



Salvaging native plants

Salvageable plant material

Be sure to dig up plants only in areas slated to be cleared, and work when the plants are dormant, from December to mid-March. Always obtain permission and any necessary permits before entering a site. Look for salvaging opportunities where new developments and roads are going in. Dormant plants resist transplant stress, and winter's cool, overcast weather provides an ideal environment for transplanting. Smaller plants are more likely than larger ones to survive salvaging, and they are easier to dig and transport. Most sites have more plants than you can dig up, so prioritize species and individuals that are best suited to salvaging.

Salvaging equipment and techniques

Sharp spades are essential for cleanly severing roots while digging. Keep files handy for periodic sharpening. Pruners and soil knives also come in handy. Cover the roots of newly salvaged plants with soil or wet burlap, so the air won't dry out the roots and kill the plants. Layer plants and soil in containers for easier transport. To transport plants long distances, use "gurneys" made from burlap slung between two sturdy poles. Replant the salvaged plants at the new site immediately, or put in containers for longer storage. Keep the plants cool, but always protect the root system from freezing. If the plants come from a weedy site, remove the soil from around the root system and pot into fresh soil to get rid of weed seed. Scout salvage sites for herbaceous weed populations prior to winter dormancy to identify weed risks and avoid further spreading invasives.

Challenging species

Pacific madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*) and Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*) form a taproot that initially comprises the majority of the root system. It is almost impossible to avoid severing this taproot when salvaging these species. Doing so reduces the likelihood of successful transplanting. Pacific madrone is also notoriously sensitive to transplant shock. To salvage these species, select the smallest seedlings available. Surprisingly, both salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) and tall Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) are difficult to salvage. Salal individuals survive better if there are rooted portions of white or pink rhizomes present. Tall Oregon grape often loses leaves when transplanted, and then sometimes a new set will regrow, so don't give up hope until plant stems die back. Other difficult-to-salvage species are not as surprising; low Oregon grape (*Mahonia nervosa*), evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*) and red huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*) can be challenging to work with in the best of circumstances. Look for bright yellow shoots when salvaging both tall and low Oregon grape, target the smallest individuals and try to get as much of the root system as possible. Successfully salvaging small red huckleberries that are rooted into old tree stumps is possible! Work with a partner to transport the root system while still in connection to portions of the rotted stump. Collect additional sections of stump to add to the individual's new planting site.

Species that work well

In general, most of the other common woody restoration species respond well to salvaging. Target individuals shorter than three feet. Herbaceous populations can be marked prior to the dormant season for salvaging later. Emergent rhizomes respond especially well to salvaging. Clumps can be transplanted into containers and then further divided at the new planting site.

References and Resources

"Grow Your Own Native Landscape" (by Michael Leigh, Native Plant Salvage Project), a propagation and landscaping guide for western Washington natives, includes a great summary of the ethics of collecting native plants and salvage tips by species. An on-line searchable database based upon this material is available at: cahedb.wsu.edu/nativePlant/scripts/webShowClassification.asp. Also, see the Native Plant Salvage Project's website (www.nativeplantsalvage.org) and King County's Native Plant Salvage Project website (dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/PI/salvage.htm).