



Newsletter

August 2017

“The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies.”

A VISUAL GUIDE to planting

Plants have many ways to cope with drought. Mediterranean plants have two rooting strategies to make the most of available water. They send deep roots as far as possible into the ground to search for moisture. At the same time, they also develop a network of finer roots near the surface to take advantage of any rainfall.

When a plant has been growing in a pot, it has a limited root system. Our job as gardeners is to encourage root development. We do that through correct soil preparation, planting techniques and watering practices. Soil preparation will be the subject of a future newsletter. For now, keep in mind that good drainage is critical. Break up any compacted soil and incorporate plenty of organic matter.

Winter is the time to plant in the Western Cape. Temperatures are moderate and the soil is moist after the first rains. New introductions can become established without heat and drought stress. This increases their chances of surviving summer. Our newsletter this month is a visual guide to best practices for planting in dry gardens.

This month, our article shows you the best planting technique for dry gardens.



Prepare a hole

The soil should be loose enough to dig a hole without much effort. Stand on a board to prevent soil compaction. This is especially important if you have heavy soil. Aim for a hole that is a little larger than the root ball of the plant. Break up the soil in the bottom if necessary.



Plant and firm in

Take the plant out of its container. If the roots are very matted, untangle them, but be gentle. Position the plant at the same depth as it was growing in the container. Most plants do not appreciate deeper planting. Fill in the hole. Firm the soil using the back of a rake or your hands.



Watering basin

The watering basin is key to helping your plant through its first summer. Watering basins need to hold 20 to 30 liters of water at a time. For average soils, this means a basin diameter of 60 centimeters and a depth of 20 centimeters. If plants are close together, build basins around groups instead of individuals.



Build the basin

Construct the wall of the basin by raking soil into a mound. Firm the soil using your hands and a small rake or spade. This is a good opportunity to reconnect with your inner child. You can also involve actual kids. Who knows, it may awaken their love of gardening.



The end result

The basin will remain in place for the first year after planting. During this time, the plant will develop a strong root system. It should not require any supplementary watering from its second summer onward. At that stage you can level the basin and apply mulch.



When to water

Water the plant immediately after planting, even if the soil is moist. This settles the soil around the roots and removes air pockets. During the first summer, water at most once every two weeks. Run 20 to 30 liters of water into the basin. This will moisten the soil below the root ball and encourage the plant to develop deep roots. Plants should then be able to survive future summers without watering.



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