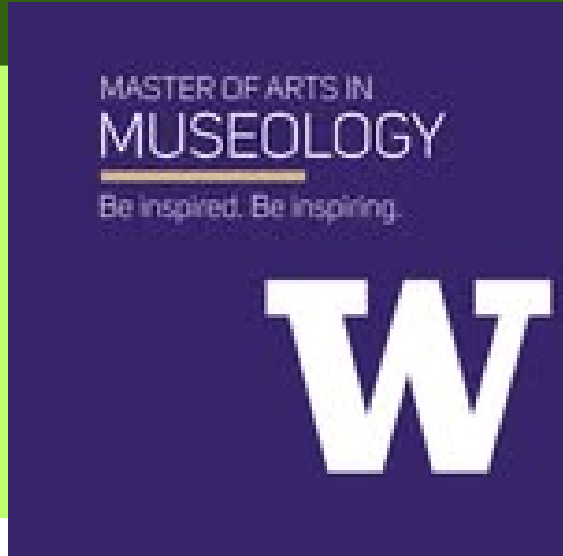


INTERPRETATION THROUGH NATIVE PLANTS

Designing Interpretive Signage for the Native Beauty Collection at Kruckeberg Botanic Garden

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Framing

The **Kruckeberg Botanic Garden Native Beauty Collection** highlights Pacific Northwest native plants and their ecological and cultural significance. However, visitors may not always recognize the relationships between these plants, regional ecosystems, seasonal change, and Indigenous knowledge systems without accessible interpretive support.

This thesis project addresses the opportunity to develop visitor-centered interpretive signage that encourages not only observation, but curiosity and connection to the natural garden environment. Existing research from a museum and environmental interpretation standpoint emphasizes the importance of relevance, accessibility, and storytelling in fostering meaningful engagement with public spaces and informal learning environments.

This project explores how interpretive design can support ecological understanding, accessibility, and visitor engagement within a botanical garden setting.

Purpose & Impact

The purpose of this project was to design a series of interpretive signage and an accompanying interpretive playbook for the **Native Beauty Collection** at Kruckeberg Botanic Garden.

The project aimed to:

- Support self-guided visitor learning and exploration
- Encourage observation of native plant species and ecological relationships
- Connect visitors to Pacific Northwest environments and seasonal change
- Implement cultural and ecological interpretation into garden experiences
- Provide resources for future KBGF staff and interns

The primary audience includes garden visitors, families, gardeners, educators, and visitors interested in Pacific Northwest native plants and ecology.

By combining interpretive storytelling, accessibility principles, and environmental education, the project supports more meaningful and inclusive visitor engagement within the garden environment.

Process

The project was completed in multiple phases across **Fall 2025 through Spring 2026** in collaboration with **UW Museology Program, Kruckeberg Botanic Garden, and members from the UW Botanic Gardens.**

Phase 1: Research & Planning - Fall 2025

- Conducted plant and ecological research using botanical texts, interpretive literature, and regional native plant resources
- Onsite visit to Kruckeberg for potential sign placements and interpretive theme
- Visited WA based botanic gardens for signage inspiration and research, along with conducting front-end signage evaluation
- Identified target audiences and accessibility goals
- Met with Supervisory Committee to discuss next steps for Phase 2

Phase 2: Design Development - Winter 2026

- Researched KBG specific plants and flowers; began drafting signage flower list
- Drafted interpretive signage content for individual plant species
- Applied visitor-centered writing and interpretive strategies
- Began drafting Plant Playbook

Phase 3: Creation & Finalization - Spring 2026

- Began full creation of Plant Species Signage and Interpretive Playbook
 - Periodically sending to Thesis Advisor and Supervisor for feedback and approval
- Made sure to integrate materials and information for future implementation and accessibility
- Developed visual hierarchy, panel structure, and signage layouts
- Incorporated ADA-informed accessibility considerations



Conclusions / Reflections / Next Steps (cont.)

Future next steps may include:

- Installation and visitor engagement of interpretive panels
- Additional signage for other areas of the garden
- Expanded multilingual or digital interpretive resources (app or website implementation)

The interpretive playbook provides a sustainable framework that can support future exhibit and signage development within the garden.

Deliverables

The final deliverables included:

- A series of interpretive plant signage panels for the Native Beauty Collection
- A comprehensive interpretive signage playbook to guide future signage development
- A thematic interpretive framework connecting ecology, culture, seasonality, and biodiversity

The signage highlights Pacific Northwest native plant species including:

- Pacific Rhododendron
- Salal
- Camas
- Vine Maple
- Red Columbine
- Kinnikinnick
- Oxalis
- White Alder
- Red-osier Dogwood
- Ceanothus species

Each interpretive panel incorporated:

- Habitat & distribution
- Identification features
- Ecological role
- Seasonal interpretation
- Visitor observation prompts
- Interpretive storytelling elements

The accompanying playbook documented content development strategies, accessibility guidelines, visual design standards, and implementation workflows for future interpretive projects.

Conclusions / Reflections / Next Steps

This project demonstrated how interpretive signage can support deeper visitor engagement with botanical collections by connecting ecological information with observation, storytelling, and place-based learning.

Key reflections from the project include:

- Accessible and conversational interpretation strengthens visitor engagement
- Interpretive prompts encourage active observation and curiosity
- Native plant interpretation can support ecological awareness and environmental stewardship
- Consistent design frameworks improve sustainability for future interpretive work
- The project (as well as future projects) should argue for maintaining the interpreter's voice in making the experience human and valuable.

The project also highlighted the importance of balancing scientific accuracy with approachable public interpretation, so that such posters/signage is easy to understand for a wide range of ages.