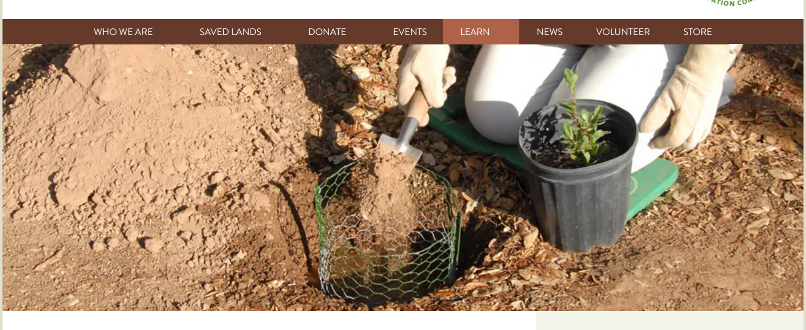
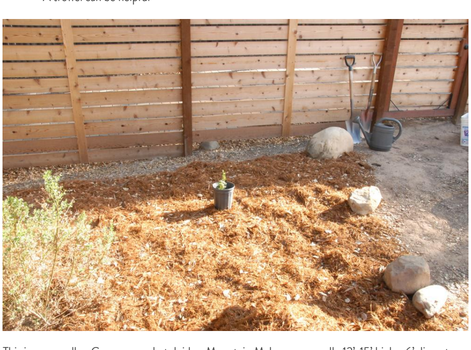


PLANTING & WATERING GUIDE FOR CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANTS

Click here to download the full guide for Ojai friendly California Natives.

1. COLLECT WHAT IS NEEDED FOR PLANTING:

- A one gallon potted plant, a spade and a source of water
- Backfill soil, from the hole dug for the plant, plus some additional soil.
- A trowel can be helpful



This is a one gallon Cercocarpus betuloides, Mountain Mahogany, usually 12'-15' high x 6' diameter when established. It was sited 6' away from the fence, pathway and other plants; see the following picture of a similar plant one year after planting.

2. SITE YOUR PLANT ALLOWING ENOUGH SPACE FOR IT TO GROW TO MATURE SIZE.

The above 7' tall Mountain Mahogany was planted from a one gallon pot less than one year prior to the photograph. The tomato cage was used temporarily to encourage upward, rather than spreading, growth.

3. DIG A HOLE ABOUT THE SAME DEPTH AS THE SOIL IN THE POT.

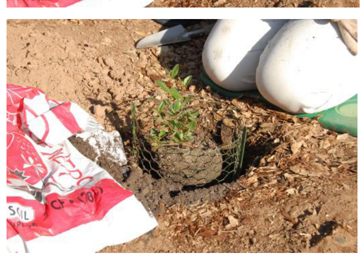
If you are using a gopher cage, dig a hole as big as the gopher cage, less two inches. Place the cage in the hole, leaving about two inches of the wire mesh above ground.

Gopher cages are usually bigger than the root ball and soil to be planted.

4. FILL THE HOLE WITH WATER AND WAIT FOR IT TO DRAIN COMPLETELY.

5. REMOVE THE PLANT FROM THE POT.

Hold the top of the soil in the pot with the spread fingers of one hand, then turn the pot upside down and rap the bottom and sides of the pot with the heel of the other hand. You may need to rap hard, several times. The soil and root mass should fall against your other hand. See sequence of photographs.



Note the bag of supplemental garden soil with the minimum of fertilizers and amendments. Soil dug from another part of your land is preferable. Here's an example of general purpose garden soil.

6. PLACE THE PLANT INTO THE HOLE (OR GOPHER CAGE) WITH THE LOWER END OF THE STEM ABOUT ¼ INCH HIGHER THAN THE SURROUNDING EARTH.

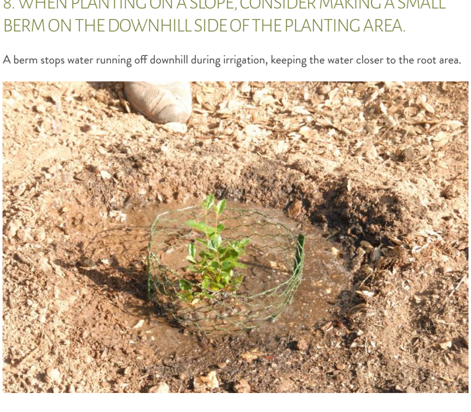
Fill any space between the edge of the hole and the root ball with soil – the soil you dug out to make the hole – carefully pushed down. It's usual not to have enough backfill soil. Take additional soil from your yard or use purchased garden soil, without amendments or fertilizers. Tamp the areas down and fill all air spaces with soil.

If you are using a gopher cage, you will have space around the plant root ball and the wire mesh. It is important to fill these areas, leaving no air spaces. Roots cannot grow in air.

7. WALK AROUND THE PLANT TO HELP ELIMINATE AIR SPACES.

8. WHEN PLANTING ON A SLOPE, CONSIDER MAKING A SMALL BERM ON THE DOWNHILL SIDE OF THE PLANTING AREA.

A berm stops water running off downhill during irrigation, keeping the water closer to the root area.



9. WATER THE PLANT AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONTINUING CARE ON THE SUBSEQUENT CHART.

This guide relates to climate conditions in California inner valleys and to plants similar to those found on the **Ojai Valley Land Conservancy's Preserves** e.g. Manzanitas, Sages, Ceanothus, Toyon, etc. **The guide gives minimum amounts for establishment of plants from one gallon pots.** Professionals may advise more. Water on a cool morning; soak at least 18" deep, to at least 18" diameter. **Water slowly and deeply to encourage deep roots, not letting water pool or trickle away from the plant.** Check with the water authority for restrictions on the use of water.

Watering notes

Decrease watering frequency in mild weather, as in early spring, if:	Watering in drought, heat or other special conditions, such as:	Decrease watering frequency for milder conditions, as in winter, or for:
- temperatures are low to mid-range - rainfall is expected - cloudy days are predicted - plant is in shade most of the day - plant grows naturally in the area	- a container- grown plant - direct sun most of the day - unusually high temperatures - wind, reflected sun from a wall - unusually dry, sandy or fast draining soil - south or west facing slopes - unusually dry weather - if the plant originates from wetter or cooler conditions	- significant rainfall, fog drip, cloud - dappled shade or full shade - wet or slow draining land - irrigated land close by - plants originating from drier conditions

Condition of Plant:	Recommendations for watering the Plant in special conditions (becoming the norm):
Plant is in a gallon pot, outdoors **in shade (essential)**, morning sun OK.	Plants in pots dry out quickly. Lift the pot 3-4 times a week. When the pot feels light i.e. the soil has dried, fill pot with water and leave to drain freely. The pot should feel heavy. If not, repeat watering.
Before or at planting time:	**Water the pot before planting.** Fill planting hole with water **at least twice** and allow water to drain completely after each filling. If drainage is slow e.g. an hour+, note this and plant after one watering.
Immediately after planting:	**Mulch.** Water 4-8 gallons, very slowly. The goal is to soak at least an 18" diameter area around plant x 18" deep. **Watering is to encourage deep roots** and to remove the smallest air pockets. It does not remove larger air pockets. **Plant to avoid air – roots cannot grow in air.**
Day after planting:	Look carefully at plant, if any areas are wilting, check for air pockets and ant activity. Water in the cool of the morning as for planting day, slowly and deeply.
First 1-4 weeks: 2-4 gallons, slowly, twice a week	Check soil 3 times a week; if dry two inches down, water 2-4 gallons, slowly.
Months 2-8: through the first summer for spring planting	Check weekly; if soil is dry two inches down, water 2-4 gallons, slowly on a cool morning. If plant is thriving, reduce water slowly, over several months. Plants establish at differing rates. If plant is not thriving, check for air pockets e.g. gophers, ants. If the plant is in sun, add shade.
Toward end of first year: Slowly reduce water to approximately 2-4 gall./month	Check every other week; if dry two inches down, water 2-4 gallons, slowly. Reduce water to approx. once a month or less by end of first year after planting. If winter rain is significant stop watering. Learn about individual plants to better manage water.
Second year after planting:	Under harsh conditions, water monthly throughout cooler days/months. Water through winter and into late spring if rainfall is low. Many natives are adapted to no summer watering.

Most large watering cans, buckets or pails hold two gallons = eight quarts = sixteen pints

Learn about the individual plants – they may have different requirements for water. Many smaller plants will establish in 4-8 months. Some large plants are established quickly, e.g. Sugar Bush, but other large plants may take 1-5 years to become established e.g. Elderberry.
In drought, winter watering may be necessary.
Give plants a deep watering at least monthly throughout any rainy or cool fall, winter or spring months to increase 'rainfall'. Most natives dislike hot and wet, avoid summer watering if possible.

Continuing care: **Water only in the cool of mornings, after a cool night.** If drainage is good i.e. water does not pool around the plant and the area dries out between watering, it is difficult to overwater most **first year** CA native plants - if watering in hot weather is avoided. Establishment of a CA native may take more water than above and more than one year. Large or slow-growing plants tend to take more time to become fully established.	**Plants labeled 'full sun' may not tolerate full sun until growth is established.** A coastal plant labeled 'full sun' will require shade to survive when planted in an inland valley. If planting in spring, most plants will benefit from a shade structure erected before burned leaf edges or curled leaves signal heat stress from the summer sun and heat. Protect a new plant from full sun: Use a tomato cage or half a cage for small plants. Cover with a towel or a 3'x3' piece of 40% 'shade cloth' secured with bulldog clips. Do not use plastic sheeting. Ensure the SW side and top are covered, tips to base of stem. Leave a space for early morning sun to enter the 'tent'. Remember to mulch. Place a small rock on the SW side of the plant to provide a cooler, moister area for roots.

Many smaller plants will establish in 4-8 months. Some large plants establish surprisingly quickly, e.g. Rhus ovata, Sugar Bush. Learn about the plants in order to provide appropriate care. Some large plants may take 1-5 years to establish.
In drought years, give not-yet-established plants additional water at least monthly throughout any rainy or cool fall, winter or spring months to increase 'rainfall'. Most natives dislike hot and wet, avoid summer watering if at all possible.

Second year after planting	Gradually reduce water until plant is thriving without supplemental water, under normal weather conditions (not drought)	**Under harsh or drought conditions, do give water liberally throughout any rainy or cool months. Most natives will prefer no summer watering.**	Under normal Ojai Valley weather conditions (not drought) plant should survive without supplemental water

Troubleshooting:
If the plant is not thriving, push hard on the earth around the plant to ensure there are no air pockets, and check for burrows around roots. Check again, air pockets are easy to miss, especially just inside or just outside a gopher cage. Roots cannot grow in air and water will leak down burrows and away from roots. If water drains fast, suspect hidden gopher burrows. Fill any holes with earth, tamping it down firmly. Ensure there is mulch and that the plant has shade protection if necessary. Insects and disease are not the first causes to consider when a plant is not thriving, but an ants' nest hidden deep in the roots will cause plants to fail. It may be related to the disturbance of the nest activity near to roots, even when ants are not farming aphids on the plant. Move the nest mechanically, no pesticides, fill the air pockets with earth. Tamp down the soil. You may have saved your plant!

Argentine ants:
These are found throughout Ventura County. They have multiple queens and cooperate between nests. Specific control techniques are required. Learn more at http://ipm.ucanr.edu/.

An irrigation system is not necessary. Hand-watering is an excellent option as CA native plants thrive on deeper watering given infrequently and prefer this to the shallow, frequent watering common to some irrigation systems.

The above is the minimum required to give most CA native plants what they need to survive the transition from pot to in-ground planting.

Continue reading to give your plant an even better chance of survival.

1. Check How Much The Water Penetrated Into The Soil.

If in doubt, give more water as the first watering is crucial to survival. In very dry conditions or when planting on sun soaked banks or slopes, it may be necessary to water the area deeply for a few days before planting day.

2. Tidy The Area And Mulch.

Oak leaves or chipped oak tree trimmings are an appropriate mulch for most CA native plants. The mulch in the picture above is shredded redwood bark, widely recommended for CA native plants. A purchased bag of 'forest products' mulch may be used. Do not use rubber or plastic mulch around plants. Place mulch at least three feet in diameter around the plant to reduce the rate of evaporation of moisture from the soil, to suppress weeds, and to insulate the soil from extreme temperatures.

3. A Rock – The Size An Adult Can Carry Comfortably – Placed On The South Or West Side Of The Plant Will Provide A Cool, Moist Area Beside The Developing Root Ball.

4. Keep The Area Weed Free; Mulching Assists With This. Do Not Amend Or Fertilize The Soil.

5. Learn About The Plant.

If the plant is deciduous at some time in the year e.g. milkweed, it will lose its leaves and dry up. Do not pull it out or overwater during this phase. Some plants show summer (heat) stress e.g. Ceanothus species may show a few yellowing leaves. Do not try to compensate for this by overwatering. Some plants are slow to grow when first placed in the ground e.g. Rhus ovata, sugar bush, may stay the same size as at planting for six months or more, surprising its anxious gardener with fast growth in a subsequent year. Understand the plant's normal behavior.

6. CA Native Plants Dislike Hot And Wet; Water Slowly And Deeply In The Cool Part Of The Morning.

For detailed information on a variety of topics related to CA native plants, the following are recommended:
Las Pilitas Nursery
Tree of Life Wholesale Nursery
California's Own landscape design, Greg Rubin
Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

7. Water As Recommended Above.

Download The Planting & Watering Guide For California Native Plants

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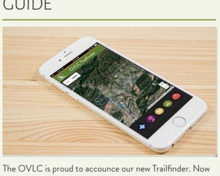

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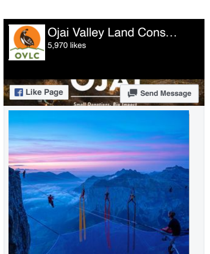

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