

High Plains Environmental Center NATIVE PLANT SPRING CARE GUIDE

CAN I PLANT THESE NOW?

Yes! With a few exceptions (*like Sunflowers and Milkweeds, which are noted on their plant profiles*), these plants are spring tough! Younger plants can be sensitive to extremes, but your spring orders should be safe down to freezing, many even below that. Remember, the ground is already much warmer than the ambient air temperatures, so the plants will be much happier in the soil than sitting in a pot on your porch. If nighttime temperatures fall below 30°F, you may offer additional protection by covering your plants with a nursery pot or frost cloth. If you cannot yet plant, you can overwinter plants in a sheltered area like a garage. We do not recommend keeping them indoors.

EVEN IF IT'S GOING TO SNOW?

Yes! Unintuitive as it might seem, snow cover is great insulation. Even in an otherwise devastating plunge to the teens, just a few inches of snow will keep the ground at or even above freezing! Another reason to be thankful for that spring snow! If you have a taller or very sensitive plant, you can temporarily cover them with a pot or sheet as mentioned above.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH DORMANT PLANTS?

If you ordered a plant like Rose Milkweed this April, you likely have a winter dormant plant. While tender young milkweeds perish in the cold, these masses of thick roots are fast asleep and tough as nails. Plant as is, follow watering instructions, and let nature do her thing! They will wake up when it is safe to emerge!

HOW MUCH SHOULD I WATER?

Every site is different. Different plants, exposures, soils, etc. It is impossible for us to offer a blanket irrigation schedule without completing a near ecological survey of your backyard. Instead apply these general principles to your watering practices:

- Planting in the morning or evening is often the gentlest transition
- After planting water deeply (cacti excluded).
- Monitor how your soil retains water. If the first 2 inches have dried out, deeply water again. This will usually be every few days for the first week or two depending on weather.
- Deeper, infrequent waterings encourage deeper root growth and hardier plants. You are "training" your young plants to acclimate to their new environment!

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- For most of our shortgrass prairie, foothill, and high desert species Overwatering is the leading cause of issues. Drought tolerance is one of the perks of planting native, enjoy it!

AS IS OR BARE-ROOT?

You can plop our plants into the ground as they come. We select these pots specifically for their excellent root growth and depth. The long and narrow shape of the pot prevents a large mass of nursery potting mix from holding water around the surface. If you have highly xeric plants or are fitting plants into narrow crevices, you may choose to rinse off the potting mix and nestle them in place "bare-root" with a narrow tool. We use a high porosity potting mix and often amend the driest loving plants with additional mineral based amendments to encourage high drainage. This has the added benefit of washing off easily if you choose to do so! The choice is yours! We do encourage that you offer some initial extra care if the roots are heavily disturbed during planting (See cacti care for additional guidelines).

I COMPLETELY FORGOT MY PLANT AND I THINK IT DIED?

While native plants are specialized to our extreme region, mortality can still occur if they are not helped to establish. THAT SAID, you may be surprised what some plants can bounce back from. Give that pile of crisped leaves a deep watering and watch closely!

CACTI CARE

Things get a little weird for plants that decided to ditch leaves in lieu of being nothing but a fleshy stem! Cacti don't even photosynthesize by the same process as most plants! The *Cactaceae* family emerged in the Americas and displays some of the most incredible adaptations in the Plant Kingdom. With a little effort up front, you can maintain some of the toughest, most effortless, plants around!

CACTI CARE: WHEN DO I PLANT?

The best time to plant cacti is in spring after the threat of extreme cold has passed. The *Pediocactus*, *Escobaria*, and *Opuntia* that we offer can be sheltered inside if necessary given they are offered full direct light. These cacti are cold hardy but at purchase they are no longer dormant, so a hard freeze may damage their succulent tissue.

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CACTI CARE: WHERE DO I PLANT?

A direct, full sun site with southern exposure is ideal for cacti.

CACTI CARE: WHAT KIND OF SOIL?

A gritty, well draining soil is imperative for most cacti, particularly in a garden setting. If amending native clay soils, I like to amend 50% of the volume with mineral ingredients such as sand/squeegee/small chip gravel and not more than 10% of the whole with organic compost/garden soil. If planting in a pot or trough, take a look at the components of your cacti's nursery pot! Planters can "clog" and allow water to pool, so a free draining mix is very important. I like to "top dress" ball cacti with small angular gravel. This creates a layer around the base of the cacti stem which holds it in place while retaining no moisture, it also looks nice! Note the planting depth in your nursery container.

CACTI CARE: HOW DO I PLANT CACTI?

We used a custom high draining mix for these plants so that they could be planted as they are. You may also choose to plant them bare-root. (See above)

CACTI CARE: DO CACTI NEED WATER?

Not much! Generally they manage just fine with what falls from the sky. Here's how you can best care for your cacti:

- After planting, allow it to remain dry for a day or two. Succulent plants such as cacti develop a callous over broken roots to protect from infections. After a few days, you can water your cacti to help settle the soil
- Intermittent watering during the heat of summer may allow quicker growth. Cacti should be completely dry between waterings. Cease all irrigation before autumn. Cacti reduce the moisture in their tissue to avoid freeze damage. Watering in the fall can prevent dormancy or lead to rot. You may notice prickly pears shrivel and lay over, while ball cacti shrink or even partially retreat into the soil.

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