

How to Effectively Establish Native Plant Plugs

Site Selection and Assessment

Decide how and where you want to use plugs, whether for new border gardens, massing among shrubs in existing foundation beds, pollinator or other wildlife habitats, or replacing portions of lawn with small meadows. Assess the space where you will be planting to determine the quality of sunlight, moisture, and soil. Survey existing vegetation to determine what does and does not thrive. In particular, identify the type and number of existing weeds.

Site Preparation

Successful establishment requires that the plugs not get outcompeted by existing weeds and their seed banks. We suggest keeping any soil tilling to a minimum since doing so results in the germination of previously dormant weed seeds. However, if choosing a site overrun by weeds and invasive plants, plan appropriate site preparation weeks – if not months – before planting, especially when using organic methods for killing existing vegetation.

Keep plugs moist before planting

Because their compact roots leave them susceptible to drying out, it's important that plug trays be kept **EVENLY MOIST** and out of direct sun from the moment they're brought home up until they're planted. Make sure to thoroughly water them two to three hours before planting. This makes it easier to remove them from their trays and loosen their roots before putting them in the ground. In addition, by deeply watering the plugs just before planting, they can be removed from their trays and laid in the spots they will be planted without drying out, thus saving time.

Recommended tools, starting with those we deem most convenient to use, include:

3" bulb & bedding plant auger drill attachment , Bulb planter tool, Small spade, Hand trowel

Determining spacing and groupings

Taking time before planting to determine the spacing of the plugs will ensure uniform density and that your supply of plugs cover the desired area. When planting larger areas, use a grid pattern with plants 12" off center from each other.

If you're creating smaller groups of a variety of species, be aware of the differences in mature heights when arranging each group. If planting against a structure, make sure the tallest species are in the back along the structure to ensure shorter species receive proper light.

Planting in the Ground

Plant plugs to a depth that allows the plant's crown to lie at or slightly **ABOVE** soil level. Backfill soil between the plug and the hole. **NO SOIL SHOULD BE PLACED ON TOP OF THE PLANT**

Water in plugs immediately after installation to fill soil air holes around root systems. During the first three weeks, water plantings for about 60 minutes every four days on mild spring days or every three days on hot summer days. A one-hour watering will soak more deeply than 15-minute ones.

Mulch helps conserve soil moisture and reduces weed pressure. We recommend immediately after planting 2-4" of shredded **HARDWOOD** mulch. Avoid cocoa bean hulls on heavy or wet soils or in dense shade to prevent fungus build-up. Avoid using bark mulch, especially large pieces.

Proactive Weed Prevention

Vigilant weed control the first year will ensure effective establishment over the long term. By preventing weeds from outcompeting herbaceous native plants, the plugs will fill in the spaces between plants, resulting in dense stands and few weeds the following years.