



Home Grounds Fact Sheet

Container Grown Plants: *After-Care in the Landscape*

Plants that have been grown in containers require **direct** and careful **irrigation** after they have been planted, and until they become well established in the surrounding soil. This, of course, is in addition to thorough watering of the plant while it is still in the container. Prior to installing in the ground, the plant roots must be "teased-out". (This is easily done using a small hand-held cultivator).

The after-care required by plants originally grown in containers is in addition to the care normally given to all new transplants. Plants which are dug from the ground have the advantage that many of their roots are cut, thereby stimulating new root growth which hastens their eventual reestablishment. The container grown plant's roots by contrast, are not disturbed by their removal from the container before planting, giving them no immediate incentive to send roots into the surrounding soil. Most fatalities of container-grown plants result from the plant drying out and this can happen even when the surrounding soil is still quite moist.

The length of the critical period, or the rate that it takes a plant to become established, will depend on several conditions. These can include drainage, soil type and water supply. More water is required by plants with fine, shallow roots or by those with abundant soft new growth and/or flowers. It is natural that plants growing in sandy soil will require more frequent watering than those in clayey soils. Plants set in average soils with good bottom drainage should be provided with 1" - 2" of water once a week throughout the first growing season. This rule of thumb must be modified according to the temperature and the type of soil. A 2"-3" layer of mulch (wood chips, pine bark, etc.) will help hold in moisture.

Wherever possible, steps should be taken to shorten the critical establishment time. First prepare a **large** planting hole (several times the width of the existing root ball). This is to provide a zone around the plant for easier transition of the roots into their new home.

If the existing soil is a heavy clay or overly sandy, it should be augmented with 1/3 to 1/2 by volume of compost. This will help loosen up the heavy clay soil or improve the water retention ability of sandy soil. It is important to thoroughly incorporate the organic matter. Before planting, be sure to correct any **drainage fault** that may lie beneath your plant. Almost all plants need good **drainage**.

The next step is to loosen or cut some of the roots before planting. By helping to extend some of the roots out into the planting hole, you begin to break the root density or the encircling root habit. For fine-rooted plants, gently loosening the outside layer of roots should be sufficient. When roots are coarse, loosen them or cut them away. A short handled hand cultivator works well. While undertaking these steps, **do not allow the roots to dry**. When backfilling the hole with existing or amended soil, create a circular ridge or dam to form a water basin. Be sure it's located so that **water** that collects **will go directly into the root ball** rather than into the surrounding prepared soil.

Where container-grown plants are planted in late summer or fall, assume that they will go into the winter without being thoroughly established. Provide a barrier or some other form of winter protection (sun and wind break) to the plant. For more information on winter protection, see Home Grounds Fact Sheet D-1-18, Winterizing Your Garden.

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