

Planting Perennials & Annuals

Plants should be planted as soon as possible after you have purchased them. If this is not possible, plants can be kept for a few days, but keep them in a shaded location, protected from wind, and keep well watered.

Container grown plant material can be planted any time, as long as the soil is free of frost.

Before you start, make sure the soil in the pot is moist. Planting a dry root ball makes it very difficult to provide sufficient water.

Preparing Your Soil

Thorough soil preparation prior to planting is essential to long term success and will spare you future aggravation and hard work. This is the only opportunity you will have to work the soil completely. Once plants are established, drainage and aeration cannot be substantially corrected without removing the plants.

Most perennials prefer a weed-free, loamy, well-drained soil. Dig in 3 cm (1 in) of composted manure (or other organic matter such as leaf mould, vegetable compost, or peat moss) to a depth of at least 12 cm (5 in) of soil. Adding bone meal or granular fertilizer at this point will help successful plant establishment. Apply according to package directions.

Dry, sandy soils can be improved by adding plenty of organic matter. Dig the area to a depth of at least 20 cm (8 in) with a fork or spade.

Heavy clay soils need to be opened by adding plenty of organic matter, along with perlite, coarse sand or grit. A 12-15 cm (5 – 6 in) layer of compost (or other organic matter) and 5 cm (2 in) of grit will greatly improve clay soils for the long haul.

To save yourself years of aggravation, the planting site should be free of weeds. This can be done by hand, chemical herbicides, or by smothering. This is done by covering the weeds with black plastic, or many layers of newspaper weighed down with bricks for a period of 2-3 months.

Planting

With a spade or shovel, dig planting holes slightly larger than the container. Gently remove the pot and tease apart the outside roots if the plant appears root bound. When positioned in the ground, firm soil around the roots. Make sure the root ball surface is at or just slightly below the garden soil surface. After planting, water thoroughly to moisten the roots.

Mulch

There are many benefits to using organic mulches. They help keep the soil cool and moist during hot summer weather, they prevent weeds from becoming established, and as they breakdown they add to the organic matter in the soil. Mulch should be no thicker than 5-7 cm (2-3 in) and it should not cover the crown of the plants (this can cause rot).

Watering

Newly planted plants need to be watered thoroughly immediately after planting.

Moisture levels will need to be monitored during the first growing season. You will know it's time to water when the soil 1 inch below the surface (don't count the mulch) is

dry to the touch. Be sure to check before you water as over-watering is just as lethal to a plant as drought. Over-watered appear wilted, but do not perk up after watering. Long, deep watering helps plants develop deep roots which will help them through periods of drought once established. A light sprinkling of water promotes shallow roots. Established plantings may require supplemental water through dry periods. Water early in the day to allow foliage to dry before dark and help prevent disease outbreaks. Try to avoid watering plant's foliage; water at the base of the plant.

Fertilizing

Adding fertilizer while doing soil preparation is not a bad idea. It's an especially nice time to add a slow-release granular fertilizer, or bone meal, as you can work it into the soil where the roots need it. Alternatively you can water in a transplant fertilizer after planting. Always refer to the manufacturer's instructions.

Established gardens may benefit from yearly fertilizing in the spring. Stop fertilizing perennials by mid-summer to allow them to harden off properly in preparation for winter.