

Fire Recovery Workshop

How to Successfully Plant Natives

First and foremost, planting at the appropriate time (in the fall through early spring) is key to plant survival. This allows the root system to become established during the cool, rainy season, well before the harsh summer months.

It is in our nature to buy bigger plants because we want the end result right now, however it is better to plant natives smaller because they will not develop a damaged root system while in the container and the roots will grow faster in their new home.

There is some discussion on whether to use a planting mix, mulch, or neither when planting natives. Some feel that using mulch will interfere with the new plant becoming well established. Our thoughts are that because they are nursery grown, they are spoiled with proper care and to set them out in the world with poor soil conditions from the start will set them back. Once they outgrow the medium they are planted in, they will be stronger and better able to continue there on their own.

Dig a hole at least twice as wide and half again as deep as the planting container size.

Pre-irrigate the planting hole by filling it with water and allowing it to drain.

Remove the plant from its container slowly. Most natives will not be a standard nursery-grown-sized plant. They tend to be smaller and not as established. Place your hand on the soil with your fingers spread around the base of the plant. Turn the container upside down, and with a slight tap on the bottom, the plant should slide out. Keeping both hands on the rootball, place it in the hole.

Set the plant crown one inch higher than the soil level so that moisture drains away from the stem.

It is advisable to install a deep water sleeve (3" x 18" perforated drain pipe) beside the new plant to aid in establishing a deeper root system.

Incorporate a well composed mulch, and mix it half and half with soil removed from the hole. Potting mixes containing synthetic material such as perlite, vermiculite, and supplemental nutrients should be avoided. These materials do nothing to improve soil conditions over time, and do not allow for a smooth transition into the native soil. Amending soil with composted organic material is recommended for planting natives. As it breaks down, the humus it contains binds with soil particles to actually improve drainage conditions over time.

Back fill the hole with pre-mixed soil and mulch. For plants larger than 5 gallons, back fill the hole with water at the same time as you back fill with soil to eliminate air pockets. Tamp backfill in gently.

Because nursery grown plants are prone to being chewed by the native animal life, it is advisable to provide a temporary wire enclosure until the plant sends out new growth, at which time you can remove the enclosure.

Information from Unique Garden Center
56637 29 Palms Hwy
Yucca Valley, CA 92284
(760) 365-1511



Fire Recovery Workshop

How to Irrigate Native Plants

California native plants are well adapted to our climate and can tolerate extended periods of heat and drought. Many natives experience a drought-induced dormancy in the summer. They simply maintain their size and shape, add very little or no new growth, and sometimes even lose a few leaves toward the end of the season. This is how they “tough it out.” For natives to display such resilience during our long, hot, rainless season, they need to be well-established with extensive, deep root systems. Branches which shade the root zone, leaf litter, and mulch protect the topsoil from excessive drying. To have well established plants in the summer, you must plant in the fall or spring. Summer is the most difficult season to install native plants in the landscape. It is best to wait until fall if at all possible. If you must handle new plantings during the hot season, here are a few tips:

- Pre-irrigate the planting hole so that there is adequate moisture around the root system.

- Plant at such a depth that the crown or base of the plant is slightly above the soil level, so that water drains away from the stem. Planting too deeply will cause rot.

- Apply 2-4 inches of organic mulch (no manure) around the root zone of each plant (keep mulch and excess soil away from the crown).

- Water by hose, drip or low volume sprinkler in early morning. Avoid watering during the heat of the day since this may cause root rot.

- Water only when the soil in the root zone (6-8” down) begins to dry out. Water enough to thoroughly soak the soil around the plant - deep enough to reach the bottom of the planting hole.

- Avoid watering frequently with small amounts of water (high frequency, short duration).

- Apply water at a low frequency with long durations to thoroughly soak the soil and allow vital oxygen to re-enter the root zone. Remember, mulch will preserve soil moisture between waterings.

- For best results, avoid using overhead irrigation for long durations (especially in the sun) because the prolonged leaf wetting during the dry season can promote disease.

Most native species are difficult to plant in the heat. The best approach is to postpone the planting until fall. If you have to plant in summer, consider providing temporary shade to these sensitive types. Use burlap or other mesh cloth supported by stakes on the sunny side of the plant to create a cooler micro-environment. Don't drape the shade fabric over the plant, this will create even hotter conditions. Don't forget, everything starts getting easier around October 15.

Stay cool!

Information from the Tree of Life Nursery website
[www.treeoflifenuresery.com]
33201 Ortega Hwy.
P.O. Box 635
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693
(949) 728-0685