

Farming around native oaks

The ancient Oregon white oaks (*Quercus Garryana*) in the middle of Willamette Valley agricultural fields and pastures are hundreds of years old.

They are still standing because they've had the respect of generations of landowners. Perhaps they were valued for the bit of shade they offered farm workers or livestock. Or perhaps the respect came from the fact that they were the oldest living things around. They were here when Lewis and Clark first visited the Northwest and their acorns sustained the native people who lived here before the arrival of "settlers."



In any case, these oaks are becoming more rare as they succumb to old age and are not replaced.

Here are guidelines for keeping them healthy while farming:

- **Leave a tillage buffer around them.** To be sure you don't damage oak roots, leave an untilled area at least 1 ½ to 2 times the width of the tree's canopy.
- **Park vehicles or farm equipment elsewhere.** In addition to the potential to leak oil, pesticides and other harmful chemicals, vehicles can cause damaging soil compaction.
- **Plan irrigation to avoid them.** Watch out for overspray. Excess water in summer can be fatal to native oaks.
- **Avoid fertilizers and herbicides underneath them.**
- **Share these guidelines with your employees, contractors and family so they, too, can know how to care for your Oregon white oak trees.**



The value of oaks to wildlife

Even just one single native oak tree in the middle of a field has tremendous value to songbirds and other wildlife. Oaks and oak habitats in our region provide food, shelter and nesting areas for 200 species of birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals, not to mention the numerous native insects that use them. Several species of birds are considered oak dependent. If the oaks go away, so do these species.

Photo: Slender-billed nuthatch by Mark Greenfield

The guidelines on the first page are primary actions you can take to keep existing Oregon white oaks healthy. Here are some next steps:

- **Leave some young oaks as replacements for old ones.**

Jays carry acorns around and hide them here and there. Look out for young seedlings and pick one that's in a convenient place to protect and let grow. Transplant seedlings less than a foot or so tall -- before the deep taproot has grown too long.



- **Restore native understory.**

Remove ivy, blackberry and other invasive weeds. Plant native wildflowers such as camas and lupines or shrubs like snowberries, red-flowering currant and Oregon grape. Doing so will greatly increase the habitat value for numerous wildlife species.

- **Save the whole stand**

Stands of oak and their understory are even more valuable than individual trees. Top or remove encroaching Douglas fir, which can shade out oaks.



- **Learn how to distinguish Oregon white oak trees from non-native oaks.**

See the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District website, Oregon White Oak Habitat page, for help.

<https://wmswcd.org/programs/oak-habitat/>

- **Download a free publication to learn more.**

For much more information, download a free 66-page publication, *A Landowner's Guide for Restoring and Managing Oregon White Oak Habitats*.

www.blm.gov/or/districts/salem/files/white_oak_guide.pdf



Ask for assistance!

If you have oaks on your rural property, the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District is available to provide technical and financial assistance to keep them healthy and improve habitat. Contact the district at 503-238-4775 or info@wmswcd.org. Help is available for farmers and other landowners on many other conservation issues as well.

West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District doesn't discriminate based on age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristics protected by law. The District is an equal opportunity employer. Reasonable accommodations are made for events, educational materials and services and we invite your feedback. Please email questions or comments to info@wmswcd.org or call 503.238.4775.



This fact sheet was a collaboration between the Sauvie Island Habitat Partnership and the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District. Feel free to print copies for personal use. Permission will be liberally granted for larger scale reproduction, but please give us credit and ask by emailing sauviehabitats@gmail.com.