General Planting Instructions

When to Plant

In the temperate climate of the Bay Area we can garden practically year-round. Spring and fall are ideal times for planting, with mild temperature and rainfall helping plants get established. You can also spruce up your garden in summer and winter as long as the weather isn't too extreme. In summer, don't plant when the temperature is expected to exceed 90° for several days. New plants may not recover from the stress of being planted in excessive heat. In winter, hold off planting for several days after heavy rain. Working wet soil isn't just unpleasant, it also causes soil compaction.

Preparing the Soil

Planting time is your only chance to improve the soil. Unless you have perfect rich, loamy soil, you'll want to amend your soil, meaning blending in a nutrient-rich compost. Amending your soil improves both fertility and soil structure, which is important for good water, air, and root penetration. Use **Gold Rush** or **Bumper Crop** for most ornamental plants and fruit trees. We recommend **Paydirt** for annuals and vegetables.

Make your planting hole twice the width of the pot, if possible, and no more than an inch or two deeper than the root ball. Rough up the sides of the hole or slice several vertical grooves so that roots will be guided to grow into the surrounding soil. Blend the soil you've removed with the amendment so that the final mixture is about half soil and half amendment. Try to break up any clumps larger than a golf ball.

How to Plant

Mix a starter fertilizer into the soil at the bottom of the planting hole, following label directions. **Sure Start** and **Master Start** are high in phosphorus, which is important for root development. Because phosphorus doesn't move easily in the soil, it's helpful to put it at the roots when planting. You may also add an iron supplement such as **Iron Plus** or **GreenAll FST** to maintain vibrant green growth on your new plants.

Most plants are grown in plastic containers of various sizes. (For bareroot plants see our care sheet*, Planting Bareroot Roses and Fruit Trees*.). You can usually just slide a plant carefully from the container when it's time to plant. If the plant seems stuck, press firmly on the sides of the pot to loosen it. It's rarely necessary to cut the pot away from the plant.

Once out of the pot, check the condition of the roots. If the plant is well-rooted with visible roots just to the edge of the root ball you can plant it as is. However it's not uncommon for a plant to be root bound, with roots forming a dense mat at the outside of the root ball. In this case, you'll want to loosen the roots by massaging the

root ball, making vertical cuts with a knife, or teasing the roots out with a sharp tool, being careful not to break up the entire root ball.

Place the plant in the hole so that the top of the soil in the pot is even with or just a bit higher than the surrounding soil. Plants buried too deeply will not survive. Use your amended soil to fill the hole, firming it down with your hands as you fill the hole. Use excess soil to build up a ring of soil around the plant. This will create a basin so that when you irrigate, the water will penetrate deeply to the roots without just running off.

Mulching

Spread a 2-3 inch layer of organic mulch such as **Bumper Crop** or **Micro Bark**, keeping the mulch several inches from the main stems of your plants. Mulching gives your planting a finished look while conserving moisture and preventing weeds.
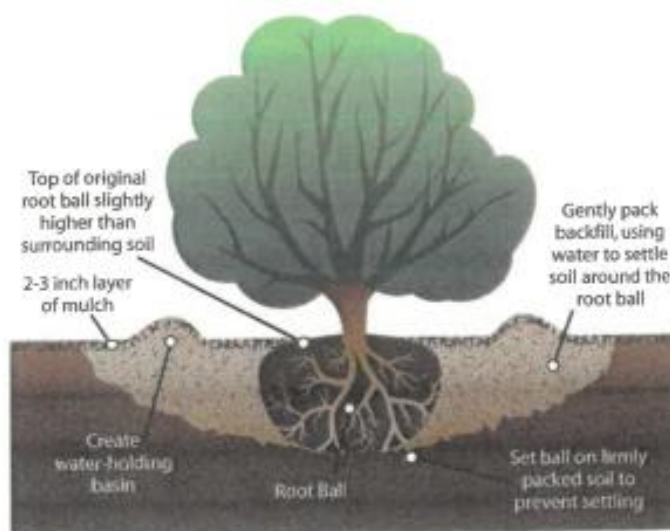
Watering

Immediately after planting, water thoroughly to settle the soil and prevent transplant stress. Check your plants daily for the first week or two. Water whenever the soil feels dry, which may be daily if the weather is warm. When you irrigate, apply enough water to soak the original root ball and the surrounding soil. After the first or second week, begin to reduce the frequency while still watering deeply. For detailed information on watering to establish plants and to keep them healthy see our care sheet **Watering 101**.