



Native Plant Tips: The First Year

Thank you for buying a California native plant. Use these tips during the first year to get your natives off to a good start.

#1: Where to plant

It's important to know the requirements of your plant for sun, water, soil and drainage. Look up your plant on Calscape.com. Remember your plant will grow, so choose your site with mature size in mind. Be sure to plant your new purchase as soon as possible. Roots dry out quickly in small pots. If you can't plant within the next few days, be sure to keep the roots moist. *Natives can be grown in containers, too (see below).

#2: Prepare the soil

Prepare the soil by digging a hole slightly shallower than the depth of soil in the pot and twice the width. Leave plenty of space for roots to spread out. Natives generally get the nutrients they need from the soil. Fertilizers and amendments are typically not needed.

#3 Initial planting and watering

Water the hole and the root ball of the plant well. Gently loosen the roots and place the plant into the hole so that the crown of the plant (where the stem meets the roots) is sitting just above the level of soil. Fill in around the plant with the soil you removed from the hole. Gently tamp the soil down and water thoroughly. You want a little well forming a wide moat around the plant, surrounded by a berm or donut of soil to help hold the water in when watering to encourage roots to grow outward. Be sure when the moat is filled the water is below the crown of the plant.

#4: Mulch

Apply 2-4 inches of mulch, leaving 3 to 4 inches of clear space around the crown (where the stem meets the roots).

#5: Ongoing water

Keep the plant moist, not wet for the first year (2 years for trees). Deep water when the top 2-3 inches of topsoil is dry. You can check with your finger. Check your plant frequently until you get a sense of how often the soil dries out. Newly planted natives need water regularly until they have a chance to grow deep roots. Once the plants are established they will need less water. Water infrequently, but deeply, up to 5 gallons per plant. Water slowly enough so that the water has a chance to soak in.

#6: Don't do too much.

California native plants developed in nature, and generally do not require much maintenance. Leave seedheads, leaves, and dry stalks for the birds and habitat.



Native Plant Tips: Growing in Containers

Native plants can thrive in containers with the right care and attention given to soil selection, irrigation, and fertilizer!

Pot Size: When choosing a pot, use a container that is a few inches larger in diameter than the original container size. If you are planting several plants in one container, choose a pot large enough to contain the plants plus a margin of several inches from the plants to the edge of the container. Repot to a larger size container when the plant's roots have filled the pot.

Pot Material: Nearly any solid-walled container with a drainage hole can be used as a pot. Materials such as unglazed terra cotta or wood are more porous and require more frequent irrigation than plastic or glazed ceramic pots. For sunny locations, avoid dark-colored or metal pots that can get hot and damage roots. You can insulate pots, especially black plastic, from direct sun by double potting: place a smaller pot inside a larger container and fill the space with a coarse, porous material like gravel, perlite, or lava rock.

Soil: In general, native plants prefer a well draining potting soil that provides a good amount of air circulation around the roots. A cactus mix potting soil that contains perlite, a light mineral that aids drainage, works well. Over time, the soil will break down and need refreshing or replanting. Plan on refreshing the soil or repotting every year or two.

Water: In containers, most native plants prefer fairly regular watering, depending on the weather, type of plant, and soil texture. Using a porous mix allows for regular watering during warm months, while reducing the risk of rot due to overly wet soil. Be sure to observe your plant: if the soil appears to be staying wet longer than normal or is pooling and not draining normally, make sure that the drain holes are not clogged with roots or compacted soil.

Fertilizer and Supplements: Though most natives are fine without fertilizer, natives in containers should be fed once or twice per year at the start of the growing season. This is because there is limited space for the soil to hold nutrients and the regular watering that container plants need will flush nutrients out of the soil. Dilute fertilizer to ¼ strength or use ¼ the amount specified on the product label. There are a number of fertilizer choices: organic, non-organic, slow release, conventional, and liquid. Micronutrients such as iron, zinc, manganese, and copper can be depleted quickly in containers: you may consider supplementing with a broad spectrum mineral supplement.

Mulch: Mulching helps to retain soil moisture, which is important in containers that can dry out more quickly than soil in the ground. Wood mulch, pebbles, or rocks can be used and dress up your container plantings. Avoid direct contact of the top dressing with the stem (crown) of the plant.