

## Gardening 101 Lesson Nine – Planting

Here are the basics for putting a plant in the ground so that it will grow well.

1. Dig a hole large enough to hold all the roots. Keep the dirt removed close to hand.
2. Mix some compost or fertilizer appropriate to the kind of plant in with the dirt at the bottom of the hole.
3. Fill the hole with water and let it drain completely.
4. Loosen up the roots and make sure they aren't crowded together during planting. Trim the top of the plant so that its circumference more or less equals that of the roots.
5. Place the plant in the hole at the appropriate height and start filling in the hole with the dirt you reserved.
6. When the hole is about halfway full, pack down the dirt in it. Then pour in more water and let it drain.
7. Finish filling the hole and use your heel to pack down the dirt well.
8. Water the plant once more.
9. Optionally, mulch the ground surface around the plant but don't let the mulch actually touch the stem.
10. Keep the plant well watered (but not over-watered) until it's established.

Here are some specifics.

Keep the plants in a shady place for several days and gradually move them into sunnier locations. Keep them watered but don't drown them. After about a week, they will be used to the sun and can now go out into the garden.

Check the size of the plant at maturity and leave enough room around it to grow into.

It's easier to remove plants from their containers if the soil is moist so water them and let the water drain out thoroughly. Many have been in their pots a long time and have a tight root ball so loosen up the roots, either by teasing them out with your fingers or by cutting into the root ball in several places.

Some plants, such as tomatoes and clematis, need to be planted deeper than they are in the pot. Others, such as Sweet William and peonies, will suffer if planted more deeply so check labels carefully before you plant.

### Annuals

Plant in the spring or summer but don't even think of planting annuals until all danger of frost is past. (The average last frost date for Ottawa is May 6.)

Ideally, choose plants which are compact and not blooming or else cut off the flowers. That's right, cut off the flowers! That will allow the plant's energy to go into producing roots and getting it established in the ground which is what you want at this stage. Don't worry, the flowers will come back.

If the annuals are in flats, use a sharp knife to separate the individual plants.

## **Perennials**

Most perennials can be planted in the spring or fall or even in the summer.

Remove all flowers, if present.

Some perennials are available in a bare-root condition (no soil on roots, unpotted). Keep the roots damp until you plant them.

## **Trees and Shrubs**

These are best planted in the late summer or early fall. Planting in early spring is also possible.

Remove all flowers, if present.

Some trees and shrubs will be in pots but more commonly, their root balls will be wrapped in burlap and tied in place. Make the hole about two or three times the breadth of the container or root ball but only deep enough to contain the root ball. Remove the twine, wire, or other binding material and also remove the burlap from the top of the root ball and peel back from the sides. The remaining burlap can sit on the bottom of the hole where it will later decompose.

After the plant is in the ground, build a small ridge of soil around the perimeter of the hole to allow water to accumulate and gradually soak in. (This structure is called a saucer.)

For large trees and shrubs, it's easier and safer (though more expensive) to use a professional service to plant them. Usually the nursery where they were bought will offer a planting service.

Keep well watered for at least a year by filling inside the saucer and letting it drain several times per watering. Doing this for two years is even better.

## **Vegetables**

Many vegetables can be grown by planting seeds direct into the ground; for these, simply follow the directions on the seed packet. Pay attention to the depth instructions because if you plant them too shallowly, the sun or birds might get them and if you plant them too deep, the seed may fail to germinate. Water them frequently but lightly (use a mist setting on your nozzle) until the seedling appears.

Some vegetables are available as bedding plants, either in flats or in pots. For potted vegetables, follow the general directions but for those in flats, use a sharp knife to separate the individual plants. Don't plant these until all danger of frost is past.