

How to plant small natives from containers

Generally, natives are planted without soil preparation or fertilizer. In heavy clay or very dry soil, you may want to punch a bunch of holes with a soil knife nearby for aeration and water absorption.

Digging the hole: Dig a hole slightly deeper and wider than the container, so that the plant's crown (the growing part at the bottom) will be at or slightly below the level of surrounding soil. Keep soil you take out nearby. If possible, water before planting.

Ways of planting: There are lots of ways to plant. In the end, you want the crown about level with surrounding soil or slightly below, leaving a shallow depression or level space to catch water. Roots must be comfortably vertical, not forced or bent. (Dig the hole deeper or trim roots.) Make sure there are no air spaces around roots.

- **Mold technique:** If soil is firm and the plant's roots are not dense and "pot bound," you can create a mold by patting soil around the container with the plant still in it. Then carefully remove the container from the hole. Take out the plant, place it carefully into your mold, and pat everything down, leaving no air spaces around the roots.
- **Loose soil or poorly rooted plant:** The mold technique won't work if soil is loose and sandy, or falls away because the plant is not well rooted. Cradling the roots with your hand as best you can, place the plant gently in the hole with roots headed down and slightly spread, gently refill the hole with the soil you dug out, and pat down.
- **Dense, pot-bound roots:** The mold technique also isn't perfect if roots are very dense and crowded. Take the plant out of the container and trim away the bottom ½ inch or so (this is stimulating for most plants). Slit the root wad from the bottom about halfway up, and slightly spread the parts. Loosen some of the roots, and scrape to roughen the outer roots. Separate runners. Then plant the plant, refill with soil, and pat down.

Taking plants out of containers: To avoid any tugging on the plant, it very often works to spread your fingers across the top, turn plant and container upside-down, and strike the edge of the container sharply on a hard object. The plant is likely to slide out easily. Place the container on its side beside the hole and try to gently slide the plant out, cradling it with your hand. For wide containers, keep fingers spread across the top. If more is needed, you can push from the bottom of the tube with a stick, press or roll the sides with increasing firmness, or finally slit the container.

Last steps: Consider trimming branches to relieve demands on the plant and encourage branching. Mulching with surrounding leaves is good, but won't work on a creek bank swept by floods. Gather up pots and labels. Water deeply and widely, especially uphill, and then wait until soil is close to dry before repeating. You want water to continue to percolate to the plant, and you want the plant to have to send roots out and down to find water.

Planting in erosion-control cloth: Spread meshes of jute erosion-control cloth wide enough to dig the hole, then replace them after planting. Replace any staples (U-nails) and make sure upstream and downstream edges remain buried. The plant will help anchor the cloth; the cloth will retain moisture, mulching the plant.

Planting on flood-swept banks: Anything that interrupts flow will tend to cause erosive eddies that can dig the plant out. Jute mesh avoids this. A vertical stick upstream can break the flow and catch debris that otherwise might catch on the plant. Planting downstream from trees or bushes can give some protection.

Banks are often rocky or gravelly a short way down. Use your pin flag to prod for pockets of deep soil, and adjust suggested locations. Sometimes weeds mark patches of good soil, so digging does double duty. **On Codornices, keep an eye out for the fleshy pink to white roots of bindweed. Dig them out before planting.**

