

# GENERAL PLANTING TIPS FOR DESERT NATIVES



## WHEN TO PLANT

The best time to plant perennials, shrubs and trees is during the fall and early winter. This gives plants time to establish a healthy root system and build energy for the growing season. Annuals are best sown or planted from October to late November.

## SOIL

Most native plants perform better without fertilizer or actually respond negatively to fertilizer. Desert native plants are adapted to soils that are low in nutrients, so adding extra nitrogen in the form of compost or fertilizer is not necessary. In addition, nitrogen promotes foliar growth, and may actually delay root establishment. Mulching with inorganic materials like rocks or gravel is recommended instead organic materials like bark. Mulching in general can be helpful in retaining moisture, reducing erosion, and controlling weeds.

## PLANTING TECHNIQUE

It's all about the hole you dig and the way you handle the live plant. The hole should have irregular surface walls and be slightly larger than the root ball of the plant. Measure the height of the plant's root ball and make the hole no deeper than the root ball. When the plant is placed in the hole, the spot where the stem meets the soil should be about ½ inch above the surrounding grade. Before planting, fill the hole with water prior to planting to check the drainage. Once the water has drained through, gently slide the plant out of the container, hold the root ball and gently place it in the hole.

Start by replacing the loosened backfill you removed while digging the hole. Gently tamp it down so the plant is stable. You can add more water as you fill the hole or afterwards. Avoid burying the collar of the plant. Build a berm with the extra soil around the outer dimensions of the hole to retain water.

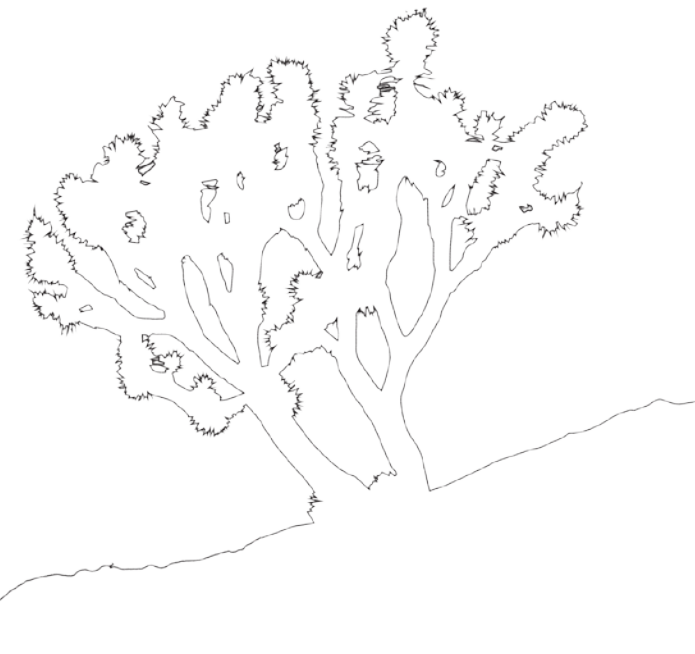
Water the root ball and the planting area thoroughly after planting. Remove any nursery stakes, if present. If necessary, re-stake the plant loosely. Avoid pruning at this time. A "nurse rock" should be placed on the south side of the plant to maintain soil moisture, but keep it a few inches away from the base of the plant.

**Caging small plants with hardware cloth is recommended to protect them from hungry wildlife.**

## WATERING

Many native plants can survive with minimal supplemental water once they are established (after 2-5 years). New plants, however, need to be watered more frequently than established plants. Always water deeply. Light, frequent irrigations create shallow, weak root systems. Deep, less frequent irrigations encourage deep strong root systems that can tolerate longer periods of drought.

As plants mature, their root systems expand. Mature root systems are typically 1½ - 4 times wider than the plant canopy. If hand watering using a berm, increase the diameter of the basin as the plant matures. If using drip irrigation, move emitters away from the trunk of the plant and add more emitters at and beyond the dripline.



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## BASIC DESERT WATERING SCHEDULE FOR NEW PLANTS

- Weeks 1-2: Water every 1-2 days in summer and 3-4 days fall through spring
- Weeks 3-4: Water every 3-4 days in summer and 6-7 days fall through spring
- Weeks 5-6: Water every 4-6 days in summer and 7-10 days fall through spring
- Weeks 7-8: Water every 7 days in summer and every 10-14 days fall through spring
- After week 8: Gradually extend the time between irrigation until the plants are established (2-5 years)

After the first summer there is rarely a need to irrigate more than once a week. Once established after the first couple of years, plants with the exception of annuals can be watered once every 1-3 weeks in summer and 2-4 weeks fall through spring.

*\*Keep in mind this is just a suggestive guide. One must always pay attention to the plant and the weather.*

## STAKING & PRUNING

When possible, remove stakes at the time of planting. If stakes are needed, make sure they are loose and allow the plant to sway without falling over. This will allow the trunk of the plant to become stronger in response to the wind.

Never allow ties to become tight around the trunk. Remove or adjust stakes after 1 year.

Pruning will be dependent of the individual plant species. It is best to prune trees while they are still young, but wait until after the first year. Leave growth on the lower trunk for up to two years to allow the tree to grow strong.

## TYPICAL SIGNS OF PLANT STRESS

### Underwatering:

- Soil in the lower portion of the root ball is dry
- Older leaves turn yellow/brown and drop off
- Leaves are wilted or drooping
- Leaves curl upward or inward
- Stems or branches die back

### Overwatering:

- Soil is constantly damp, especially around the base of the main stem
- Leaves turn light green, yellow or become dull
- Young shoots are wilted or drooping
- Leaves are green yet brittle, or wilted but not dropping
- Algae and/or mushrooms are on or around plants

## WHAT IF I CAN'T PLANT MY NEW PLANT RIGHT AWAY?

We recommend that you plant your new plant in the ground because it will be easier to maintain. Yet sometimes that is not always possible right away. If you will keep your plant in its container, please place it somewhere that gets plenty of indirect sunlight, but not direct full sun. You will need to pay attention to the soil moisture and water when the soil becomes dry. During this phase, it is advantageous to use a cage to protect the plant from hungry animals.

