

Native Plant Care

What to expect from your plants: Your plants are just coming out of their winter dormancy this month. Some plant species will have green leaves earlier than others, but don't be surprised if they have no leaves at all! It's perfectly natural if they still seem dormant. If they aren't already, they should begin showing new green growth soon after planting, and planting should happen as soon as possible!

Don't wait to long to plant! Planting now in the spring is best, while the weather is cool. It will be important to water any of your plants that already have new green growth well when planting, and do not let them dry out after planting for several weeks. These are native plants so cool to cold temps above freezing are okay! Planting as soon as possible will guard against heat stress from disturbing the roots in warmer weather, and ensure they survive and thrive!

Carolina Native Nursery Native Plant Care:

Native Plant Planting Tips

One of the most important aspects of successful landscape gardening is planting correctly. Extra time and effort at this stage will pay dividends later on as native perennials or shrubs grow and mature. The use of quality plants, proper pruning, adequate water, fertilization and lime seldom compensate for poor planting.

Planting Procedure

A modern trend in landscaping is to plant shrubs in large beds. When this design concept is followed, it's best to prepare the entire bed versus digging individual holes. In many areas the soils are poorly drained so we recommend planting trees or shrubs slightly above grade in raised beds or mounds. Finish with 3 – 4 inches of an organic mulch on the surface to conserve moisture, discourage turf and increase growth and survival.

- When planting container-grown plants, be sure to disturb the root zone area of the plant, especially if it's "pot bound". Breakup the ball gently with fingers and thumbs. Again, don't plant too deep! Because container plants are usually grown in high organic soil mixes, we recommend adding organic matter to the backfill. Be sure to blend this into the backfill, again using as much native soil as possible.

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- When planting bare-root plants, be certain to prepare a planting area wide enough so roots can be straightened out and separated. Prune off roots which are damaged or ones which may later girdle the plant. Work the backfill around the roots to ensure that no air pockets remain. Firm the soil lightly and water thoroughly. Form a saucer depression around the plant to facilitate later watering. Position the plants so that the highest roots are about one inch below the soil surface and no deeper.

Fertilizing

If lime is needed to raise the pH of the soil, it should be mixed in at planting time. This is also the perfect time to add phosphorus and potassium if needed. A soil test will tell you the amounts you need. Soil test kits are available at some local garden centers. In lieu of soil testing results, add a half cup of lime and fourth cup of 5-10-10 or equivalent per bushel of backfill soil. Don't add lime if planting acid-loving plants. Don't place fertilizer into the planting hole in concentrated amounts as it can seriously injure the roots. Do your first surface fertilizations 6 to 9 months after planting, but never in the summer. Use a complete organic fertilizer with a maximum of 10% nitrogen at a annual rate of 3 to 4 cups per 100 square feet of ground. Split this amount into 2 half applications in spring and early fall.

Watering Your Native Plants

Water your plant thoroughly once at home and let the water soak through the soil. If you cannot plant it within a few days of receiving it, you can leave the plant outside in partial sun and monitor its moisture.

Water your plant well after putting it in the ground, and make sure it stays well-watered for the first year to let it get established. The best time to water your garden is early in the morning, before the sun is high. If you live in a humid climate, watering at this time lets the sun evaporate the standing water from the foliage of your plants, preventing mildew. And in all climates, you will lose less water to evaporation by the sun's rays if you apply it early in the day.

1. The best method of watering shrubs is with a soaker type hose or to use the end of the hose to ensure that the roots of the plants receive a thorough watering. It is best to keep water off of the foliage because it can cause plant diseases.
2. Buy a moisture meter. This inexpensive device will allow you to check the moisture not only in your shrub beds, but also in your lawn, house plants, and vegetable garden. A moisture level of 50% or greater is recommended.

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3. **Watering After Planting.** Water must be applied during the first growing season. Wet the soil thoroughly enough to soak the entire root system at least once every 5 days during drought conditions and possibly less often under milder temperatures. Rainfall will not substitute for direct application of water to the rootball, however, it may allow you to lengthen the watering interval a couple of days.

Pruning Your Native Plants

1. The key to pruning your trees and shrubs is identifying the type of plant it is, and the appropriate time of year to prune it. We suggest calling us if you have any questions or concerns.
2. On some shrubs, after flowering occurs the bud for next season is formed. Therefore, these plants should be pruned immediately after flowering. Azaleas, dogwoods, forsythia, hydrangea, viburnum, wisteria, climbing roses and rhododendron fall into this group.
3. Shrubs that bloom on the current year's growth should be pruned during the dormant period in winter or early spring.
4. It is always best to trim out any dead or diseased wood, suckers and any areas of the plant that are misshapen and tangled.