

Gathering Mosses -- Responsible Land Stewardship

By Annie Martin, Owner, Mountain Moss Enterprises

Please do not gather mosses from public areas such as our local/state/national parks or forests. These recreational spaces are set aside for everybody to enjoy. Preserve our natural treasures for future generations. To put it bluntly, do not steal mosses from protected places. Issues of illegal moss harvesting are of concern to US Forest Service officials, environmentalists, bryologists, and me. How about you? As a responsible land steward, I believe it's time for a discussion about the issues of rescuing, gathering or stealing mosses. There are definite distinctions between these actions. Yet, often moss rescues and the process of gathering mosses are generalized---perceived as irresponsible thievery. So that other folks can appreciate mosses in natural settings, please do not take mosses from protected forests and parks. Alternatively, I encourage you to take advantage of rescue opportunities from places where mosses will be destroyed. Save mosses; don't steal them!



Rescuing Mosses -- *Removing moss species from places where they are intended for inevitable destruction*

There are many opportunities to RESCUE mosses that WILL get destroyed where new residential/commercial development occurs impacting acres and acres of land. When the bulldozers arrive, it is usually too late. However, keep

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your eyes open for signs of imminent destruction. "For sale" signs (particularly sites designated for commercial development or new residential communities) signal moss rescue possibilities. People contact me regularly. Once, a guy let me know that his driveway was being reworked and offered for me to come get mosses before they are destroyed. It is advisable to get permission from the landowner first. On many occasions, upon noticing a new roof about to happen, I have brazenly asked permission to rescue mosses before the roofers started. Just ask... usually the answer will be YES. You might as well take all you can get because mosses are on death row anyhow. Please contact Mossin' Annie if you know of any potential rescues.

Harvesting or Gathering Mosses-- *Taking small sections of mosses in a responsible manner from your own property (or friend's place) leaving enough mosses in the original locations for the colonies to recover*

When mosses taken from places that won't necessarily be destroyed, the process is considered harvesting. In this case, take only portions. Leave plenty of mosses to sustain regrowth at the site. If you are retrieving mosses from your own property (or someone else's land), use this conservation method of relocating certain colonies to desired garden spots, yet leaving enough mosses for original retrieval sites to rejuvenate. Seek out additional opportunities by networking with private property owners who have extensive woodlands. Don't confuse "legitimate harvesting" with "illegal harvesting."

Stealing Mosses--- *Seems pretty obvious, stealing is taking mosses without permission and without regard to ethical standards. Illegal harvesting is a major concern in our protected forests and parks.*

If you don't have permission, then you are stealing. Illegal moss harvesting from our protected forests and parks certainly falls into this category. Regretfully, unethical harvesting to support the floriculture industry is common practice in North America and other places around the world. If you buy products sold as "sheet, mood, cushion or reindeer moss", in all likelihood, you will be supporting questionable methods that negatively impact our natural resources. The magnitude of illegitimate harvesting that exists is absolutely appalling.

Buying Mosses--- *Purchasing from legitimate sources*

If local mosses are not plentiful in your area or you do not want to have to go to this much toil and trouble, there are sources where mosses are available for purchase. Avoid dried mosses sold in a plastic bag by huge floral distributors in garden centers or big box stores. Intended for floral or craft purposes rather than landscaping, these mosses may have been subjected to green dyes or even spray-painted to achieve a consistent green color. Regretfully, illegal harvesting to support the floriculture industry is common. If you purchase dried mosses sold in a bag or box called "sheet, mood, or cushion moss," inadvertently, you play a role in the domino effect of this complex issue of irresponsible harvesting and corresponding

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consumer demand. Many moss distributors function as middle men between moss harvesters and consumers. Some moss suppliers stage mosses for sale rather than growing them. Legitimate and ethical distributors of mosses should:

- Adhere to USDA regulations by obtaining proper licensing and certification
- Avoid questionable harvesting practices
- Cultivate live mosses for landscapes (not crafts or floral purposes)