

LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION PLANTING GUIDE

Note: If you are not planting for your client right away, keep plants in their nursery pots in a lightly shaded area and water as needed. Plants in pots are not drought tolerant and need regular water to stay alive (typically once every 2-3 days in summer)

PREPARATION

LAWN/WEEDS: Remove all unwanted plants including weeds prior to planting. If removing a lawn, water soil afterward to allow any remaining grasses and weeds to re-sprout so that these can be removed before planting (see lawn removal guide).

SOIL: Do not till the soil unless severely compacted, as tilling brings more weed seeds to the surface and promotes germination. Do not add any soil amendments or fertilizers unless soil is in such poor condition that it is unworkable. Ideally, have the soil tested by a reputable lab if you have any concerns. If you do need to add some organic matter, use a light application of well-aged, low nutrient compost. Some organic matter won't hurt and can help alleviate issues related to compaction and moisture-repellant soil. Natives generally prefer nutrient-poor soils.

PLANTING

SOAK: Water your plants in their pots thoroughly the day before planting. This encourages vigorous growth and reduces transplant shock.

HOLE: Dig a hole that is about twice as wide as the container and approximately ½" less in depth.

WATER THE HOLE: Fill the hole with water and let it drain to ensure sufficient moisture for the new plant. If soil is very dry, repeat this step 2-3 times.

PLANT: Remove plant from container, disturbing the roots as little as possible. If root bound, it is okay to *gently* separate the roots and gently rough up the edges of the root ball.

Note: Take special care when handling *Carpenteria* (bush anemone), *Dendromecon* (bush poppy), *Romneya* (Matilija poppy), *Fremontodendron* (flannel bush), *Arctostaphylos* (manzanita), and *Trichostema* (woolly blue curls). Their roots are especially fragile and do not respond well to disturbance.

Set the plant into the hole. The top of the root ball should be slightly (1/4"-1/2") higher than the surrounding soil to allow for settling. Position the plant and return the native soil to the hole, removing any rocks, twigs or debris that may reduce the root to soil contact after planting. Pack gently but firmly.

Optional: If hand watering, you can create a berm around the plant. For a one-gallon plant, it should be approximately two feet in diameter.

Note: If you use drip or overhead irrigation, creating a berm is not recommended.

MULCH: Spread 3"-4" of mulch between new transplants, leaving at least 2"-3" clear around the stem or crown of each plant. Mulch can increase the likelihood of plant survival, as it moderates soil temperatures and helps retain soil moisture. Consider also using a "nurse rock" – a softball size or larger rock placed on the southwest side of the crown of the plant – to shelter the crown and roots from heat, help the soil retain moisture, and function as a natural drip system as your plant gets established.

WATER: After planting, water the area well. If hand watering, fill the berm area around the plant and let it drain. Repeat 2-3 times to remove air pockets and ensure wet soil around and below the root ball.

ESTABLISHMENT & WATERING

The establishment period for most natives varies from one to three years. Fast-growing plants (such as sages, coral bells and grasses) establish more quickly than most woody shrubs and trees. Until plants are established, they'll need frequent attention and regular watering. Though you may not see rapid growth above ground, the root system is developing. It is best to remember this saying: "The first year they sleep, the second year they creep, the third year they leap."

How often you water will depend on the container size, the type of plant, your soil, sun exposure and the weather. Sandy soils drain well but dry out quickly, requiring more frequent irrigation. Heavy (clay) soils retain moisture longer than sandy soils, meaning 1) you will need to water less often, and 2) it will be easier for you to overwater your plants by watering them before they need it. Plants in full sun will need watering more often than those in shady spots. Soil dries out more rapidly when it's warm or windy than during cool, still or overcast weather.

Watering natives correctly is essential. Improper watering is the primary reason for plant loss. Most native plants prefer deep infrequent soaks, rather than frequent shallow soaks. Though roots should not be allowed to dry completely, some dryness is good. At least twice a week, check the root ball of new plants by using a soil probe (use caution as this can damage many roots!) or your finger 3"-4" below the surface. If the soil is moist, do not water. If dry, water slowly until the root area and surrounding soil are completely wetted.

To encourage deep rooting and minimize disease, always water thoroughly and deeply – up to five gallons per plant.

If you have clay soil or are planting on a slope, check soil moisture again after watering to be sure that the water has soaked in. If runoff is a problem, several short applications on the same day may be needed for adequate saturation.

Tip: Place plants on automatic watering only *after* determining water needs. When weather changes, change the schedule to accommodate plant needs. During the winter months, set the controller to manual but continue to monitor moisture levels.

FALL/WINTER PLANTING

Fall and winter are the ideal times for planting California natives. Cool temperatures and shorter days reduce transplant stress, and seasonal rains reduce the need to water. It is still very important that new plantings be watered deeply and regularly. During dry winters and/or after a light rain, supplemental irrigation is crucial for both new and established plants.

SPRING/SUMMER PLANTING

Planting in spring and summer can present challenges, especially for inland gardeners. If you live near the coast, you have few worries – just remember to water, as needed. If you are inland, give special attention to plant selection and watering. Riparian and desert plants should transplant just fine, as they are accustomed to summer moisture. Grasses and shade-loving natives are also easy to plant during our warm months.

Consider NOT planting these until fall: *Ceanothus* (California lilac), *Arctostaphylos* (manzanita), *Penstemon* (beard tongue), *Fremontodendron* (flannel bush), *Dendromecon* (bush poppy), *Romneya* (Matilija poppy), *Iris* (iris) and *Trichostema* (woolly blue curls). These natives are especially prone to disease when watered in summer.

Whichever plants you choose; you will need to water regularly the first summer to get them established.

Note: The water requirements shown below and described on your plant labels are for established plants.

Most new plantings will require additional irrigation during the first 1-3 years.

Low: Every 14-21 days or less **Moderate:** Every 10-14 days **High:** Every 3-7 days or more