

“I’m not sure what I want to write about this week,” I said. My husband said, “Tell them how we’ve been moving rhodies, small trees and azaleas around.” Good idea. It’s the perfect time of year to relocate woody plants or even put in newly purchased plants.

Depending upon the size of the plant you’ll need the following tools and/or equipment: a strong husband (or several strong gardeners); a very strong, wonderful brother-in-law (ours is six-foot-five John Aitchison); an inexpensive plastic tarp (costs about two or three dollars); several shovels (or spades as some folks call them), a wheelbarrow, a truck with a bumper hitch (one of those balls that you can hook things up to), and some very strong rope.

We waited to move the plants until after we had several weeks of rain and cool weather off and on. That way all the plants were relatively dormant and had moist roots so they wouldn’t suffer shock when moved. We also watered the plants in after moving them. Luckily for us we relocated plants on Saturday and Sunday, watered them in, and then for a week it would rain. Great timing. This autumn has had perfect rainfall so you might want to consider moving some of your own plants around.

Pat and I were able to move most of the smaller rhodies (under four feet tall and about three to four feet wide). The bigger ones John and Pat moved. We first dug around the plants (a circle as wide as the plant). Most of the roots were no deeper than ten inches, but quite dense and heavy. Sometimes to loosen the roots from the earth we would slide the shovel under the plant and I’d push down on the handle of the shovel to push the roots up from the ground and Pat would slide his shovel under the root ball and loosen it more. We continued this process working our way around the plant.

We found the strongest trunk areas (usually there is a main stem with several sturdy branching trunks). We each grabbed hold of a trunk and lifted the plant up. Go carefully so you don’t accidentally break off the trunk. You may have to repeat these steps to make sure the plant is released from its hold on the ground. Depending on the size of the plant you can now either lift it onto the tarp or slide it onto the tarp. Next we took the ends of the tarp and slid the rhodie to its new planting spot. We also lifted lighter weight plants into our wheelbarrow for transporting to their new location.

Two rhodies were multi-branched, very wide and quite large. Pat and John dug around the root balls using the above method and then slid a rope around and underneath the remainder of the root ball that they couldn’t reach (or loosen). Next they hooked the rope to the hitch. Carefully with one driving and the other watching the rootball and shouting directions they used the truck to pull the rope under the rootball completely loosening it. Then they tied the rope around the root ball (not onto or around the multi-trunks). The last thing they did was use the truck to pull the rhodie out of it’s former home and slide it to its new planting area.

We used the truck and rope sliding method to move two huge bushy rhodies about twenty feet closer to the road giving us an instant screen from neighborhood traffic. Along this property line we’d removed an inherited fir tree hedge that blocked our neighbor’s view. After tree removal we bermed up the area and began moving plants to create a total planting area about forty by sixty feet. Half of the new area is planted with the rhodies we’ve moved. The rest of the area we’ll fill in with new plantings. (Definitely not rhodies.)

We hope you won’t have to move too many of your plants around, but you’ll know how if you have to. We carefully researched the mature size of the small rhodies we planted six and seven years ago. However the moral of this story is that everything planted here grows to gargantuan proportions – especially rhodies. Choose your plants wisely.

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