



Collecting plant material

A resource for the wildlife rehabilitation sector

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

Cover photo: Coastal upland swamp threatened ecological community. Alex Pike/DCCEEW

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Environment and Heritage

Department of Climate Change,

Energy, the Environment and Water

Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 1300 361 967 (Environment and Heritage enquiries)

TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 1300 361 967

Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 1300 361 967

Email info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Website www.environment.nsw.gov.au

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1. Purpose

This standard operating procedure (SOP) outlines best-practice requirements for collecting plant material from areas that are listed as a threatened ecological community (TEC) under the NSW *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act) or that constitute threatened species habitat. It applies when the material is collected for wildlife rehabilitation.

Compliance with this document is a condition of a biodiversity conservation licence (BCL) to rehabilitate sick, injured and orphaned protected animals, issued under the BC Act.



Photo 1 **Quorrobolong Scribbly Gum threatened ecological community. Mark Cameron/DCCEEW**

2. Scope

This standard operating procedure applies to licensed wildlife rehabilitation providers, specifically persons who are tasked with planning or collecting plant material from threatened ecological communities or threatened species habitat for the purpose of providing food or enrichment to wildlife in care.

This standard operating procedure does not apply to the picking of plants that are protected or threatened, as listed under Schedules 1 and 6 of the BC Act.



Photo 2 Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*). Dan Lunney/DCCEEW

3. Introduction

The provision of a natural diet is an essential component of wildlife rehabilitation, and volunteers are sometimes required to source browse and enclosure furnishings to support the nutritional and enrichment needs of animals in their care. This activity may require wildlife rehabilitators to collect plant material from threatened ecological communities or threatened species habitat.

In New South Wales, it is an offence to pick protected or threatened plants, or to damage the habitat of a threatened species or a threatened ecological community. These activities are only lawful if they fall within a defence under sections 2.8 or 2.9 of the BC Act, or if they are authorised by a biodiversity conservation licence issued by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy and Environment (the department).

Licensed wildlife rehabilitators are authorised under their biodiversity conservation licence to collect plant material and damage habitat within threatened species habitat and threatened ecological communities for wildlife rehabilitation purposes, provided they comply with this standard operating procedure. The picking of threatened or protected plants listed in Schedules 1 and 6 of the BC Act is not authorised.

To minimise the need to collect browse from threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat, wildlife rehabilitation providers are encouraged to explore opportunities for cooperative arrangements that support sustainable practices. This could include but is not limited to:

- collaborating with local councils to identify designated areas, plantation sites or salvaging opportunities, formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding or similar agreement
- establishing plantation opportunities on privately owned land
- planting feed trees
- harvesting from privately owned land with the owner's permission
- networking with other groups, such as Landcare, arborists or horticulturists.

Although this standard operating procedure focuses on collecting plant material from threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat, it is recommended that these procedures be used for all plant collection activities under the licence to support best-practice and sustainable collection across all sites.

4. Procedure

4.1 General requirements and restrictions

You must follow the following requirements and restrictions when collecting plant material from threatened ecological communities or threatened species habitat.

Requirements

- Collection must be limited to the minimum amount of plant material required for animals in care.
- You must obtain landholder permission prior to accessing a site and any conditions of entry must be adhered to, such as collecting techniques, designated collection areas, collection frequency or biosecurity requirements.

Restrictions

- Collection of whole plants is not permitted.
- Plant material collected during this activity is not permitted to be transferred to any other individual, organisation, licence or authority for any other purpose other than for wildlife rehabilitation.
- Plant material must not be collected from land reserved under either:
 - the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NPW Act)
 - an Area of Outstanding Biodiversity Value.
- Collection of threatened or protected species as listed in Schedules 1 and 6 of the BC Act is not permitted.

Wildlife rehabilitation providers must ensure that authorised members are adequately trained in plant collection techniques, including plant identification, biosecurity, work health and safety (WHS) and sustainable collection practices. These skills are addressed below.

Collection is also permissible where it is required to comply with a relevant code of practice. For example, the *Code of practice for injured, sick and orphaned koalas* states that all adult koalas being prepared for release must be fed leaves from eucalyptus species sourced from the area in which they will be released (7.1.16). Meeting this requirement will involve collecting foliage from within the habitat of a threatened species (that is, the koala) and often from within a TEC.

5. Identification

Accurate identification of plants is essential. It ensures the most appropriate species are selected for wildlife in care, supports compliance with licence conditions (including this SOP), and enables correct procedures to be applied when working within threatened species habitat or TECs.

Before collecting any plant material from these areas, you must identify their location or likely locations. Once known, you can establish if collection of the proposed plant materials should occur, or if you need to adjust your plans.

There are several useful apps and online tools for plant identification, including:

- [PlantNET](#)
- [EUCLID](#).

To check which plant community types and plant species occur in your area before collecting plant material, use the [Trees Near Me app](#).

Threatened plant and animal species are listed in Schedule 1 of the BC Act, TECs are listed in Schedule 2 and protected plants are listed in Schedule 6 of the Act.

Search by region to identify threatened species habitat and threatened ecological communities in your local area using the [Threatened biodiversity profile search tool](#).



Photo 3 **Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest threatened ecological community.**
Mark Cameron/DCCEEW

6. Biosecurity

Collecting plant material can spread pathogens and invasive plant species that harm biodiversity in New South Wales. Biosecurity protocols reduce this risk and are essential when working in threatened species habitat and threatened ecological communities.

Basic biosecurity and hygiene protocols must include:

- ensuring all cutting tools are cleaned and disinfected (for example, 70% methylated spirits to 30% water)
- removing soil, debris and plant material from clothing, footwear and equipment
- where possible, avoiding taking your vehicle off-road
- avoiding collecting plant material from trees showing signs of disease
- using sustainable collection techniques to avoid increasing disease susceptibility of individual plants
- disposing of any unused or waste material responsibly.

Understanding site biosecurity risks, such as invasive species or diseases like myrtle rust and *Phytophthora*, helps you adjust collection plans. For example, avoid highly impacted areas or visit high-risk sites last to reduce the chance of spreading risks between locations.

Limit collection during weather conditions that increase the risk of spreading pathogens or invasive plant species.

Contact Local Land Services or your local council for advice on biosecurity risks in your area.



Photo 4 **Close up of myrtle rust, a serious fungal disease that affects plants in the Myrtaceae family. Michael Jarman/DCCEEW**

7. Work health and safety

Work health and safety is an important aspect of plant collection and must be incorporated into your planning activities. The table below lists some of the common hazards that may be encountered and what control measures you can put in place to eliminate or reduce these hazards.

Table 1 Common work health and safety hazards and their control measures

Potential hazard	Control
Uneven surfaces, trips and falls	- Assess your surroundings and avoid areas where there is potential for a fall to cause significant injury. - Wear sturdy footwear. - Do not work near cliff lines. - Choose an alternative route or site if terrain is too steep or unsteady.
Cuts, grazes, eye injury, etc. from vegetation, rocks and tools	- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as long sleeves, gloves and eye protection. - Carry a first aid kit. - Familiarise yourself with tools and equipment before use and use sharp, clean tools that are appropriate for the task.
Bites or stings from snakes, spiders, insects or plants	- Stay alert for stinging or biting insects, animals or plants. - Wear long sleeves and pants, enclosed shoes and a hat. - Wear gloves and gaiters as appropriate. Tuck shirt into your pants and your pants into your socks. - Apply insect repellent that contains diethyltoluamide (DEET), picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE). - First aid kit to include snake bandage. - Ensure mobile coverage to contact emergency services or carry a personal locator beacon (PLB). - Ticks can cause disease, allergic reactions and Mammalian Meat Allergy. Check your clothing and skin often. Do not irritate, squeeze or remove live ticks with tweezers. Treat adult ticks immediately with an ether-containing spray, such as Tick-off Medi Freeze spray.
Exposure to extremes of temperature or weather	- Use appropriate sun protection such as hats, long sleeves, sunglasses, sunscreen and work in the shade as much as possible. - Carry adequate drinking water and consume regularly. - Check weather forecast prior to commencing collection of plants.

Potential hazard	Control
	• In colder weather, ensure you have enough layers on you, or available, for example, thermals or waterproof jacket. • If weather appears to be deteriorating re-check conditions and adjust plans if needed.
Injury from manual handling or branch collection	• Wear a hard hat if collecting above head height. • Employ safe lifting techniques for example, bending at the knees and carrying smaller amounts at one time, avoid twisting. • Where possible, have 2 people or use wheelbarrows, carts, garbage bins or bags to assist with carrying. • Take regular breaks.

8. Sustainable collection

Sustainable collection of plant material is the responsibility of all collectors. By applying a 'do no harm' approach and minimising your impact, you help ensure that plant populations remain healthy and continue to support wildlife.

Unsustainable harvesting practices can lead to a range of negative impacts, including:

- introduction or spread of weeds and disease
- death of a plant or population of plant species
- reduced quality of soil nutrients and recycling
- reduced availability of shelter, habitat and food for wildlife
- reduced plant fecundity through the removal of reproductive material such as flowers and seeds
- reduced amount of available plant material for future harvesting
- reduced structural integrity of the plant creating human safety hazards, for example, falling limbs or branches and
- damage to professional relationships and reputation of the sector.

Collection methods must support the long-term health and viability of individual plants and populations. Collecting material from a plant causes injury and stress and using the correct tools and techniques is one of the simplest and most effective ways to minimise these impacts and support the long-term health and viability of the plant. For example, larger branches should be undercut, also known as the 3-cut method (see 8.1, following), to preserve the structural integrity of the plant.

Tree-topping, whereby you reduce the height of a tree by cutting down large branches from the top of the tree, is not an acceptable method of plant collection.

Collectors should inspect each plant and consider how removing foliage could benefit the plant. Where appropriate, selecting branches that contribute to crown thinning can improve airflow and light penetration, and increase the overall health of the plant.

Additionally, your tools need to be clean, sharp and appropriate for the size of the branches you are collecting. Check the manufacturer's recommended cutting diameter so you know which tools are appropriate for your needs.

When collecting plant material, it's essential to use practices that protect the long-term health and resilience of individual plants. This includes:

- avoiding collecting from young or small trees (less than 3 years old)
- never ripping or tearing branches away
- always cutting as close to the branch collar as possible without cutting into it
- selecting robust and healthy plants, avoid harvesting from already declining plants such as those experiencing heat stress, disease or dieback

- avoiding collecting in extreme weather conditions and consider the time of year or recent weather events (for example, fire, flood or drought)
- not removing more than 20% of material from a mature plant in any 12-month period
- not overharvesting from one plant, as this can reduce the plant's capacity to recover and result in the death of the plant
- cutting with the angle of the branch collar to reduce water accumulation and susceptibility to disease.

8.1 The 3-cut method

The 3-cut method for cutting a tree is an accepted standard practice used by arborists. It involves pre-cutting or undercutting a branch to avoid splitting or tearing of the branch collar or trunk. This technique minimises injury to the tree and allows for quicker healing. Follow these 3 steps:

- Step 1: Cut the underside of the branch approximately 30 cm up from the branch collar and one-third of the way through the branch.
- Step 2: A little further up from the undercut, cut from the top of the branch all the way through. This will cut the branch off and leave a stub remaining.
- Step 3: The last cut should be as close to the branch collar as possible and follow its natural angle. Do not cut into the branch collar. Cut all the way through to remove the stub.



Figure 1 Example of the three-cut method for cutting branches. Hannah Ryan/DCCEEW

8.2 Minimising impact to non-target species

The collection of plant material must be done in a way that minimises damage to non-target plant and animal species. For example:

- do not collect if wildlife is present in the plant, or visibly using it as habitat or shelter (for example, active hollows or nests)
- minimise impact on soil, roots and understorey by stopping harvested branches from dropping on the ground or damaging other branches or plants after being cut, and restoring any disturbed soil or vegetation before you leave
- ensure you remove rubbish, equipment and all cut plant material from the area – leftover plant material may increase fuel load and must be removed from the site.

Once collected, avoid dragging the harvested material along the ground to avoid contamination.

To prevent spoilage, plant material should be laid on a clean sheet for transporting short distances or in buckets of water if travelling long distances or visiting multiple sites. Spraying leaves before transport can help with keeping them adequately hydrated.

9. Definitions

Area of Outstanding Biodiversity Value: Refers to land that contains irreplaceable biodiversity values of state, national or global significance declared by the NSW Minister for the Environment under the BC Act.

Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (BC Act): Legislation for protecting and managing biodiversity, including threatened species, ecological communities and areas of outstanding biodiversity value in New South Wales. Wildlife rehabilitation is a licensed activity under the BC Act.

Biodiversity conservation licence (BCL): An approval granted by the Environment Agency Head to a person to conduct an act that would otherwise be an offence under the BC Act.

Branch collar: The area where tissue from the trunk and base of a branch overlap. It contains specialised cells that help seal off wounds if the branch is removed.

Browse: Native vegetation collected for feeding wildlife undergoing rehabilitation.

Code(s) of Practice for wildlife rehabilitators: Documents published by the department that set standards for the care and housing of protected animals that are incapable of fending for themselves in their natural habitat.

Damage: Damage habitat includes damage caused by:

- removing or relocating any part of the habitat
- activities that prevent the continued use of the habitat by animals.

Habitat: Includes:

- an area periodically or occasionally occupied by a species or ecological community
- the biotic and abiotic components of an area.

Landholder: A person who is the owner of land or who, whether by reason of ownership or otherwise, is in lawful occupation or possession, or has lawful management or control, of land.

Myrtle rust: Refers to a fungal disease caused by the fungus *Austropuccinia psidii*. It affects plants in the Myrtaceae family by attacking new growth. It is listed as key threatening process under the BC Act.

Phytophthora: Refers to a fungal disease caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi* that causes plants and trees to rot and die. It is listed as a key threatening process under the BC Act and once it is established it cannot be eradicated. Also called Phytophthora dieback, root rot or cinnamon fungus.

Pick: Pick a plant includes gather, take, cut, remove from the ground, destroy, poison, crush or injure the plant or any part of the plant.

Plant: Any plant, whether vascular or non-vascular and in any stage of biological development, and includes fungi and lichens, but does not include marine vegetation.

Protected plant: A plant of a species listed or referred to in Schedule 6 of the BC Act.

Threatened ecological community (TECs): A critically endangered ecological community, an endangered ecological community or a vulnerable ecological community listed in Schedule 2 of the BC Act.

Threatened species: A critically endangered species, an endangered species or a vulnerable species listed in Schedule 1 of the BC Act.

Wildlife rehabilitation: Wildlife rehabilitation means the rescue and/or temporary care of an injured, sick or orphaned protected animal with the aim of successfully releasing it back into its natural habitat.

Wildlife rehabilitation provider: A person or organisation licensed under the BC Act to do wildlife rehabilitation.

10. More information

- [Area of Outstanding Biodiversity Value](#)
- [Arrive Clean, Leave Clean](#)
- [Australian Centre for Disease Control: Preventing Tick Bites](#)
- [Code of practice for injured, sick and orphaned koalas](#)
- [Euclid](#)
- [Hygiene guidelines: Protocols to protect priority biodiversity areas in New South Wales from *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, myrtle rust, amphibian chytrid fungus and invasive plants](#)
- [Koala tree use in NSW](#)
- [Infection of plants by *Phytophthora cinnamom* profile](#)
- [Let's make it zero for our wildlife heroes](#)
- [Landcare](#)
- [Myrtle rust in Australia](#)
- [Myrtle rust videos | Australian Network for Plant Conservation](#)
- [*National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*](#)
- [NSW Rehabilitation of Protected Animals Policy](#)
- [NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Standards resource hub](#)
- [PlantNet](#)
- [Threatened biodiversity profile search tool](#)
- [Trees near me](#)

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Commonwealth of Australia (2015) *Arrive clean, leave clean*, Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water website, accessed 22 April 2026.

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International Society of Arboriculture (2021) *Pruning mature trees* [PDF, .516 MB], Trees are good website, accessed 22 April 2026.

Standards Australia (2007) *AS 4373–2007 Pruning of amenity trees*, catalogue, Standards Australia website, accessed 22 April 2026.

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Appendix: Checklists to support sustainable collection of plant material for wildlife rehabilitation

Table 2 **Before collection**

Action	Tick
Have you looked at options for harvesting plant material in locations that are not within a threatened ecological community (TEC) or threatened species habitat?	
Have you identified your site and its conservation status (i.e. is it a TEC, privately owned land, Crown land)?	
Have you obtained permission from the landholder (where applicable)?	
Have you considered the dietary requirements of the wildlife in your care including amount, component of plant (e.g. seeds, flowers, leaves) or seasonal preferences of the species?	
Is your equipment clean and sharp?	

Table 3 **During collection**

Action	Tick
Have you got the appropriate PPE and conducted a site risk assessment to identify hazards in accordance with your organisation's relevant policies and procedures?	
Have you identified the species of plant you intend to harvest from?	
Have you identified non-target species that could be impacted by your activities, and what you can do to minimise these impacts?	
Have you inspected the tree for signs of wildlife, nesting, disease or other factors that would prevent you from harvesting from it?	
Have you selected appropriate equipment for the size of the branch?	
Have you determined the appropriate harvesting method for the species, size and longevity of the tree?	
Have you restored as much of your disturbance as possible e.g. replacing displaced soil or understorey growth?	
Before leaving the site, have you removed as much plant material and soil as possible from your shoes, clothes and equipment?	

Table 4 **After collection**

Action	Tick
Have you ensured that you have taken all harvested plant material (even waste product not intended for wildlife in care), rubbish and equipment with you before you leave?	
Is all plant material transported and stored in a way that minimises damage and contamination to the harvested material?	
Has all equipment and clothing been cleaned and disinfected?	