

FROM BLAH TO WOW IN 18 MONTHS” CREATING A NATIVE PLANT GARDEN

Louise Goulet, Ph.D. R.P.Bio #168

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My Objectives

- To create a native garden to help **salvage** Garry Oak and woodland **plant diversity at risk**
- To create a native garden that is **beautiful year-round** and can be used as an **educational tool** with neighbours and friends, local government staff, and other people interested in native plants
- To **learn** about native plants in my surrounding environment and to **help** other groups trying to protect these plants [Giving presentations, seeds, plants, etc.]

How this was done over 18 months

- **Nov 2007** – Started **salvaging** and **stockpiling** native plants
- **June 08 - Nov 08** – **Landscaped** several **habitat types** over ~ 1700 sq feet on front/side of our property
- **Summer 2008** - Created a **list of native plant species** appropriate to each habitat type with the help of others
- **Sept 08 – Oct 08** - Complemented salvaged species with **plant trades and purchases** (less than \$1,000 so far)
- **Nov 08 – Feb 09** – **Planted species** in most suitable habitat
- **April 09** - **First blooming**

Salvaging Native Plants

- Participate in Saanich and Native Plant Study Group salvaging programs; also have other access to some private lands.
- Mostly salvaged though winter 2007-2008 on SE facing slopes in Metchosin, and again in summer 2010; in woodlands during summers 2009, 2010 and 2012. Work in progress - Main garden is South facing!
- Salvage **pieces of sod up to 6" thick** when possible, loose soil, carpets of mosses and/or licorice ferns, **bulbs** found below these; few shrubs/trees; nursing log











Stockpiling Salvaged Plants

- **Pieces of sod salvaged during the winter**, with embedded small bulbs, were **weeded** and **stockpiled** on exposed bedrock in backyard; large bulbs and few salvaged shrubs/trees were kept in large pots
- “Winter” sod was **under laid** with landscaping cloth and 2”-3” of sterilized soil; waited till plants bloomed to identify all species and plant in suitable habitat type
- Plant assemblages **salvaged during the summer** were identified and categorized as to habitat type; weeds were removed; sod and individual bulbs/larger plants were **planted immediately** in suitable habitats





Landscaping and Site Preparation

- Going from flat, grassy or paved yard to varied habitats – landscape architect developed a plan based on “wish” list
- Creating various **aspects** (S, N slopes), **light** regimes (sunny, shady, partly shady), **moisture** gradients (very dry to wet) and **soil types** (sandy, very sandy, or not sandy)
- **Habitat types created** included woodland, Garry oak meadow, steep S/N facing slopes, rocky outcrops, shady areas (behind large rocks or trees), stream and pond
- **Sand mixed in Garry meadow soil**, with 6” of sand also placed under top foot of that soil to ensure very good drainage. Rich garden soil was not modified for other habitat types, other than adding as much salvaged soil as possible when planting







Identifying Salvaged Plants and Other Desirable Plants

- I identified what I could (*Plants of Coastal BC* by Pojar and Mackinnon), and hired a plant ecologist to identify the plants I did not know
- With the help of the plant ecologist, I categorized areas in the front and side gardens in **11 specific habitat types**
- The plant ecologist listed the plant **species typical of each habitat type**, to be secured if possible to get a rough representation of plant diversity found in the wild
- **Yellow flag** for unknown species during open garden sessions, to have these plants identified by visitors

Buying/Trading for Selected Species

- **Primary selection** was based on the list of species identified as typical of the habitats available, plus personal wish list
- **Buying most shrubs and small trees** - these do not transplant well from the wild [Oregon Grape, Vine Maple, Gummy Currant]
- **Buying showy/focal species** [Red Columbine, Bearberry, Common Harebell, Pacific Rhododendron, Scouler's Corydalis] to add interest and lengthen flowering season
- **Trading** for species not available commercially, such as native grasses (~10 species) or Two-coloured lupine
- In total, ~200 species (List available on request)













Febr 2009 Planting and Mulching

- Few ornamental/native **trees** were kept and, with **large rocks**, were used to **provide shade**, e.g. English Oak, Red-osier dogwood
- **Bulbs** not imbedded in salvaged sod were **planted first**, at different depth for each species [Garry Oak Gardeners' Handbook]
- Areas with planted bulbs were covered with **dark mulch** to avoid damage when planting sod or potted plants nearby
- All **weeds were removed** from potted plants and pieces of sod, which were “planted” at soil level, besides bulb patches
- Individual plants and “**islands of sod**” were **connected by a “sea of mulch”** for looks, to ensure consistent moisture levels and to keep off weeds





First Blooming
May 2009













Challenges

- **Identifying native plants** and their habitat requirements
- Knowing **weeds and staying on top of them!!!**
- **Cost and availability** of commercially-sold native plants
- **Access** to plants to be salvaged or to be traded
- **Time and physical strength** required to do the work
- **Control** of aggressive or prolific species such as yarrow and seablush, which take off in “empty” rich soil
- **Watering** – keep moist for first two years but no water in August for bulbs to harden; different habitat needs
- **Making garden “beautiful” year-round**, including lengthening blooming period for public appeal
- **Propagation** of wanted species – need information, supplies, place to do it, time and luck
- **Maintenance** (weed, weed, then weed again); keep adding

Watering

- From April to June, the garden was watered twice a week for 15 to 20 minutes each time, via a sprinkling system, if it had not rained
- In July, the garden was watered once a week for 20 to 30 minutes
- During August and September, watering was minimized to ~ 10 minutes a week but the top 4 inches of soil was not allowed to dry out completely. After that, the garden was no longer watered

Plant Propagation

- Seeds of late blooming flowers and of native grasses were collected during the summer months (~25 species). Most of these seeds were given away or traded for other plants or seeds
- Some seeds were also kept to propagate and add to the garden if successfully grown
- For each plant species, half of the seeds were planted outside under plastic cover. The other half were planted in January 2010 and kept inside at about 17 degree Celsius
- So far, about 25 species have germinated, planting not always successful

Pros and Cons of the Sod Approach

Pros

- Very few plants are lost as they come with their own soil and their roots are largely intact
- Brings in microscopic flora and fauna found in soil
- Brings in native plant species you did not even know were there!

Cons

- Also brings weeds!
- Requires strength to salvage, stockpile and replant pounds and pounds of sod!





Other Benefits

- Contributes to **conservation** of native plants in B.C.
- Contributes to **educating** the public with open gardens and presentations
- Meeting **new people**, making new friends
- Learning, **learning**, learning!
- **Keeps you in shape** (if it does not kill you first)
- Sense of **accomplishment**, **joy** and **wonder**

Other ways to help

- Join Garry oak Ecosystems Recovery Team [GOERT], Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society, or Victoria Natural History Society – **learn and keep yourself informed**
- **Participate in restoration projects** - several groups such as Saanich municipality, Friends of Uplands Parks, Government House or Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary are always looking for volunteers to help
- **Participate in salvaging programs** – grow your own plants and contribute these to established restoration programs – invasive plants need to be replaced by native plants
- Support the protection of Garry oak ecosystems by **encouraging municipalities and non-profit groups** such as Nature Conservancy of Canada or Habitat Acquisition Trust to purchase /protect Garry oak areas
- **Write letters to politicians or government agencies** asking them to protect species at risk and the areas where these are found

Thanks

- To my husband and son for their help to salvage sod and plants
- To Pat Johnson and Hans Roemer for helping me get started
- To GOERT for providing so much information
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Questions

louise@mcilvaney.com 2646 Cranmore Road, Victoria

Open Garden 1 PM – 5PM, April 29, 2012

