



Sage Advice from the Roundhouse....

Summer Water

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 and leaf litter or 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. We encourage our customers 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 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 or at night as this may cause branch die-back or 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.

Some species are especially difficult to handle in the summer. *Fremontodendron*, *Penstemon*, *Romneya*, *Ribes*, *Dendromecon*, *Rhamnus*, and *Trichostema* all do better with cool season installation. At inland sites *Heteromeles*, *Rhus*, *Arctostaphylos*, some *Ceanothus* and most chaparral 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!

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