

Native Vegetation & Rhododendron Preservation

Florence is a small coastal Oregon city, located on the estuary of the Siuslaw River. It was incorporated in 1893 and thrived for many years on lumber and fishing industries. These activities eventually declined, and beginning in the 1970's and 80's it became largely a tourist destination and retirement community. Its primary natural assets are a moderate year-round climate; recreation on the several coastal lakes and the sand dunes of the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, the historic Old Town shopping and port district -- and not least, a lush evergreen Pacific Northwest ambiance created by roadsides and vistas of native vegetation and well landscaped developments. This character is particularly evident in springtime, when flowers are blooming everywhere and the green "walls" of the 4-mile Rhododendron Drive corridor are naturally decorated in pink native rhododendron blooms.



Wild Rhodys in Bloom

The "City of Rhododendrons" has long been proud of its natural beauty. The annual Rhododendron Festival was first celebrated in 1908 and has continued for over 100 years, save for wartime. Three days of activities in early May are capped by a 100-unit parade; the beautiful pink wild rhody blooms are featured on most local floats and are everywhere evident as part of the celebration.

The City is committed to maintaining this natural beauty while welcoming new development. A policy of the Comprehensive Plan, states that "Retention and enhancement of native vegetation provides for continuation of the unique character of the community... Our native vegetation is a scenic resource, especially the native rhododendrons."

To encourage the retention of existing native vegetation, the City codes (Landscaping, FCC 10-34) provide that when landscaping is required, native vegetation that is protected and retained can earn double credit against the minimum landscaping area requirement. Further, any new planting of one native rhododendron counts as two shrubs in meeting the minimum required number of landscape shrubs.

NATIVE VEGETATION

WHAT IS IT? ~ WHY SAVE IT?

Native vegetation in general means those species of trees, shrubs, and ground cover which have historically grown naturally in the Florence region. The most commonly encountered native species are identified in the "Tree and Plant List for the City of Florence" which is available at the Community Development Department. Detailed descriptions and photos for each plant can be viewed online at the Oregon State University website <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants>.

Whenever practical, the preservation of mature native vegetation for at least part of a development's landscaping is a preferred alternative to complete clearing and then re-planting. Appropriately-trimmed mature natives fit very well into the character of the community. In addition to aesthetics and "instant" greenery, the preserved native plants can help to immediately provide:

- Shading and climate control
- Visual/noise buffers
- Wind screening
- Control of blowing sand
- Stabilization of steep banks
- Control of erosion, and
- Minimum need for irrigation and pesticides.

Mature native plants in their existing locations generally will not require irrigation. Native plants that are relocated or transplanted to the site will usually need temporary irrigation until established. In any case, the compatibility of these plants with the Florence environment will allow substantial long-term water conservation.



Shading and Visual Screening

Native Rhododendrons

The wild Native Rhododendron (*rhododendron macrophyllum*) is a local favorite -- it is the historical namesake of the “City of Rhododendrons”. The native “rhody” is our star of the show for the annual spring Rhododendron Festival, when it decorates the woodlands with showy pink flowers. This unusual native plant is worthy of special preservation effort, since it is a shrub that grows very slowly – if existing mature stands are cleared and lost, it would take years to regain the spring blooming spectacle.



Star of the Rhody Festival

The native rhody will become tall and leggy in dense stands, but it can be topped and pruned back severely to form a more compact bush. While it can grow alone in full sun, the wild rhody likes filtered sun or partial shade and seems to be happiest growing with company in the understory of evergreen trees.

This native plant spreads by seed and is not easily propagated – nursery stock is typically dug as small plants from wild sites that have been or will be cleared.



Small native rhody transplants

Native Trees

Evergreen trees are dominant in the Florence coastal environment, and probably the single best recognized native tree is the Shore Pine. This tree is fast growing and highly adaptable to its environment – in windy locations near the beach, its height may be “wind pruned” to that of a large bush. In dense stands, it will grow tall and straight with few lower branches; this form is not particularly desirable as part of development landscaping, since solitary tall Shore Pines can sometimes be unstable in Florence’s high winds and sandy soils. Small or newly planted Shore Pines can be happily pruned to the “bush” form, and in just a few years will grow to become striking specimens.



Topped and pruned Shore Pine

In sandy soil, the Shore Pines develop an extended network of medium-depth roots which can be an effective element in a vegetative bank stabilization program. These trees are sometimes susceptible to needle drop due to fungal infection, so some care may be necessary for specimen plantings.



The Old Town wind break

Other native evergreens common in Florence include Douglas Fir, Sitka Spruce, Western Hemlock, and Western Red Cedar, all of which grow slowly and can become very large. The City strongly encourages preservation of existing trees of this type – either as single specimens or in groups or windbreaks.

Broad-leaf evergreen trees native to and commonly found in this area include Pacific Waxmyrtle and Oregon Myrtle. The Waxmyrtle is popular as a large shrub or small tree, and is found in most local “wild” tracts. It may be pruned or trimmed to almost any desired shape. The warty, wax-covered berries are popular fare for birds, particularly over winter.



Screen of pruned Waxmyrtle

Deciduous trees that are native to and common in the Florence area include Big Leaf Maple, Vine Maple and Red Alder. These trees are also sometimes found as large shrubby bushes. Bark of the Bigleaf maple may attract mosses and lichens in the coastal environment. Vine Maple trees are noted for presenting showy red leaves in the fall. Red Alder are fast growing and nitrogen fixing, so this tree can do well in very poor soils. Near the coast, alder trunks also tend to become covered with mosses and lichens, making a rather scruffy appearance.

Native Shrubs

In addition to the wild rhododendron, other dominant native shrubs in the area include Salal and Evergreen Huckleberry. Salal is omnipresent, and may grow tall and dense in older stands. It spreads quickly by underground runners and develops an extensive shallow root system, which makes it a valuable contributor for bank stabilization.

The local huckleberry is a pleasing evergreen shrub which spreads more slowly but can become tall and dense. While useful for bank stabilization, it can also exist in moist lowland sites.



Shrubs: Huckleberry and Salal

Native Ground Covers

The most common native ground covers in the area are Kinnikinnick and Wild Strawberry. Prostrate or creeping forms of Common Juniper also appear in many landscapes, but they are not so typical in wild sites.

Kinnikinnick is a pleasing evergreen plant which spreads slowly and is easily maintained. Wild Strawberry spreads quickly by surface runners, but does not form a really dense cover.

Any of these ground covers allow water conservation and easy maintenance relative to mowed grass turf.



Kinnikinnick ground cover

HOW TO SAVE AND RESTORE NATIVE VEGETATION

Landscape Layouts and Examples

The most important guideline for preserving native vegetation as part of development landscaping is to **START EARLY**. The stands of native plants and trees to be retained should be identified on the development site plan and physically marked for protection (by fence, tape, flags, etc) before any site work starts. Otherwise, the site will typically be fully cleared for the convenience of building contractors. The bonus credits offered by the City landscaping code will help to assure that native preservation can be cost effective while retaining the historic Florence character and ambiance.

Landscape layouts can incorporate existing native vegetation in the form of islands, margins, screening, or buffer strips. (Fig. 10) The native plants should best be trimmed and pruned by qualified personnel as necessary to assure that they will form a long-term element of the site land-



Dense visual and noise buffer

scaping. Any diseased vegetation or split, leaning, or unstable trees should be removed – and replaced with new native nursery stock when appropriate. The fast growth rate of shore pines can replace trees that must be removed; they often can be mixed for good effect with other slower-growing, long-lived tree species.

There are many examples in the City where native vegetation has been preserved and/or restored to form a pleasing and desirable part of the overall site landscape. The Community Development desk can provide locations and directions for a first-hand view of landscaping projects which have made effective use of native vegetation.



Island of native vegetation

Planting Tips and Procedures

In general, “pocket planting” is the most reliable approach when native vegetation must be relocated or transplanted in sandy Florence soils. In this procedure, the planting hole is dug about twice the width of the pot or root ball – then filled with a soil-compost blend around and under the plant’s roots.

For large **Native Rhododendrons**, it is generally recommended that they be topped and pruned back severely (to

4 or 5 ft height) before relocation; preferably during a prior dormant season. If the existing plant is growing in Florence sand, it will not have deep roots and may be effectively “scooped up” and moved, as by a front-end tractor loader. If it must be manually handled, most of the soil may fall from the roots – this need not be a problem so long as the roots are kept moist for prompt “pocket planting” at the new location.

It should be noted that 100% survival cannot be expected when relocating native plants on the site, so some over-planting would be prudent. Nursery stock that is brought to the site may typically be expected to have a good rate of survival



Large native rhody transplant

All of the native plants noted in this brochure are generally available as nursery stock from local Florence dealers. The Native Rhododendrons are sometimes an exception – they may need to be ordered in advance to assure the desired delivery.

Finally, it is important to be aware that some plants that are commonly found at “wild” sites in and around Florence are not true natives – in fact, some of these species (e.g. Himalayan Blackberry and Scotch Broom) are prohibited for new plantings and should be removed since they are identified as noxious and invasive. For details, see the brochure “*Noxious Weeds Common to the Florence Region*” available at the Community Development Department.



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