline view?

Topping trees is prohibited, but selective pruning or thinning for safety, view protection, or maintenance may be allowed if pruning does not affect ecological functions. When tree thinning is proposed, a certified arborist's report must show that no more than 20% of a tree’s limbs will be removed, and no more than 20% of the canopy cover in a stand of trees will be removed in a given five-year period. Tree thinning will generally require approval from the County through a Shoreline Exemption Permit.

There is a tree that I am afraid might fall on my home – what can I do?

Removal of hazard trees is allowed (as certified by an arborist and approved as an exempt activity by Island County), but after removal appropriate native trees should be planted to re-establish the area.

I am planning a new home for my shoreline property – will I be able to remove existing vegetation to provide for the home, driveway, deck and yard?

You will be allowed to clear existing vegetation to support your shoreline development, provided that your proposed home is sited and designed consistent with the shoreline buffer, setback and other standards of the SMP. Approval for development does not mean that you will be allowed to clear trees to provide an unobstructed view of the shoreline or water. County staff will review plans for site clearing to ensure that vegetation removal is minimized to the maximum extent reasonable. County review will also consider whether natural landscape features, such as snags, stumps, logs, drift logs, or uprooted trees, are retained to the greatest extent feasible to support the fish and wildlife that rely on shoreline habitats.

As you landscape your property after construction of the home, you may be required to provide and implement a planting plan that establishes native vegetation throughout shoreline jurisdiction.

Images provided from Island County Shore Stewards’ Guide for Shoreline Living – for more information on appropriate tree thinning to maintain shoreline views, please see the Guide for Shoreline Living, or from an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist.

Trees and vegetation along this Puget Sound shoreline were maintained as the property was developed with a new home. This approach is consistent with vegetation retention standards of the SMP, which require preservation of trees and other vegetation within shoreline buffer areas, and minimization of site clearing throughout shoreline jurisdiction to the maximum extent reasonable. Selective pruning for views may be allowed, but must be completed consistent with the SMP to avoid impacts to ecological functions.