

Down the Garden Path

+ Botanical gardens brimming with everything from seasonal blooms to towering evergreens freely flourish throughout Pierce County. Whether you're in search of Northwest natives or fantastical flora, there's plenty here to inspire your green thumb.

Begin on the winding paths of **Chase Garden**, a 4.5-acre site overlooking Mount Rainier near Graham. One of just 16 Garden Conservancy preservation projects in the country, this garden was the lifework of owners Emmott and Ione Chase, who merged Japanese and Northwest influences into their design. Delight in the ponds, woodlands, alpine meadow, sweeping drifts of heather, and rock-garden plantings inspired by Mount Rainier wildflowers.

Lakewood Gardens, a 10-acre lakeside estate in Lakewood, features a stately manor, lush lawns, formal and woodland gardens, vast collections of rhododendrons and Japanese maples, and a truly knockout view of Mount Rainier. The gardens retain interest even in winter months, when taller evergreens and bare trees in their understory dominate the landscape.

Inside tree-lined **Wright Park** near downtown Tacoma, the **W.W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory** is always in bloom. Opened in 1908 and renovated in 2004, its 12-sided central dome and wings (made from 3,000 individual panes of glass) house seasonal floral exhibits and more than 200 species of exotic tropical plants to create an oasis of warmth and color even on dreary days. —**Mike Greenstein**



Lakewood Gardens



TOUR DE FAUNA

Get an up-close introduction to native Northwest wildlife.

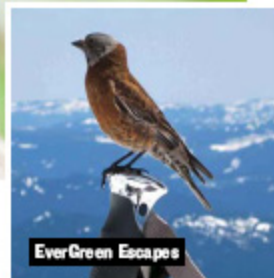
+ Charge up that digital camera, clear out that memory card, and prepare to get snap happy. Three Pierce County tours let you set your sights (and lens) on herds of Pacific Northwest wildlife, from bears and wolves to eagles and seals.

At **Northwest Trek Wildlife Park**, literally every turn of the 50-minute tram tour brings a new animal into view. Listen for bugling Roosevelt elk looking for love (or picking an antler-snagging fight), and see bighorn sheep snoozing by the dozen with their newborn babes. The naturalist guides do it all: navigating the tram, spinning a fast-paced patter of animal facts, and pointing out blacktail deer, mountain goats, moose, and swans amid the 435 acres of wetland, forest, and meadows. After the tram ride, take a self-guided walking tour through vine maples and towering firs, where paved trails pass wolf dens, bobcat haunts, and black bear enclosures.

Destiny Harbor Tours take place right on the water—one of the best places to observe animals in Pierce County. Captain Tom

Drohan's open-top boats offer views of Mount Rainier, which soars high above the marine habitat. As you thread through Gig Harbor and Tacoma waterways, keep watch for others, sea lions, and harbor seals splashing around. You might even glimpse a bald eagle skidding in to harpoon salmon.

EverGreen Escapes takes small groups on 10-hour Mount Rainier excursions. In a biodiesel-fueled Mercedes van, naturalists whisk visitors up to the active volcano while extolling the area's rich natural and local history. Hike past waterfalls and peer through binoculars to spot nesting bald eagles, chattering pica, foraging foxes, or—for the lucky few—a lone black bear. Walking switches to snowshoeing in the winter, when silent snowflakes tickle your nose and birds dart by seeking out berries. No, you don't have to go foraging yourself. EverGreen Escapes keeps tour participants well fed with a hearty seasonal lunch, such as quinoa nectarine salad and grilled chicken in chimichurri sauce. Then toast the mountain with a glass of local wine in hand. —**Lora Shinn**



EverGreen Escapes