Native Plant Seed Dispersal Types Plant List

Some plants use more than one dispersal type. For example, some seeds are carried by animals and are also windblown, and most seeds will fall to earth if not otherwise dispersed. The following list represents the dispersal type most often employed by these common native plants for the most successful regeneration of their species.

Use this list to help determine dispersal types for the plants that occur in your habitat area for use in seed dispersal activities.

Windblown
- Big Leaf Maple
- Vine maple
- Cattail
- Black cottonwood
- Fireweed
- Douglas fir
- Western hemlock
- Red cedar
- All conifers
- Red alder
- Paper birch

Chewing or Eating
- Salal
- Snowberry
- Oregon grape
- Black hawthorn
- Huckleberries & Blueberries
- Dewberry
- Indian plum
- Devil’s club
- Salmonberry
- Wild rose
- All other berries

Animals Carry
- Goldenrod
- Oceanspray
- Pearly everlasting
- Grasses
- Douglas fir
- Western hemlock
- Sitka spruce
- All other conifers
- Hazelnuts
- Maple species
- Garry oak
- Trillium

Falls to Earth
- Miner’s lettuce
- Violet species
- Oregon ash
- Yarrow
- Camas
- Goat’s beard
- Bleeding Heart
- Iris species
- Wild onion
- Lupine species
- Penstemon
- Bleeding heart

Sedge & Grasses
- Goldenrod
- Oceanspray
- Pearly everlasting
- Grasses
- Sitka spruce
- All other conifers

Setting up the Activity

Look for plants in your habitat area that have seeds. Though seeds are present throughout the year, the best time of year to find a wide variety of seeds is summer through early winter.

Attach ‘Plant Number Labels’ on six plants in the natural habitat area so that all four dispersal types are represented. (Note: To allow more room for students to study, place a second set of ‘Plant Number Labels’ on plants (ideally the same species) in a different location in the habitat.) It is not necessary (though it is desirable) to know the plant names.

Use your own observation and judgment to make this determination if the plant is not listed above; there are few resources for determining the actual dispersal type of seeds. For example, if the seed is a berry it will always fit within the ‘chewing or eating’ category. If it adheres to your clothing when you brush against it, it will fit within the ‘animals carry’ category. If it is heavy and solid and falls straight down or has a seedhead that eventually bends over to the ground it will fit within ‘falls to earth’ category. Seeds with wings or hairs that allow them to fly through the air fit within the ‘windblown’ category. Another dispersal type not discussed here, but interesting to note is ‘travel by water’ and includes seeds that float such as iris and, in other parts of the world, coconut.

This activity is designed to introduce the concept of dispersal, and how a plant’s particular dispersal type affects the success of seed germination and plant growth, a factor to consider in the following activity Growing Native Seeds.