

PLANTING OUT FROM CONTAINERS

The Planting Hole

- When preparing to plant a new garden border or large bed, the whole area should be prepared before the individual planting holes for trees or shrubs are dug. This often involves the removal of grasses and weeds. If planting individual plants into the landscape, clear a one metre diameter area around the planting site of all grasses and weeds which would otherwise compete for moisture and nutrients. It is advisable to maintain this clear area around your plant at least until it is well established. This can be done by using a good layer of some durable mulching material such as pine bark nuggets or gravel.
- Dig an oversize hole and loosen the soil around and at the bottom of the hole with a fork. The depth of the hole should be such that the top of the root ball of the plant is just level with the final surface of the soil. Avoid smooth sided holes like those produced by augers and do not dig into impermeable subsoil; in both cases you will be producing a “pond” for your plants as well as making it difficult for the roots to enter the surrounding soil.
- If available, some well decomposed organic matter can be mixed with the loosened soil at the bottom of the hole. Do not, as an alternative, incorporate inorganic fertilisers as root damage can result.

Planting

- Thoroughly soak the plant in its container and allow it to drain. Fill the hole with water and allow it to drain completely.
- To remove plants from pots, place your hand over the top of the mix, with the plant stem between your fingers. Turn the pot upside down and jerk the whole plant and pot or tap the edge of the pot on something solid. The root ball should easily fall out of the pot onto your hand.
- Remove any circling root mass that has accumulated at the bottom of the root ball by teasing it out with the hand or removing it with a sharp, clean knife. Cut any circling roots around the outside of the root ball by making shallow (5mm) vertical slices in the side of the root ball. This may seem a drastic measure but it is a necessary one as any circling roots left intact will thicken until they severely restrict the growth of the plant.
- Place the root ball at the required place in the hole, gently push soil around it and lightly firm it down. Make sure that the stem is vertical. Bring the soil up to the level of the top of the root ball, and no higher. If the root ball is covered water may not be able to enter it.
- The newly planted plant must be watered as soon as possible. Form a dish of soil around the plant, or on the downhill side if planted on a slope. Be careful not to let the dish cause waterlogging of the plant if there is an extended period of very wet weather or if your soil is poorly drained; in the latter case it would be beneficial to incorporate organic matter, or even sand, to the planting area. Depending on prevailing weather and soil conditions, the plant may need to be watered several times a week for the first few weeks of its life in the soil.
- Apply organic mulches whenever possible, but always keep them clear of the trunk of the plant. Mulching may not be beneficial early in spring when it is desirable for the soil to warm up quickly to promote rapid establishment and growth of your plants. At most other times, however, the benefits of mulching are numerous.

