

Planting Guide

The biggest mistake beginning gardeners make is using lousy or too-thin soil. Before planting anything in your yard, prepare your garden beds by digging to loosen the soil and adding organic material! This prep work can save you untold disappointment and, perhaps more than any other factor, the costs involved in replacing dead and diseased plants. Remember you only get to plant it once so make sure your prep work will ensure a successful one.

If you're working with a brand-new, you can stake it and get it ready the autumn before you plan to plant. This act gives the soil and the amendments you've added time to settle and meld. It also means you have less work to do next spring.

If an autumn start isn't possible or practical, go ahead and prepare the ground — but don't start too early. If the ground is still cold or soggy, digging in the soil can compact it and harm its structure. How do you tell whether it's ready to be worked in? Grab a handful and squeeze — it should fall apart, not form a mud ball.

Follow these steps when preparing your soil:

1. Dig deep.

Most plants are content with 6 to 8 inches of good ground for their roots to grow in.

2. Fill 'er up.

Add lots and lots of organic matter! Try using compost, dehydrated cow manure, shredded leaves, well-rotted horse manure, or a mixture. If your yard happens to be blessed with fertile soil, adding organic matter is less crucial, but most soils can stand the improvement. Mix it with the native soil, 50-50, or even more liberally. Generous applications of Sheep Pellets and Blood and Bone are also useful. If working with clay soils add Gypsum, this will break down the clay chemically.

Maybe your area's soil is notoriously acidic, or very sandy, or quite obviously lousy for plant growth. The good news is that organic matter can be like a magic bullet in that it helps improve whatever you add it to. You have to replenish the organic matter at the start of every growing season or maybe even more often. (If the soil stubbornly resists improvement, resort to setting raised beds atop it and filling these bottomless boxes with excellent, organically rich soil.)

Planting

The plant should be placed in the hole so that the soil level, after planting, is the same as the level in the pot (or in the case of 'bare rooted' plants the soil level on the stem).



Some plants may appear a little 'root bound' - i.e. they have a mass of roots especially around the base (see left). This is not normally a problem, but it is a good idea to gently tease out the roots around the base.

Backfill around the roots with planting mix, mixed with soil from the hole. Incorporate with this a handful or two of 'Osmocote' or 'Acticote' long-term, slow release fertiliser. Both products are safe, will not burn the roots and will give your plants a perfect start in life.

No other feeding is required in the first year.

Firm the soil around the roots to ensure a good contact (roots will not grow through air pockets) and to keep the plant stable.

After Planting Care

Watering: It will be some weeks or even months before your new plants have roots penetrating well out into the soil. Therefore plants will need watering regularly for the first few weeks and through the first summer. From September through to April new plants should be watered 3 times a week.

Mulching: This involves covering the soil surface around your plants with a layer of compost or straw 20-40mm deep, preferably laid prior to summer. This reduces water loss from the soil and keeps roots cool in the hot weather. Mulching also prevents weeds

Pests & Diseases: Like people, strong healthy plants are much more resistant to attack so keep plants well-watered and fed and you shouldn't have too many issues. Stay vigilant and at the first sign of infestation see this handy on line guide for treatment options:

<http://www.tuigarden.co.nz/garden-problem-solver>