



Las Campanas Water Cooperative

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

2018 Summer Bulletin

Landscaping in the Summer – Can we still plant?

If you enjoy gardening, as most of us do, we have a desire to continue to plant well past the spring planting season. Tracy Neal, the landscape consultant for the HOA, addresses the issue of planting in the summer.

Tracy's advice on summer planting:

People often wonder if it's possible or advisable to plant new plants in the summer in our high desert environment. It is indeed possible to successfully install a new landscape in the summer, as long as the new plants are adequately watered throughout the growing season. The critical factor is to irrigate them frequently enough that the roots never dry out completely. This can mean watering every day or two with small plants (defined as 1-gallon size and smaller) and every two to three days for larger plants (defined as 5-gallon size or larger). Don't expect new plants that are not native to a hot climate to grow much in the heat of the summer; when the temperature is over 85 F. Many plants in the high desert go "semi-dormant" and many new plants will wilt from heat stress even if the soil is moist, which is an indicator that the heat is making it hard for plants to "root in". When it starts to cool off and (if we're lucky) the rains come in July and August, they will start to grow better. A lot of root growth happens in late summer and fall, so it's critical to keep irrigating your plant on a regular basis until plants go dormant, adjusting, of course, your watering schedule based on the temperature and possible soaking rains. It should be noted that it is equally important to water every two to four weeks in the winter to keep new root systems hydrated in our relatively warm and dry winters.

Although we can continue to plant during the summer season we should take the challenges of the high desert climate the ongoing drought into consideration. The fall season (September through November) is a very good time to plant healthy and reliably hardy perennials, grasses and woody plants, as long as someone will be around to water them through the winter (as noted above every two to four weeks after your irrigation system is turned off). Keep in mind that nurseries don't bring in a lot of new stock late in the season; they are trying to get rid of plants so they don't have to overwinter them. Field-grown ball & burlap ("b & b") trees are dug in late winter for the next season and in late fall (November or early December) for the fall season. This means that most plants you will find in the nurseries in late summer and early fall have been there a while and some of them are "the last of the litter", they are ones that didn't



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sell during the main part of the season. You may not be able to find the plants you want or healthy specimens in the fall, in which case you may be better off waiting until the next season.

An exception to the plants recommended for fall planting is the group of desert-adapted plants that grow best when it's hot—agaves, bear grass, cacti, desert willows, yuccas and similar plants. These are best planted by the end of July so they will have plenty of time to get rooted in before winter arrives. Most of these plants are also more drought tolerant the first season and don't need watered as often as non-desert plants. A yucca in a 5-gallon size pot can usually get by when watered only once a week, and cacti should be watered only every two to three weeks the first season. Most of these plants do not need to be watered in the winter, and true cacti shouldn't be watered in the winter.

Given that we are in an extreme state of drought at this time, you might want to put off adding any new plants to your landscape until later in the summer or even next year. Again, one exception might be very drought tolerant native plants that don't need as much water the first year and will require minimal watering after they are established.