



Transplanting Native Seedlings

Don White, Tom Davis and Ron Mahoney

An important source of tree seedlings may already be on your forest property. Native seedlings have several advantages:

1. The seedlings are already adapted to the site.
2. No purchasing or transportation costs are required other than your own labor.

3. Storage is not a problem because seedlings can be moved a few at a time over a longer period of time than most nursery stock.

The following suggestions should help in getting the job done:

1. Select seedlings that are 6 to 24 inches tall.
2. Select seedlings from an area that is similar in aspect (north, south, etc.) and elevation to the area where the trees will be planted.
3. Select healthy, single stemmed seedlings with well developed top growth.
4. The best time to transplant them is as soon as the ground thaws in the spring up until 2 weeks before bud break (usually about the last week in April). If seedlings are transplanted after bud break, survival is greatly diminished.
5. One of the best tools for digging up seedlings is a common, garden type, digging fork (Fig. 1). A shovel also works well, but more care must be taken to avoid cutting major roots.
6. Trees may be moved by either (a) shaking all of the loose soil from the roots (called bare rooting); or (b) digging an earth ball with each seedling and then moving it intact to the new planting site.
7. When using the bare root method, the roots must be kept moist at all times. Put the trees in a container, and pack damp moss, straw, wet burlap or wet vermiculite around the roots. Keep them away from wind, light and warm sunshine as much as possible.
8. Dig only the trees in the morning that you can get into the ground during the rest of that same day.



Fig. 1. Use a digging fork like this when transplanting seedlings.

9. Prune the top growth as necessary to get it in balance with the root system (they should be about equal in size). Do a little root pruning to stimulate root development and to get rid of excessively long roots that may be difficult to put into a normal planting hole.
10. If competing vegetation (like heavy sod or dense weed cover) is a problem, scalp an area at least 30 inches square down to mineral soil for each seedling before planting. Chemical herbicides can be used as an alternative to scalping. The addition of a dye will help locate the treated spots at planting time. If herbicides are used, they may have to be sprayed 2 to 3 weeks or longer before the trees are planted. Check the label for directions.
11. Seedlings may be planted with several kinds of tools. The shovel, however, is probably the most frequently used. Planting bars, mattocks, planting augers and post hole diggers may also be used. (See CIS 528, *How To Plant Seedling Trees for Idaho Farms and Forests.*)
12. On some of the drier sites, supplemental irrigation may be needed for 1 or 2 years after planting.

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For more information, contact your local woodland forester at the Idaho Department of Lands office or your University of Idaho Extension forester in Coeur d'Alene or Moscow.

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