

Wenatchee Naturalist Class and Puppy
By Laurie Riegert, December 2025

We started in September as beginners. I have been hiking on the hill across the street from my house for 25 years. I knew arrowleaf balsamroot, lupine, sagebrush and serviceberry. Marmots, porcupine, coyote and mule deer. I was familiar with beetles and lizards and rattlesnakes. But why should I learn the names of everything I see? I will just forget them. I don't remember names well. I like to hike and be outside in nature, isn't that enough?

I started to think about learning more about the area where I live and love after I retired. A friend who loves to identify wildflowers as we hike, suggested that I learn 2-3 new wildflowers every time we go hiking. That seemed like something I could do. A year later, I signed up for the naturalist class with the idea of learning more about my surroundings. Next, I became a puppy owner.





My puppy companion has ears that hear every sound and a nose that is very acute. She was 3 months old when our class started. Our excursions up the hill were scary at first. If she heard a siren, or a train whistle or a dog bark, she was ready to turn around and race down the hill, pulling me with her. She met the mule deer as they came down for the winter. They stayed far away from us at first, but Izzy could see them and was very wary just as they were of her. She was not always fun to walk with, pulling me, smelling everything, tasting horse poop, and often cutting our walks to a brief few minutes before retreating to the safety of the house.

Gradually, as Izzy smelled the bushes and tasted the serviceberries, I learned the names. She stopped to sniff, and I pulled out my notes and tried to identify the plants that we had learned in class. I took pictures. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, Antelope bitterbrush, rubber rabbitbrush, tall buckwheat, and three types of sagebrush! I saw Steller's jay. I heard other birds. What are they? I downloaded Merlin onto my phone and was told that dark eyed juncos and red-tailed hawks and flickers were in the area. My new binoculars are here and I look forward to catching some glimpses of the birds that I am hearing. The deer watched us this week from only 10 yards away. Izzy rarely wants to retreat down the hill to safety.

Izzy and I are still beginners but together we inspire each other to learn about our hillside in ways that bring us closer to nature and feel like we are a part of the shrub steppe landscape.

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