

How to Conduct a Plant Rescue

Wild Ones members make an effort to save native plants that would otherwise be destroyed by a bulldozer because of land development. This bittersweet situation provides you the opportunity to retrieve plants for your landscape.

Rules vary from chapter to chapter, but a code of ethics and liability waivers are required. Following are some guidelines. Member will: do no collecting without owner's permission, observe all laws/regulations governing collection, ascertain boundary lines, cause no damage to property, leave all gates as found, discard no smoking materials, fill excavation holes that would be dangerous to people or live-stock, cause no damage to collecting material, take only what can reasonably be used and/or donate plants to an educational receiving area, leave collecting area free of litter, cooperate with plant rescue leaders, report to Wild Ones officers any rare or endangered species, and conduct oneself in a manner which will add to the stature and public image of Wild Ones everywhere.

Finding Sites

Watch for "for sale" signs or headlines about highway expansion. Network with friends who are landowners, real estate agents, contractors, developers, and excavators. Report leads to your rescue coordinator. If you don't have one, you may ask the owner or developer for permission to survey the site for native species, explaining that you are a member of a non-profit organization that promotes the use of native plants. Take an inventory, then contact the owner, report your findings, and explain that:

- Plant rescuers will take responsibility for their own safety and are willing to provide waivers, protecting the owner from any liability.
- Rescuers are willing to dig during whatever hours are convenient to the owner or developer.
- The developer can generate good publicity from helping to preserve some native species.

Chapters usually ask members to sign up to be on the rescue call list. A coordinator will make arrangements to contact members with exact instructions either personally or through rescue assistants. Be sure to follow up with a thank you to the landowner for their kindness.

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Transplanting

Remember, digging from the rescue site is only half the job; plan accordingly. If you know you won't be able to plant your plants immediately, then, before you leave home, prepare a trench into which you can temporarily heal in your plants. For the dig, wear a long-sleeved shirt and long pants. Tuck pants into socks or boots if you're in chigger or tick country. Don insect repellent if necessary. Gloves, pruning shears, and drinking water are necessities. Refresh your visual memory about Poison Ivy or similar dangers. Take along a marking pen, plastic bags, or buckets. A long-bladed transplant spade is best for moving deep-rooted plants. Some rescuers use a child's plastic toboggan, laundry basket, or old shower curtain to drag their booty back to the car; carts or wheelbarrows are unwieldy. Dig as deep and wide a clump as you can manage. Not only will this help the plant you've selected to survive, you may benefit with extra seeds or plants not immediately evident. Secure the soil so it doesn't shake apart on the drive home. If foliage will be hanging out of a trunk or window, cover it to prevent windburn during transport.

When you get home, try to place plants into growing conditions similar to their original site. To reduce transplant shock, trim back plants by about a third (even if it means cutting off pretty flowers), and put some kind of shade over them for the first few days. A lawn chair or bench will cast enough shadow to reduce the sun's intensity. Water regularly until well established.

Plant rescues are a privilege of membership. For this reason, do not share rescue locations with friends or family. Neither are rescued plants to be given away or sold. Extra plants may be used to stock a school project or plant exchange. Because some jurisdictions require state inspection of plant materials used in this way, contact your county agent or Bureau of Endangered Resources to learn the rules for your area.