



# *Sage Advice from the Roundhouse....*

OCTOBER

The Beginning of Planting Season

Like any specialized group of plants, California natives should be dealt with on their own terms. Often, when homeowners try including native plants in their gardens, they inadvertently treat them just like their exotic landscape plants with respect to planting time and watering. This is a common mistake that can lead to the decline and death of the plants. If you have had difficulty planting natives in the past, perhaps this information will help! Because California native plants are perfectly adapted to our natural climate and seasonal cycles, they tend to be subject to slightly stricter planting guidelines than most exotics. The most critical factor to insure success when putting in natives is getting the timing right, that is, planting during the cool season.

In the month of October, several factors combine to insure a successful planting. In the fall, the soil is still warm, but the air is cooler; daylength is waning shorter and there is some moisture in the air. Above all, the winter rains are just around the corner which will encourage the deep roots that are desired in a drought tolerant garden. These extensive root systems are of major importance in sustaining the plant through the warm, dry season that follows. Generally, fall through early spring is acceptable for planting natives due to the mild nature of our winters. But don't plant much later than the end of April, or you risk losing the plants to the heat. Put in a *Manzanita*, *Ribes* or *Iris* during the peak of the cool season and stand back!

During the summer months, many native plants exhibit a drought-induced dormancy in response to the hot, dry weather. This is a critical time for the plants, when they utilize their adaptations to stress and rely heavily on their extensive root systems to reach deep into the soil for available moisture. Some species are notoriously difficult to keep alive when installed during (or near) the warm season. *Romneya* (Matilija Poppy), *Fremontodendron* (Flannelbush) and *Penstemon* are all best planted in October, as well as *Trichostema* (Woolly Blue Curls), *Rhamnus* (Coffeeberry) and *Dendromecon* (Bush Poppy). Of course, there are exceptions to all rules, and the same applies here. If you must plant near or during the warm season, you will have more success if you are gardening on the coast or in shady locations, but extra care is still necessary.

Depending on the soil (sandy or clay), the plant, and the microclimate (foggy, shady, inland, windy...) the watering regimen for your newly planted natives will vary slightly. Generally, a deep, thorough irrigation once a week for the first few months and then twice a month through the first year should be fine. Avoid frequent, overhead and midday watering, especially during the summer, when cooler, overcast days are best. Good luck!

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