

## Vegetation Indicators

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Plants are the most obvious indicator of a wetland. Wetland plants called "hydrophytes" (hydro = water, phyte = plant). Wetland plants grow in water or in a substrate that at least periodically is deficient in oxygen due to excessive water content. Hydrophytes have certain adaptations that allow them to thrive in inundated or saturated soils where non-hydrophytes (upland plants) cannot. Most obvious of the wetland plant adaptations have to do with capturing and transporting oxygen. Most upland (non-wetland) plants take in oxygen through root systems and distribute it through their stems and leaves. To succeed in a water-logged environment, wetland plants must employ other strategies to take in oxygen, such as long, oxygen-transporting tubes (emergent reeds) or the ability to [float on shallow water](#) (lilies).

Although nearly 5,000 plant types occur in wetlands in the United States, you can usually determine if wetland vegetation is present by knowing a few plant types that commonly occur in your area. For example, willows, spruce, alders, spirea, horsetail, sedges, rushes, buttercup, cattail, and various types of grasses occur in many of Washington's wetlands. Other indicators of plants growing in wetlands include trees having [shallow root systems](#), [swollen trunks](#) (e.g., bald cypress), [multitrunking](#) or roots found growing from the plant stem or [trunk](#) above the soil surface.

As part of the National Wetland Inventory undertaken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), a wetland plant list has been developed by the Service in cooperation with a federal interagency review panel (Reed 1988, 1996). This list ranks individual plant species according to their probability of occurrence in wetlands. If you cannot determine whether the plant types in your area are those that commonly occur in wetlands, ask the local Corps District Office or a local botanist for assistance.

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