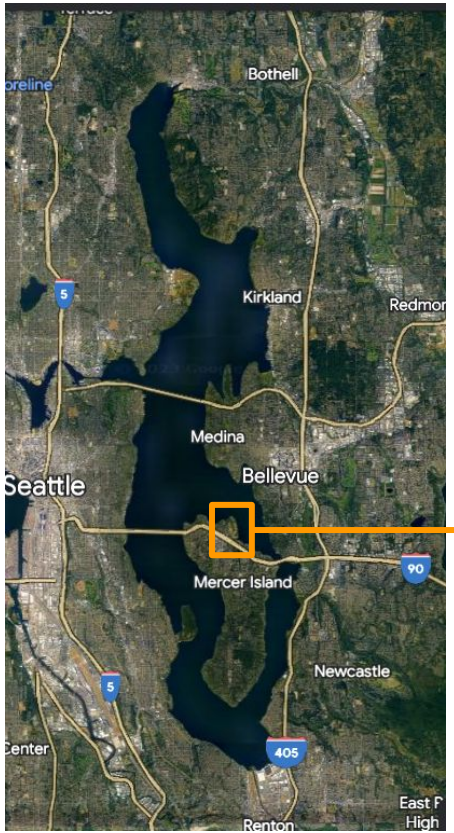
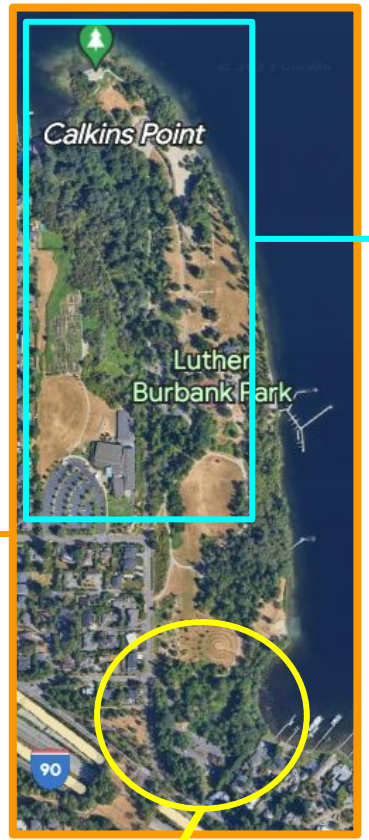
Interpretive Signage At Luther Burbank Park

Charlie Weiss Sharman

Location and History

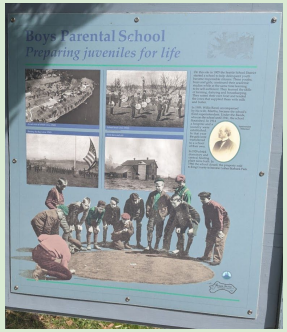
North Wetland: Category II
Diverse vegetation and close to polluting sources





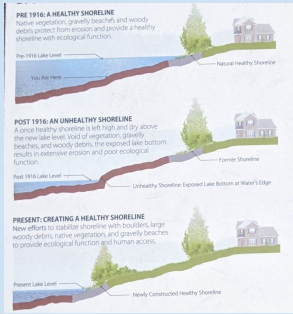
South Wetland
(Christie worked here)

1880s
Clearing and agriculture



-1943
Boys' school

1916
Lake WA drained



1969
King County purchases, manages historical buildings

2002
City of Mercer Island takes over, restores wetlands and focuses on recreation

Why signage?

Technology is innovative, but distracting

Signs can go beyond dry facts

- Encourage exploration
- Ask questions
- Ground in nature

Values and Principles

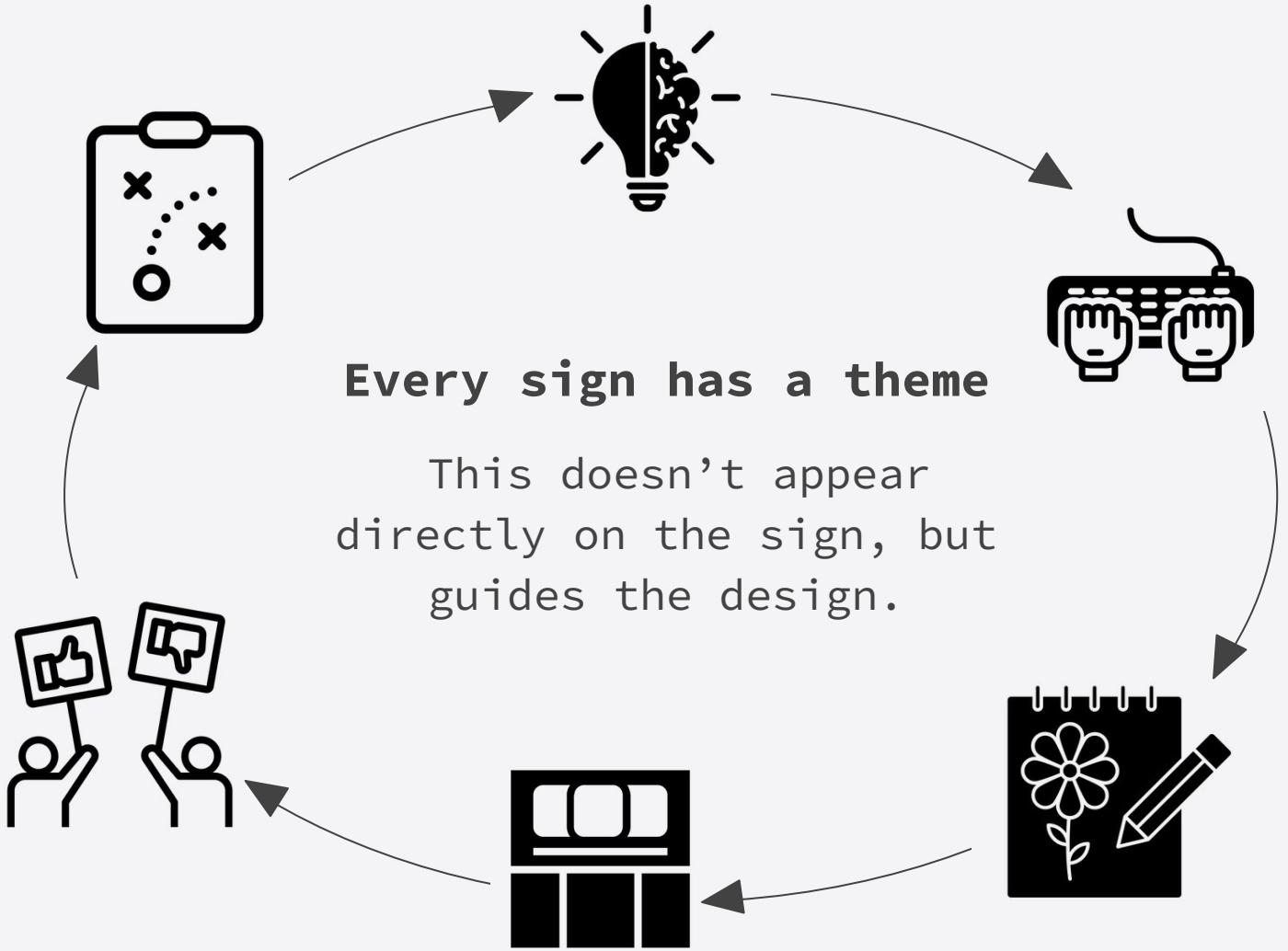
Values

Luther Burbank Master Plan

- Embrace natural systems
- Maintain the character
- Manage vegetation
- Improve park infrastructure
- Improve the arrival

From Tilden's Six Principles (National Park Service)

- Relate the wetland to the personality or experience of the visitor
- Aim not to instruct, but to provoke
- Present the wetland as a whole, rather than a part

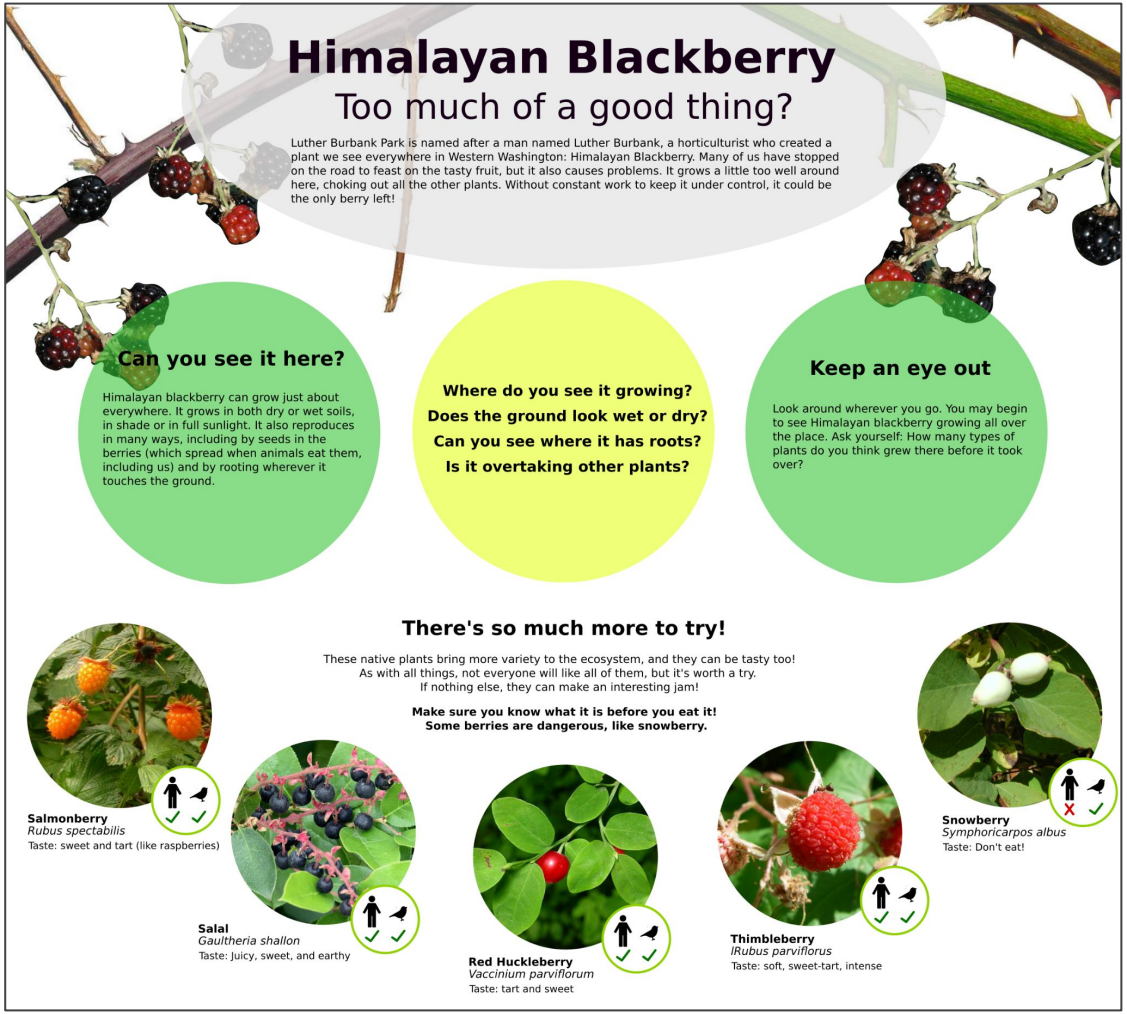


Every sign has a theme

This doesn’t appear directly on the sign, but guides the design.

The Signs

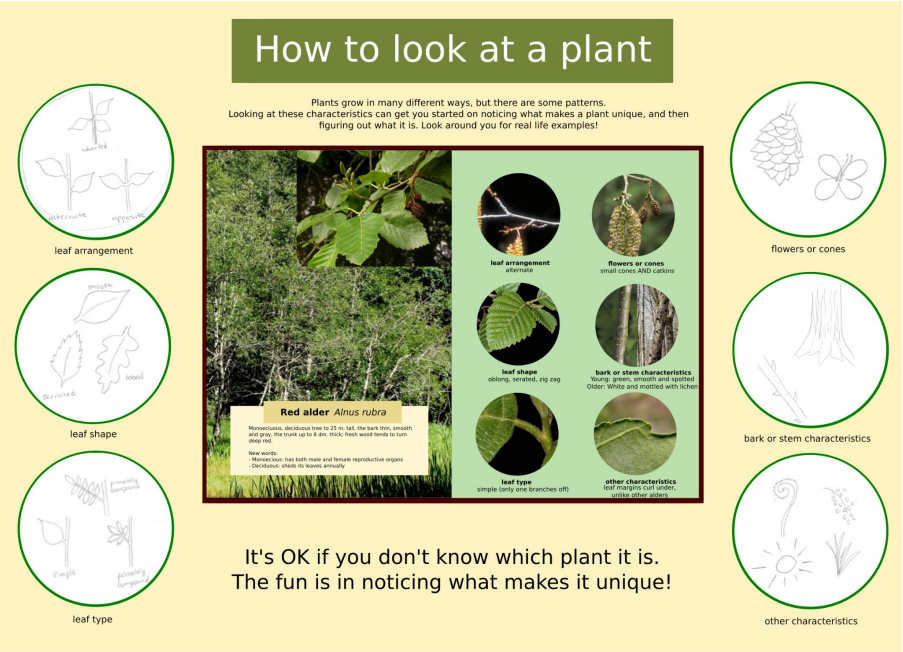
these are conceptual



Theme: “Luther Burbank Park is named after the famous horticulturist [Luther Burbank]... [He] created the Himalaya[n] blackberry– loved by some for its luscious fruit, despised by others for its invasiveness. Ironically, many of Luther Burbank Park’s native vegetation are choked with Himalaya[n] blackberry bushes” (from City of Mercer Island website)

Justification:

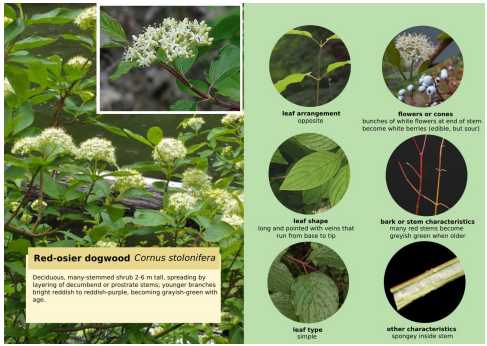
- Embrace natural systems
- Manage vegetation
- Relate to experience of visitor
- Provokes (Asks questions, encourages activity)



Theme: Plants are very unique. With some basic skills, anyone can learn how to tell them apart and appreciate their individuality. Its okay if you don't know what a plant is- the fun is in noticing its unique qualities.

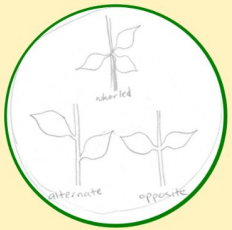
Justification

- Embraces natural systems
- Relates to experience of visitor
- Provokes
- Physical interaction

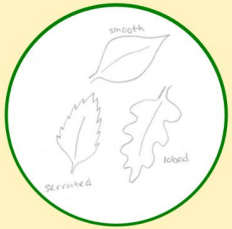


How to look at a plant

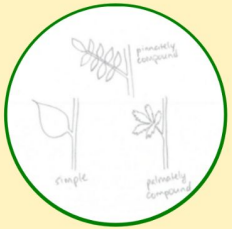
Plants grow in many different ways, but there are some patterns.
Looking at these characteristics can get you started on noticing what makes a plant unique, and then figuring out what it is. Look around you for real life examples!



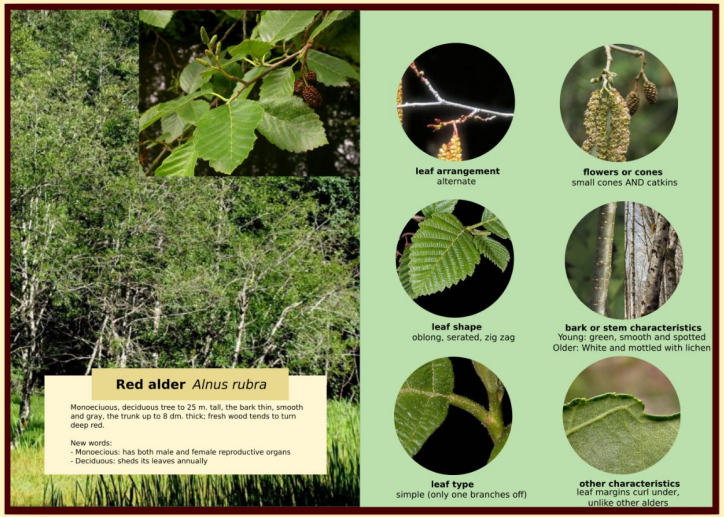
leaf arrangement



leaf shape



leaf type

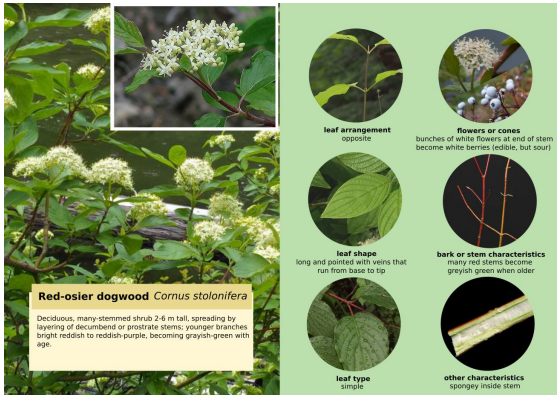


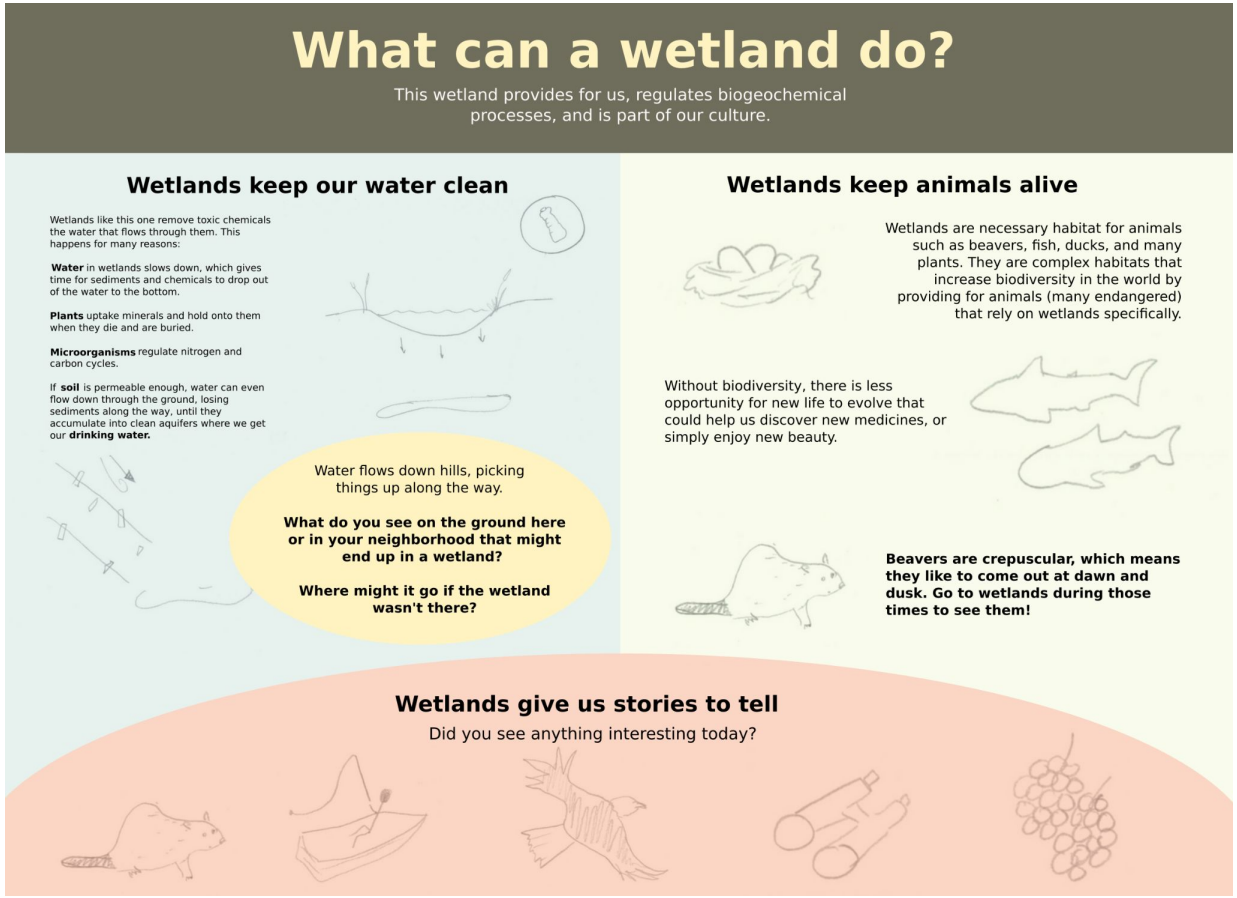
It's OK if you don't know which plant it is.
The fun is in noticing what makes it unique!

flowers or cones

bark or stem characteristics

other characteristics





Theme: The wetlands at Luther Burbank Park are some of many in a much larger watershed. Wetlands in the watershed provide for us and animals, regulate biogeochemical processes, and are part of our culture.

Justification:

- Embrace natural systems
- Relate to experience of visitor
- Provokes (Asks questions, gives animal viewing tips)
- Present wetland as a whole, rather than a part

Theme: Wetland aesthetics can vary greatly throughout the seasons, from winter twigs to beautiful blooming flowers. They can be both active and serene, noticeable with all the senses.

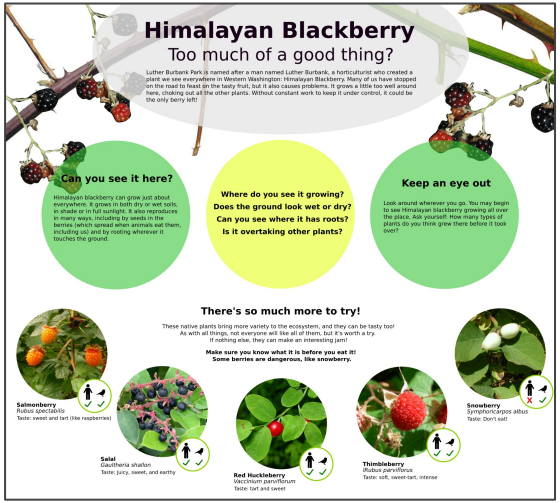
Justification:

- Embrace natural systems
- Relate to experience of visitor
- Provokes (shows viewer how to use all their senses to appreciate wetland)

Future Work

Feedback and collaboration - a critical (missing) step

- Local government/groups
  - Constraints from the city/other bodies
  - Relationships with Tribes for native botanical history
- User research
  - Currently making a lot of assumptions
  - Testing and feedback
  - Need opinions from people who aren't scientists
- Professional sign makers
  - Wording
  - Art
  - Other tips



Questions/Comments?

Image Sources

Cow picture: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cattle

Lbp map: https://your.kingcounty.gov/GIS/web/Web/VMC/recreation/LB_2005_tabloid_300.pdf

Montlake cut: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montlake_Cut

Historical buildings: http://mercerislandhistory.org/historic.html

Stock photos:
https://www.dreamstime.com/photos-images/taking-white-flower-mobile-smart-phone-nature.html

Icons: thenounproject.com