

Planting native seedlings



Often native seedlings can be slow to adjust after being transplanted from a container. To increase their success follow this advice before planting.

Site preparation

Site preparation and planning are the most important aspects of any successful planting.

Weed control should begin a year or two before planting and can be done by grazing, slashing and spot spraying. Weed control before planting will reduce weed competition during the first growing season, reduce the need for later weed control and give seedlings the best chance of growing quickly.

It is also recommended to control potential grazing pressure from rabbits and kangaroos. Rabbit bait should be laid at appropriate times to ensure density of populations are reduced before planting.

Large wire, mesh 'cages' may need to be installed to protect particularly tasty species from kangaroo grazing.

Permits are available for properties with high kangaroo populations. Another option for kangaroos is the use of pheromones.

Planting out tubestock

Timing

The best planting time depends on how much follow-up watering and maintenance is planned. Early winter or spring is usually best in higher rainfall areas. Mid-autumn to early winter is best in lower rainfall areas such as the Adelaide Plains. This gives plants the best chance to establish using natural rainfall.

Herbicide

Herbicide is best applied two to three weeks prior to planting to create a 'spot' for the plants. Patterns include 1.5 m wide strips or 1 m wide spot sprays for small groups of plants. Leaving untreated areas between the strips or spots reduces the possibility of wind and water erosion. Slashing or mowing can control weed growth whilst plants are establishing.

Watering

Ensure plants have been well watered prior to planting. Alternatively, soak the soil around the root ball by placing the container in a bucket of water until it stops bubbling



(don't submerge the entire plant). This helps get rid of air around the roots and makes it easier to get the plant out of the container.

The hole

The most common mistake when transplanting from a container is digging the hole too shallow or narrow. The ideal hole is twice as wide as the container and a bit deeper, depending on the size of water well you want to create. If the ground is too dry, fill the hole with water and allow it to soak into the ground. Plants growing in sandy soils will benefit from water crystals to retain moisture around the roots.

Removing the plant from its container

Remove the plant from the container being careful not to disturb the roots more than necessary. The soil and root ball should come away easily. If not tap the pot lightly with a small garden tool. It is a good idea to scrape the top layer (up to 1 cm) of the tube mix into the hole to bury weed seeds which are sometimes in nursery tubes.

Supporting the base of the exposed seedling with one hand, use your other hand to hold the roots and soil together as you place it in the hole. If the roots are coiled tight tease them out gently from the sides and base with your fingers.

Backfilling

Backfill the hole with soil and tamp firmly without compacting. A good water well is vital for ease and speed of watering and holding rain near the plant. Ensure the bottom of the plant/top of the roots is a few centimetres below the natural ground and form a low wall around the well edge if there is a slope. This will help you achieve a water well with a capacity of 2 litres. Water new plants immediately. A good soaking reduces evaporation, settles the soil, reduces air pockets and encourages roots to become stronger, by growing deeper as they look for moisture.

Watering

During the first summer you will need to water regularly (every few weeks depending on evaporation, mulch protection and weed control). During summer, if watering is required, soak weekly. Removing weeds will also reduce competition for water.

Over watering native seedlings can result in "soft" plants, with poorly developed roots, which are likely to perish during drier spells. To prevent this from happening, infrequent deep watering is more desirable. This allows water to percolate deep into the soil profile to escape evaporation and be available to the plant. It also encourages deep roots with a healthier plant able to survive droughts.

Watering should be done in the cool mornings or evenings to reduce loss through evaporation. In the longer term, the plants should survive on rainfall alone.



Backfilling a hole increases a plant's chance of success

Mulching

Adding a layer of mulch to your plantings can reduce evaporative water loss by over 70 per cent. A good layer of mulch will reduce weed growth and improve the biodiversity of soil invertebrates that maintain soil structure and productivity. It will also reduce stress to plants by keeping soil temperatures down. Mulch can include stones, gravel, fibre mats and organics such as tree chippings. Don't put organic mulch against the base of the plant as this can cause rotting of the plant stem.

Tree guards

Tree guards are very effective when installed correctly. They provide UV protection from the harsh summer, conserve moisture, guard from wind and drifting sand, create a barrier from rabbits and fight weeds when used in conjunction with weed mats and mulch. There are many forms depending on finances and preferences. For simple, yet detailed information on installing tree guards visit the WA Bassendean Preservation Group website: www.bpginc.info/. Look under 'More info/Useful documents'.

Natural Resources Centres

For further information on planting native seedlings contact your local centre.

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