

Watering your baby plants



Water when needed

Plants need to be watered more frequently when first planted. Water when the soil near the roots and beneath the surface is dry. Check plants for early signs of drought-stress such as slight wilting of leaves or stem tips. Plants with stiff stems and waxy leaves may not wilt, even when in need of water. Lush plants that more readily exhibit signs of drought-stress can indicate water needs of their more rigid neighbors. It is best to water before plants are stressed.

Water thoroughly

Make sure that the soil in and around the planting hole becomes wet. Poorly drained soils may require several shorter periods of irrigation to promote infiltration without runoff. Water should penetrate the soil below the deepest roots.

Allow soil to dry

Soil should be moderately dry before watering again. Many native plants are subject to rot and disease if their roots stay too wet, especially in warm soils. Roots need both air and water. Small spaces or pores fill with water when the soil is excessively wet, starving the roots of air. Do not let newly planted plants dry out completely unless they are cacti or other plants highly susceptible to rot, and adapted to dry soils.

Reduce frequency

Water less frequently as plants become established, though continue to water until the root area and beyond are wet.

Plant is wilted but soil is moist

Do not water if soil is wet. Plants wilt for many reasons. If wilting is due to root rot from excess water, the plant is unlikely to recover, though it may help to gently prune back the stem tips and allow the soil to dry. Follow up with careful watering practices – only water when the soil is moderately dry and the plant looks like it needs a drink, a bit hard for novices to tell but it comes with practice.

Pat the soil

Probe the soil with your fingers around the original root ball to determine whether air pockets are present. Organic matter in nursery soil decomposes over time, sometimes leaving gaps in the soil. This is common and should be checked during the establishment period or whenever young plants seem to need excessive amounts of water.

Sun screen

Set up a temporary sun screen to reduce stress for young plants that wilt during the heat of the day but perk up as temperatures drop. Keep an eye on these plants so that they receive water before drought-stress sets in. As plants become established they are better able to withstand heat.

Weeds like water too

Remove weeds that grow around new plants. These unwanted plants compete for water, nutrients and light. The same goes for wildflowers that crowd native perennials.