

Gardening in Drought Conditions

“To Plant or Not to Plant”

Excerpts from

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Whenever we have hot dry weather there is always the questions of whether gardeners should postpone all planting. It is true that droughty weather makes planting success more difficult. Evaporation is high, root growth is limited, water costs are higher in the summer, and it is often unpleasant to be out in the landscape in such weather. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to plant in hot weather and you can be successful if you are conscientious.

Establishing a lawn during drought restrictions with a three-week plan: A key to its success for sod is to have good sod-to-soil contact. Remove all lumps and rocks, within two inches of compost, rake it smooth and roll the sod after it is laid.

WEEK 1: ½ inch a day. Preferably ¼ inch in the morning and ¼ inch in the evening

WEEK 2: ½ inch every day. Preferably at one time to begin to develop a deeper root system

WEEK 3: ½ inch every two to three days. Depending on the particular site conditions, grass type, and installation

The three-week plan also works for Bermuda seed. Use the same soil preparation plan and apply the seed to the surface.

If for some reason after the three-week variance period, your new lawn has dry spots, you may not sprinkle except during your designated day, but you can hand-water or use a soaker hose to address any dry spots.

If you must plant a tree or shrub in a dry hot period consider the following advice:

- Dig the hole as deep as the root ball and two or three times as wide. There is no advantage in adding compost or other organic material directly to the planting hole.
- Place the tree or shrub in the hole and fill the hole with the native soil. Press the soil into the hole with your foot and then run the hose at a slow rate until it fills the planting hole and overruns the root ball.

- Let the soaked soil settle and then top off the hole with the remaining soil. The pressing of the soil with your foot and the soaking is especially important in droughty weather because large air pockets must be eliminated to reduce drying of the root area.
- Mulch over the root system on the surface of the ground with three - six inches of mulch. The larger the plant, the more mulch depth. Use shredded brush, leaves, bark, pecan shells or whatever organic material is available. The mulch should not touch the tree trunk or shrub stems. Form a donut around the trunk with the mulch.
- Water the plant with at least five gallons when the soil dries to one inch under the mulch or anytime you note wilting in the morning.
- The water needs to be applied directly to the base of the plant. Most of our drought-tolerant plants are slow to become established, especially in hot weather so roots are concentrated in the original root ball throughout the first summer.
- Do not apply root starter or any fertilizer at planting. Use a slow release lawn fertilizer next spring. Fertilizers are salty and a newly planted shrub or tree cannot utilize a large shot of salty nutrients when it is stressed by hot weather.