

## WACD PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

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### Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*)

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#### Distribution

Red Alder occurs primarily west of the Cascades in Washington at elevations from sea level to 2,400 feet. It can also be found growing in pockets along the east slope of the Cascades.

#### Growth Habit

Red Alder is a tall fast growing (although short lived) deciduous tree. It can grow over 80 feet tall in approximately 20 years. The growth habit of its canopy is variable, largely depending upon exposure. The canopies of trees growing in the open can exceed 40 feet, whereas the canopies can be quite narrow when grown in dense woodland.

#### Adaptability

Red Alder grows in a variety sites that range from sunny to shady, and wet to dry, from a moist bottom-land, to a dry rocky slope. It grows best in areas with moist soils and lots of sun.

#### Comments

- Red Alder is an excellent conservation species. It establishes well on open, disturbed sites. It is often a naturally occurring pioneering species on clear cuts, burns, landslides and other disturbances.
- Once established, it is fast to grow above competing vegetation and provide shade for the surrounding habitat. Red Alder is a 'soil building' species.
- It is nitrogen fixing, meaning it is able to convert nitrogen from the atmosphere into a form available for plants in the soil.
- It also adds a considerable amount of organic matter to the soil through heavy leaf litter in the fall.
- Red Alder has significant commercial value in the Pacific Northwest. Its wood is valued for furniture and cabinet building, veneer, fuel, pulp, and sawdust for nursery soils.

