

Guideline for Planting and Watering your California Natives

-adapted from CNPS materials for Riverside-San Bernardino Chapter of CNPS

Planting

Below are suggestions for planting a drought tolerant California native plant. When and how you plant natives can make all the difference in the plant's survival. Be sure to check on the specific plant needs or requirements as for sun/shade, water and soil type. For example, place any riparian or wetland plants in regularly irrigated or naturally moist areas you might have, and drought tolerant ones in drier areas on your property.

When to Plant – For areas below 3,000 feet in elevation, the ideal time to plant California natives is late fall through late winter. Planting in spring may be preferable at higher elevations or around water features.

How to Plant – When putting your plants in the ground:

- Moisten the area to be planted a day or two before you dig to plant. Dig a hole in the moist soil (like a wrung-out sponge) that is twice as wide and as deep as the container. If you're planting on a bank or slope, create a flat area around the hole with a shallow berm on downslope side to help retain water.
- Fill the hole with water and let it soak through completely before you plant. Also soak the plant.
- Rough up the sides and bottom of the hole so the roots will be able to dig in as they grow.
- If roots are tight in the pot (root bound), loosen the moist roots at base of rootball. Otherwise, do not rough up the roots when you take them out. Leave them as undisturbed as possible.
- For woody plants and those with a distinct above-ground stem, the base of the stem just above the roots should end up about one-half inch above the surrounding soil. This prevents rotting of a stem that is buried. Spread moist, loose soil gently into the gap around the plant and tamp it down with your hands to remove air pockets. Fill with soil and smooth out the remaining dirt. Make sure all roots are covered with soil. For the initial soaking, create a berm to outside of rootball.

Planting into a hole that's twice as wide and as deep as the container (Photos by Ernesto Alvarado).



Mulching and Finishing Touches

Although native plants don't need fertilizer, many may benefit from mulch. The two basic types are organic (bark, leaves, etc.) and inorganic (rocks, gravel etc.) spread around the plant away from the base of the stem.

- Chaparral, woodland and forest plants prefer organic mulch, preferably with some rocks as well. Plants from seashore, desert and rocky outcrops prefer inorganic mulch. You can check calscape.org for more information about which types of mulch different plants prefer.
- Do not cover the rootball of the plant with mulch. Mulch too close to the stem can result in rotting of the stem.
- Rocks placed just outside the rootball are always helpful because they provide cooling for the roots.