



## Fertilizing New Plantings

Regular water is much more important than fertilizer. Most plants you get from us are already fertilized for the current year so no additional fertilizer is needed. For subsequent years, we recommend slow release fertilizers such as Nutri-Rich, Sup'r Green or Osmocote for everything except acid loving plants (such as rhodies, azaleas, camellias, blueberries). Apply these fertilizers to the top of the soil and water it in during the growing season. They will not burn plants and one application lasts all summer. For acid loving plants, use an acidic fertilizer such as rhododendron/camellia fertilizer.

General purpose chemical fertilizers will also work, but be sure to follow the directions on the package. They can burn if they are over applied. Spray on chemical fertilizers like Miracle Grow give a quick response, but don't last as long as slow release fertilizers so they may need to be re-applied periodically.

Fertilizer is best applied in the spring (after the last frost) so that it is available to the plant when it begins new growth for the year. Some heavily blooming plants (e.g., roses, fuchsias and hibiscus) may be fertilized again during the growing season. Stop fertilizing plants in August to allow them to harden off and prepare for winter.

## Conclusion

Forget the "green thumb" myth. Successful gardeners have dirty, slightly moist thumbs! Careful planting and watering will give you a beautiful garden.

## Protect Your Investment!

Unlike manufactured articles, plants are living things that require some easy care to do well. Because we have no control over what happens to them after they leave our care, we can offer no guarantee. Attention to a few simple planting and watering instructions will make your new plants flourish. Here's what you need to do.

**Prepare the Soil** - Whether you have clay, sandy, rocky or loamy soil, amend the soil with compost, bark or potting soil. A perennial may require four or five shovels of organic amending material. A larger shrub or tree, may require a full wheelbarrow. Soil amendments absorb water and help *sandy/rocky/loamy* soil hold water longer. Amending *clay* soil improves drainage and makes it easier for roots to get out into the soil. Amendments should be *mixed in* with native soil rather than simply replacing it. Mixing in the organic matter may result in a small mound. For trees and shrubs, put the amendment mostly around the plant rather than under it. Organic material under the plant will decay and the plant may sink.

For plants purchased in **containers** - loosen the outside roots when you plant to help the roots get out into the soil.

For **bare root plants**, cut off any broken roots and soak the remaining roots in water for an hour if they appear dry. The small hairy roots absorb moisture and nutrients. The thick roots are pipes to get the water and nutrients to the base of the plant and provide wind stability.

For **balled and burlapped** plants, cut the twine and burlap around the trunk and spread them back in the hole to be covered with soil. Otherwise, the plant can strangle itself when the trunk grows and the twine doesn't. There is no need to remove the burlap from the rest of the root ball. The roots will go right through it and removing it may damage roots that have already done so. The burlap holds the root ball together and minimizes root damage.

### Planting depth:

- Plant **container plants** at the same depth as they were in their containers.
- **Bare root trees** are often grafted just above the roots. Plant bare root trees with the root stock graft at least one inch above the soil. If there is no graft near the soil level, plant the top roots about an inch below the soil level.
- For **balled and burlapped** plants, plant at the same level as they grew before.

### Water New Plantings Regularly

Regardless of the weather, water in your planting well when you first plant it. Soak it thoroughly to get good root to soil contact. For trees and larger shrubs, use some of the displaced soil from the hole to make a dam around the plant. This will help to hold water around the root ball.

Newly planted plants require more water than established plantings for a couple of years. For the first two summers, water your new plantings deeply about once a week during the whole summer until late September or Early October. Perhaps twice that often if you have gravelly or sandy soil. When

watering new plantings, give them *lots of water*. Frequent shallow watering causes shallow roots which makes plants less drought tolerant. Weekly, slow, deep watering penetrates the soil allowing roots to grow deeper and plants to become more drought tolerant.

Plants in containers are especially susceptible to water stress. On a hot day, plants can draw all the water out of a container very quickly because they do not have a big root system. In hot, windy weather you may need to water container plants every one or two days.

Do not trust irrigation or drip systems to provide enough water for new plantings. Water them deeply with a hose. Do not stop watering new plantings because they look okay. They look okay because they're getting regular water! One day without enough water can cause problems and may even kill them. Do not stop watering new plants because they get a little wilted. Deciduous plants in particular may wilt or go dormant as a defense against drying out. Although, that is not good, plants can often be saved with continued watering.

The occasional summer rains in the Northwest are not a reason to stop your regular watering schedule. They almost never penetrate to the root zone. When the weather cools in fall, reduce frequency of watering to help plants harden off.

**Applying mulch:** 3-4" of organic matter (compost, bark, wood chips, etc.) will help with water retention, slow evaporation and enrich the soil.