

Planting native seedlings



Often native plants can be slow to adjust after being transplanted from a container. To increase the success of your new plantings follow this advice before planting.

Site preparation

Site preparation and planning are the most important aspects of any successful planting.

Weed control needs to begin a year or two before planting and can be done by grazing, slashing and spot spraying. In a dry finish to the season, weed control will markedly improve seedling survival over summer, and in a wet year, weed control improves growth rates over summer and into the second year.

It is also recommended to control grazing pressure from rabbits and kangaroos. Rabbit bait should be laid at appropriate times to ensure density of populations are reduced before planting.

Large wire, mesh 'cages' may need to be installed to protect particularly tasty species from kangaroo grazing.

Permits are available for properties with high kangaroo populations. Another option for kangaroos is the use of pheromones.

Planting out tubestock

Timing

Where possible plant in early winter or spring (early autumn in areas with less than 550mm) to give plants the best chance to establish using natural rainfall.

Herbicide

Herbicide is best applied two to three weeks prior to planting to create a 'spot' for the plants. Patterns include 1.5 m wide strips or 1 m wide spot sprays in groups of three to five.

Leaving untreated areas between the strips or dots will reduce the possibility of wind and water erosion. Slashing or mowing can control the weed growth whilst the plants are establishing.

Watering

Ensure plants have been well watered prior to planting. Alternatively, soak the soil around the root ball by placing the container in a bucket of water until it stops bubbling (but don't submerge the entire plant). This helps get rid of air around the roots and makes it easier to get the plant out of the container.



The hole

The most common mistake when transplanting from a container is digging the hole too shallow or too narrow. The ideal hole is twice as deep and twice as wide as the container it is in, with as minimal soil disturbance as possible.

Fill the hole with water and allow it to soak into the ground. Plants growing in sandy soils will benefit from water crystals being added to retain moisture around the roots.

Removing the plant from its container

Remove the plant from the container being careful not to disturb the roots more than necessary. The soil and root ball should come away easily, but if not tap the pot lightly with a small garden tool.

Supporting the base of the exposed seedling with one hand, use your other hand to hold the roots and soil together as you place it in the hole. If the roots are coiled tight tease them out gently from the sides and base with your fingers.

Backfilling

Backfill the hole with soil and stamp firmly without compacting. Construct a 10 cm high ring of soil around the hole, allowing for a small depression around the plant to retain 500 ml of water – known as a water well. Water new plants immediately.

A good soaking reduces evaporation, settles the soil, reduces air pockets and encourages roots to become stronger, by growing deeper and looking for moisture.

Watering

Watering can begin, if required, from mid to late spring when the plants are actively growing. During summer, if watering is required, continue with a weekly soaking.

Over watering native seedlings can result in “soft” plants, with poorly developed roots, which are likely to perish during drier spells. To prevent this from happening, infrequent deep watering of your new plantings is more desirable. This allows water to percolate deep into the soil profile, allowing it to escape evaporation and remain available to the plant. It also encourages the development of deep roots resulting in a healthier plant, able to survive droughts.

Watering should be done in the cool mornings or evenings to reduce loss through evaporation. In the longer term, the plants should survive on rainfall alone.

Mulching

Adding a layer of mulch to your plantings can reduce evaporative water loss by over 70 per cent. A good layer of mulch will reduce weed growth and improve the biodiversity of soil invertebrates that maintain soil structure and productivity. It will also reduce stress to plants by keeping soil temperatures down.



Backfilling a hole increases a plant's chance of success

Tree guards

Tree guards are very effective when installed correctly. They provide UV protection from the harsh summer, conserve moisture, guard from wind and drifting sand, create a barrier from rabbits and fight weeds when used in conjunction with weed mats.

There are many forms depending on finances and preferences.

Further information

For simple, yet detailed information on installing tree guards visit the WA Bassendean Preservation Group website:

www.bpginc.info/.

Look under 'More info/Useful documents'.

Natural Resources Centres

For further information on planting native seedlings contact your local centre.

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