

## **Transplanting Native Plants**

By Dwight S. Hall, Extension Horticulturist (Retired), Overton, Texas

Many desirable native or wild Texas plants are adaptable for the home landscape. The natives are hardy to local weather conditions, local soils, and perhaps more tolerant of local garden insects and diseases. Most natives are easy to grow, yet the task of successfully transplanting the desired native from the wild is often difficult, and must be done with care.

The wet, cold days of winter are ideal times for transplanting plants, both native or cultivated species. Due to cold, the plants are dormant or in a state of rest, and will not suffer the shock of moving and the interruption of growth.

Special precautions must be taken when selecting native plants for transplanting. Even though these plants are hardy, it is often difficult for the home owner to substitute the natural or native woodland environment which nature has provided. The gardener must first ask if he or she can provide growing conditions similar to those in which the plant now thrives. If not, leave the plant to nature.

Before digging, the home owner must decide which native plants will best fit his or her landscape needs. It would be unwise to select a native dogwood for a sunny location, since dogwood demands shade or overhead protection. The planting area for the new plant should be well prepared prior to transplanting. Dig the planting hole both wider and deeper than the native plant's root system. Add woods loam, peat or humus, or, preferably, the type of soil from which the native is taken. Have leaf mold and loam on hand to fill in or work around the new plant's root system.

In choosing the native plant to transplant, do not attempt to transplant an overly large specimen. Small plants are usually more vigorous. They grow much faster and are easier to handle. It may be necessary to tag the plant in the wild while in leaf or berry to be sure of a positive identification. Young elms, void of foliage, often resemble native redbuds. Not all hollies will produce berries; in selecting yaupon, deciduous holly, and American holly, choose the female plants with berries.

Particularly in the case of large specimens, it may be well to prune the root system of the selected native prior to digging. Prune the plant's lateral roots at least one growing season prior to complete transplanting. Making spade cuts around the plant helps it to adjust to shock prior to transplanting and develop a more intensive root system.

When transplanting, lift the plant with a ball of earth if possible. Wrap the ball with a moist burlap sack or similar material for easy transferal and to prevent disturbance of the root system. Plant the native plant at its normal growth depth immediately after digging. Water well after planting, and mulch over the root areas with leaves, straw, or leaf mold.

Pruning transplanted plants is often difficult for the gardener, but usually is essential for

viability. Cut back the upper branches and end shoots of limbs to compensate for loss of root area and to encourage new branching and foliage growth come spring. Some of the foliage should be stripped or removed from evergreen plants.

Some of the most desirable and abundant native plants that may be transplanted now include:

Dogwood  
Redbud  
River Birch  
Sassafras  
Cherry Laurel  
Red Cedar  
American Holly  
Yaupon  
Native Hawthorn  
French Mulberry  
Native Oaks, Elms, and Maples

Regardless of your choice, be sure you transplant with caution and care -- otherwise, leave it to nature.