Melaleuca Nursery
INDIGENOUS & NATIVE PLANT FARM

Successful Planting Guide

Ensure the roots of the plant are wet when you plant it

The easiest way to do this is to plunge the plant (pot and all) into a bucket of water. Wait for the air bubbles to stop coming out of the pot and then you are ready to go. If available, seaweed solution (such as Seasol™) in the soaking water will provide hormones to help encourage the plant extend its root system.

There is no need to tickle the roots

If the plant is at the right stage of growth for the pot – there is no need to break apart the root ball when you take it out of the pot. In fact, with some species from Western Australia, this is the fastest way to kill the plant!

Dig a large hole

The majority of plant roots grow in the top 30 – 60 cm of the soil. When digging the hole for your new plant, the hole should ideally be twice as wide as the pot in which it is purchased. The hole should be only slightly deeper than the pot.

Make sure the root ball is covered with soil.

Potting mix is designed to dry out because in a nursery situation plants would normally be watered every day. When you transfer a plant from pot to ground, make sure you cover up the top of the potting mix with the local soil (not just mulch) - even sandy soil will dry out slower than potting mix.

Water plants in

Give each plant at least half a bucket of water (4 – 5 litres) after you have planted them. It will make sure the soil has settled around the roots and reduce air pockets which will kill root tips.

Mulching

Mulch is a great way to maintain water levels in the soil during warmer months. If it is an organic mulch, it will breakdown and help the structure of the soil. However, with organic mulches, it is a balance between making the mulch deep enough to suppress weeds and shallow enough that additional watering is not required. Regular top ups of the mulch will be required, frequency will depend on the type of mulch. Mulches with a high nitrogen content, like pea straw or Lucerne hay, will require more frequent replacement.

Inorganic mulches can avoid this problem as the rainfall or irrigation water will run through the mulch rather than soaking into the mulch particles. They will also not require replacement for many years.

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Organic matter is the best solution to problem soil

It doesn't matter what type of soil you have – clay, sand or loam - the best long term solution for poor soil structure is to dig in organic matter. It encourages the bacteria, worms and other critters to work through the soil. This in turn gives the plants nutrients to grow. In sandy soils, organic matter aids water retention. In clay soils, it can improve drainage. The type of organic matter doesn't really matter – seaweed solution, fish emulsion, manure, mulch, pea straw, garden scraps, compost – they will all help!

Gypsum for Clay Soils

Natural Gypsum, often sold as 'Clay Breaker', can help break up clay soil to make digging the area over easier. However, it doesn't work on all clay soils. To test if your soil is gypsum reactive, place a small piece of dry soil about 6 – 10mm in size into a glass container containing rainwater. Observe over 24 hours, if the clay slowly disperses into the water (The first sign is a halo of clay particles around the original piece) the soil will respond to gypsum. The faster the response, the greater the benefit will be. However, read the label on the product and stick to the recommended amount – too much will ruin the structure of the soil.

Any plant can do better with fertiliser

While most native plants will grow quite well without fertiliser – they can do better with it. Most plant species from the east coast will do fine with general fertiliser. Just make sure that you use a low phosphorus option with species that have evolved in low nutrient soils (like Banksias, Grevilleas, Waratahs, etc) – these plants have adapted to take up every bit of phosphorus they can find.