

# Planting and Caring for your SOUTH WEST NATIVE PLANTS

Photo: M. Belgrove

Growing plants that *originate in your area* increases their *survival rate* and at the same time reduces the *water and feeding needs* compared to exotic plants or natives from different Australian regions. South West Native Plants have adapted over eons to cope with our harsh conditions and poor soils, however, it does not mean that a little help from you will not be of benefit.

Knowing what to do to best help your native plant can be confusing especially as most literature is written for the eastern states and tropics. Following the steps below will increase your success and give you a garden to be proud of.

**Selecting your plant.** Firstly, your plant should **look healthy**, not woody or spindly but with vigorous new growth. **Check the roots**, why not, you're paying for them. If they are too small and don't adequately hold the potting mix, or the pot is so full of roots there's no potting mix left, it's probably not a good buy, so don't.

**Taking your plant home.** Try to buy your plants when you know you will be **going directly home**. Plants, dogs and children tend to wilt if left in the car for even a short period. When you get them home, give them a good water and if possible add a seaweed solution to the water.

**Preparing to plant.** Our soils are particularly poor, especially if you are in a new housing estate as these soils have usually been stripped and laid bare and have sand from unknown sources brought in. Sandy soils have no capacity to hold water or nutrients and any liquids you apply will either run off the top and not soak through or just rush through and soon be out of the reach of your plants roots. This stage of caring for your plant is **the** most important. You must add something to hold the water and nutrient within reach for your plant. Organic matter, of any description, is a good place to start, however, it is important to remember that if you are putting organic matter beneath the soil it **must be well composted**. Fresh material will draw nitrogen away from your plant in order to break down and release it back and this could be too late for your plant.

**Planting.** So, **aged** compost, manures etc are the way to go. Mix these in with your existing soil at a minimum of 10%. You can also add a slow release native or organic fertiliser to the mix e.g. blood and bone. Plant your new plant into the mix. If you have followed the advice above there should be no need to tease the roots. **DO NOT** put any of your untreated soil over this mix as it could prevent water penetration. Where possible you should always mulch your garden with free draining organic mulch. Water in thoroughly and apply seaweed solution. Ask about our **new planting mix** to improve your success.

**Caring for your South West Native Plant.** **Do you need to prune/trim your plants?** Yes, if you want bushy healthy plants an annual prune will do them the world of good. In fact, if you are brave you should give your new plant a light trim when you plant it!

**Do you need to fertilise your plants?** Yes, if you want healthy strong plants. If you have followed the planting guide above you will only need to do this in autumn and spring.

**What is the best sort of fertiliser?** This is the same as for planting; composts, manures and slow release fertiliser. Spread under the drip zone and re-apply mulch.

**Do you need to water?** Yes, no matter how hardy the plants they need water to survive. The amount of water depends on the amount of care you took when you planted it. If you increased your soils capacity to hold water around the root system by adding organic matter you will need to water less. Try and water once a week during the warm/hot months for the first year of the plants life, then, if you add more organic matter and a good mulch at least once a year your plant may only need to be watered during hot months. They will survive, however, if you want them to survive without stress and look better, be kind, give them a drink when the soil feels dry and hot. Just one last thing about watering. Don't overwater.

So that's it! A little bit of effort when planting then a quick trim and feed twice a year.

ENJOY!

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[Information provided here is for general advisory purposes only]