



Newsletter Landscaping and Trails Committee

High Desert Gardening

May 2021

Proper Planting Practices

S. M. Douglas

Before placing new plants in the landscape, it is important to give careful consideration to the plant and the site. When planting, practices such as spacing, digging and preparing the planting hole, and preparing the rootball are important. After transplants are in the ground, attention to watering and after-care are important to growth and survival.

Plant and Site Selection

- It is important to match the needs of the plant with what the site has to offer as closely as possible. This helps to maximize the vigor of the plant from the time of planting. The old axiom “the right plant for the right site” is always important, but is especially pertinent in the high desert using drip irrigation.
- Major factors for consideration include soil, slope, amount of light, space or size, hardiness zone, drainage, exposure, and soil pH.
- For naturally dry sites like the high desert, select xeric or drought-tolerant plants.

Planting Practices

Spacing:

- Avoid crowding or spacing plants too closely since crowded plants just don't grow well.

- Crowding also increases competition for available water.

Digging and preparing the planting hole:

- For both woody and herbaceous plants, the current method for preparing the planting hole is for it to be dug 2-4 times wider, but no deeper than the rootball to be planted (Figure 1). In contrast, the old method called for digging the hole no wider, but much deeper than the rootball (Figure 2). This method was modified to reflect what we now know about how roots grow. The current method prepares the soil to allow for horizontal root growth into the planting hole and eventually, into the planting site.
- Cut and remove any landscape fabric/weed barrier, if present.

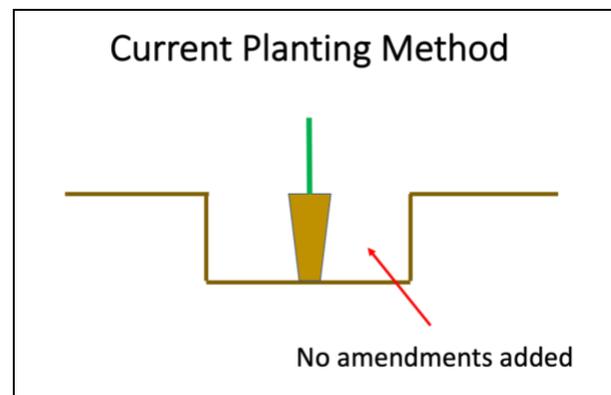


Figure 1. Current method for digging a planting hole.

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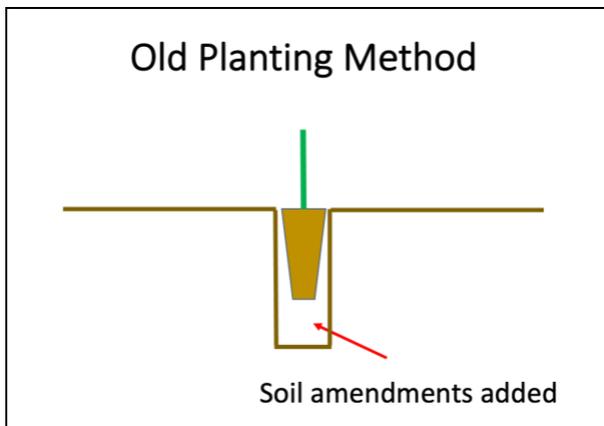


Figure 2. Old method for digging a planting hole.

- If you are concerned about your soil having adequate drainage, you can determine this by filling the hole with water. Allow it to drain, then refill it ~12 hours later. Then time how long it takes for the water to drain from the hole. The water should be gone in about 2 to 3 hours, your soil drains well.

Preparing the rootball and planting:

- Proper preparation of the rootball is unfortunately often overlooked, but it is particularly critical to plant growth in dry climates such as NM.
- In most cases, the soil dug from the planting hole (with minimal amendments) should be used to backfill the hole. However, if the soil is substantially lacking in organic matter (e.g., sand or clay), additional organic matter can be added to help with soil moisture retention.
- With balled and burlapped (B&B) material, the burlap should be completely removed or cut and folded down at the base of the rootball. When a wire basket is also present, the top 3rd of the basket should be cut and removed. These are often best done when the rootball is already in the planting hole.
- With container-grown woody and herbaceous plants, the rootball should be moist, but not wet at the time of planting. It should also be scored, cut, or carefully teased apart before planting. This is especially important if the root mass is very tight and dense. This treatment helps to stimulate the growth of new roots.

- Never transplant the plant too deep. This is extremely important for woody plants. The root flare should be level (or slightly above for heavy, clay soils) with the perimeter of the planting hole. For B&B material, this often requires opening the ball in order to locate the root flare.

Planting After-Care

Fertilizing:

- It is now generally accepted that trees and shrubs don't need to be fertilized until they have become established in the new site, several years after being transplanted. Herbaceous plants, such as bedding plants and vegetables, usually don't require fertilizer until they recover from transplant shock and are established, usually four-six weeks after transplanting.

Watering:

- It is important to use an efficient system for delivery of water to the plants such as drip irrigation. You can adjust the amount of water being delivered to each plant by choosing the correct drip emitter nozzle size and number of emitters per plant, as described in the previous article, "*Watering Tips for Mirehaven Residents*" (LTC Newsletter March (2) 2021).
- Newly transplanted plants need to be watered more frequently than surrounding established plants to replace water lost from sun and wind—you need to wet the rootball deeply and laterally to encourage roots to grow downward and outward. If you only have one zone of drip irrigation, supplemental watering may need to be done with a hose or watering can until the new transplants are established.

Mulching:

- Properly applied mulches help with soil moisture retention and have the added advantages of weed control, soil temperature moderation, and disease control.
- Materials for mulches that conform to Mirehaven ARC Landscape Guidelines include stone, gravel, and bark.

- If the soil is extremely dry, a deep watering should be done prior to applying the mulch.
- Improperly applied mulches cause many problems: when applied too thickly, the mulch impedes water penetration and smothers the roots. When applied too close to the stem, the mulch creates conditions favorable for the development of stem and crown rots. (Figure 3).
- Rules of thumb for mulching:
 - Mulches should be applied approximately 1 inch from the base of herbaceous plants and 6-12 inches from the base of woody plants (Figure 3).
 - The thickness depends upon the coarseness of the mulch. For example, fine shredded bark ~1 inch, coarse shredded bark ~2, and bark nuggets ~4-6 inches thick.

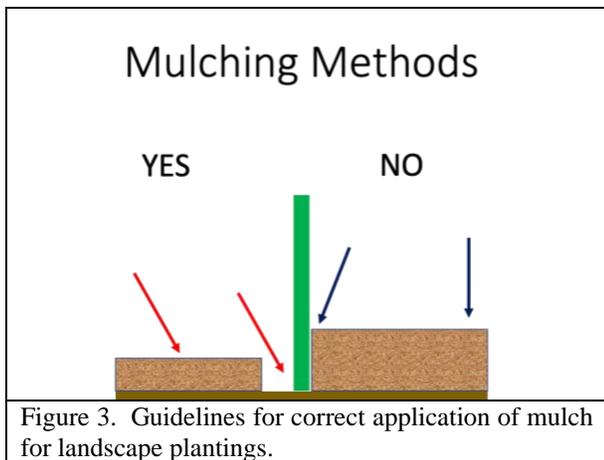


Figure 3. Guidelines for correct application of mulch for landscape plantings.

Additional Resources:

Refer to the following pages.

Resources

One of our kind neighbors (thank you Julianne) studied a site recommended in a recent article on Watering Tips and found a tool developed by the NM Office of the State of New Mexico State Engineer to develop a Xeriscape Plant List.

https://www.ose.state.nm.us/WUC/LearningXeriscape/XeriscapeGuide_ScreenResolution.pdf

This site provides information on Low-water-use native plants or adaptive plants that thrive in New Mexico's climate

On the site, scroll to the QR Square tool which will take you to the plant list site (if you use the QR Square). Here, you can search for plants by specific criteria for your garden (Region, Plant Category, Flower Color, Bloom Season, Sun Exposure, Plant Size, Deciduous/Evergreen, Water Requirement, Wildlife Attraction, or Soil Type).

Or, you can go directly to the same site on your computer at
<http://wuc.ose.state.nm.us/Plants/home.jsp>



For those with an I Phone, we found another interesting free app for those interested in identifying plants on walks called iNaturalist . You can take a picture of the plant with your phone and the app will identify possibilities for what you are seeing. Great fun!



Connect with Nature

[iNaturalist, LLC](#)

Designed for iPad

[View in Mac App Store](#)

WHAT KIND OF FLOWERING PLANTS SHOULD I CHOOSE?

READ MORE at

<https://www.505outside.com/plants/flowering-plants/>



With so many options to choose from, use the mature size, light exposure, water use and region-adapted information in the plant list to narrow down the combinations of flowers best suited to your planting spaces.

The 505outside.com website has excellent information on flowering plants at <https://www.505outside.com/plants/flowering-plants/>

This website shows pictures of 30 beautiful flowering plants suitable for this climate with accompanying descriptions. Also on the site, is a plant list of suitable plants that can easily be compared with the Mirehaven plant list as you choose plants for your garden. Four examples of flowers and their descriptions taken from 505outside site follow.

While many of these flowering plants are nearly as long-lived as shrubs and take up nearly as much space, others are smaller in stature and have a two- to ten-year lifespan that allows you to change the look of some spaces without a big investment in time or money. Xeric flowering plants are also ideal for planting in pots to dress up your patio or front entrance when that uncontrollable urge to play in the dirt strikes.



Crocus spp. Crocus

Exposure: Sun/Shade
Water: Medium
Height and Spread: 6" X 6"
Blooming Season: Spring

Description:

The Crocus is a brilliant addition to any landscape. It is one of the earliest bulbs to arrive and provides the first color to your landscape. The Crocus fits well in most landscapes because it can be found in various colors and sizes. It is easy to grow and care for and will return the following spring.



Full Sun, Part Shade

Autumn Joy Sedum, *Sedum telephium*



Low Water

Mature Size: 24"X 24"

Blooming Season: Summer

Flower Color: Red



Once you have gone through the fall with Autumn Joy in your garden, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it. Not what you typically think of as a Sedum, this tall upright variety blooms with large flower heads that start pink and age gracefully to a rich bronze. Nice as a dried everlasting flower.



Pineleaf Penstemon, *Penstemon pinifolius*



Full Sun



Low Water

Mature Size: 12"X 20"

Blooming Season: June-July Flower

Color: Orange Pineleaf...

Pineleaf Penstemon is an outstanding but often overlooked species from southern New Mexico and Arizona. Blooming for 6-8 weeks in mid-summer, the tubular orange flowers are profuse, attracting hummingbirds from miles around. *P. pinifolius* is long-lived and grows easily in both xeric and traditional perennial gardens. As the plant matures, the stems become woody, forming an attractive evergreen shrublet with bright green needle-like foliage.



Catmint, *Nepeta x fassenii*

Full Sun, Part Shade Medium Water Mature
Size: 8"X 24"
Blooming Season: May-August
Flower Color: Blue

Catmint has become a cornerstone in many xeriscapes because of its hardiness and long period of bloom. The first flush of blue flowers comes in late spring. When deadheaded promptly, a second flush blooms in late summer. Out of flower, the neat mound of gray-green foliage has a pleasing fragrance and texture. Adaptable to any well-drained soil, Catmint can handle a range of light from full sun to light shade. Trim back in late winter for prolific blooms the following spring.



With so many options to choose from, use the mature size, light exposure, water use and region-adapted information in the plant list to narrow down the combinations of flowers best suited to your planting spaces.

READ MORE at <https://www.505outside.com/plants/flowering-plants/>