

Native Oregon oaks in your landscape

Have an Oregon white oak in your yard? Lucky you – your oak is precious!

They are beautiful, culturally significant trees that attract many species of songbirds, and are fire-wise and low maintenance. They are increasingly rare – less than 10% of historic levels remain.



Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*)

Here are some things to know to keep it healthy:

- Don't water a mature oak in summer; it can cause root rot and interfere with acorn production. If you must water plants or lawn underneath, do it sparingly.
- To protect tree roots and avoid injury-related disease and pest infestation, avoid digging under or near your oak canopy (despite a deep taproot, roots are mostly shallow and can extend up to 3x the radius of the canopy). If you must dig under an Oregon oak, don't dig deep.
- Avoid fertilizers and herbicides underneath your oak.
- Don't prune limbs or pave over roots, which need to breathe; avoid compaction.
- Remove competing trees, especially conifers like Douglas fir that shade out Oregon oak.
- Share these guidelines with your family and the arborists and yard maintenance folks who work on your property.

Not sure if your oak is a native?

See the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District website, Oregon White Oak Habitat page, for help. <https://wmswcd.org/programs/oak-habitat/>



The value of oaks to wildlife

Even just one single native oak tree 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

Want to do more? Turn your oak into an oak habitat!

Here are some lovely native understory plants that naturally grow near or under oaks. Add some of this diversity to your yard to make it even more attractive to native birds and bees. Choose species that don't need summer water and are suited to your sun or shade situation. Install any new understory plants as small seedlings -- to minimize digging around your oak's roots.

Shrubs

Oceanspray
Red-flowering currant
Red-twigs dogwood
Nootka or Baldhip rose
Serviceberry
Snowberry
Tall Oregon grape
Oval-leaved viburnum
Mock Orange

Flowers, ferns & grass

Big-leaf or River lupine
Common or Great camas
Clarkia (Farewell-to-Spring)
Meadow checkermallow
Orange honeysuckle (vine)
Sword fern (in shade)
Western red columbine
Roemer's Fescue
Prairie junegrass



Get a start on the next generation

Jays hide acorns here and there. Look out for young seedlings and pick one that's in a convenient place to protect and let grow. The deep taproot of Oregon white oak trees can make transplanting difficult, but it can successfully be done when seedlings are less than a foot tall.

Download one of these free publications to learn more:

**Conserving Oregon White Oak in Urban and Suburban Landscapes:*
<https://wmswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Landscaping-with-Oak-FINAL-6.28.17.pdf>

**A Landowner's Guide for Restoring and Managing Oregon White Oak Habitats:* www.blm.gov/or/districts/salem/files/white_oak_guide.pdf

**Native Plants for Willamette Valley yards:* https://wmswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/native_plants_for_willamette_valley_yards_booklet.pdf



Ask for assistance!

If you have oaks on your 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 on many other conservation issues as well.

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Sauvie Island Habitat Partnership and the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District collaborated on this document. Permission to reprint in large quantities will be liberally granted by request sauviehabitats@gmail.com.