

Planting depth

One of the most common causes of mortality is planting too deep. If the surface of the root ball/root collar ends up below the surrounding soil level, the stem is likely to rot and the roots may suffocate, stressing or killing the plant.

We recommend digging a wide, shallow hole; make it a little shallower than the root ball. The top of the installed root ball should be about half an inch above the surrounding soil; aim for a slightly mounded look with the surface of the potting soil exposed. This will mean that even if the plant sinks as the soil settles, the roots will not get buried too deep.

Root disturbance

For container-grown plants, rough up the soil and roots on the outer inch of the root ball. Plants benefit from some root disturbance at planting time—it stimulates growth that helps plants become established. If there are circling roots, tease them outward and prune any that won't fit into your planting hole without crowding. Circling and cramped roots will not straighten themselves; they will expand in the position you leave them, crowding each other and possibly strangling the plant. Straighten and trim the roots and you're doing the plant a favor.

Watering in

One of the great things about planting in the fall is that it rains frequently. At least it usually does. For falls such as this one, or if your installation schedule coincides with a week of dry weather, irrigating your freshly installed plants is important. Plants are entering dormancy and are less vulnerable to water stress than in the spring or summer, but nevertheless anything that reduces transplant shock will improve overall survival and growth. If you have the option, irrigate!

Staking

The bottom line is if the plant will stand up without a stake, don't give it one. Stake a plant only when it needs support, and connect the stake to the stem as low and loosely as possible. Staking a plant interferes with its natural ability to support itself.