

Planting Method for California Native Plants

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Rationale:

- The roots get introduced into the mostly native soil that was used to make the mud, thus eliminating the good soil/bad soil boundary that could cause the plant to become root-bound.
 - Replacing the top of the rootball with native soil prevents the potting soil from acting as a wick and drying out the plant in summer and from trapping the water in the potting soil and drowning the plant in winter.
 - Mulching slows down evaporation a lot — I've seen studies claiming that 3" will slow down evaporation by as much as 90%. In clay soil, that water will be available to the plant for the next several months.
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1. Before digging the hole, if the soil is rock-hard: get a gallon of water in a milk bottle, punch a small hole, place it over the location where the hole will be dug. The hole should be small enough to take about an hour to drain that 1 gallon. A pin, or a not-too-large needle works fine. This makes it possible to dig without using a jackhammer.
2. Next day: use a post-hole digger to dig a hole a bit wider than the pot and set the soil aside. The diameter of a standard post-hole digger is about perfect for 1-gallon plants. Get a 5-gallon utility bucket with a pinhole in it. Fill it with water, let it drain into the hole over several hours. The flow rate should be slow enough that the hole won't overflow. Refill the bucket twice. This may take until the next day.
3. Once the water has drained, Wash off top and sides of the rootball. The goal is to get rid of the top two inches of the potting soil (or at least an inch) and up to an inch on the sides. Most of the watering nozzles have a position labeled 'center' which is best for that operation. For plants that are somewhat root-bound, the 'jet' position may need to be used.
4. Mix the native soil with the washed off stuff and make mud out of it (heavy-duty rubber gloves are a must). Be careful not to make it too runny.
5. Pour some mud in the hole, put in the plant, pour the rest of the mud.
6. Adjust the plant height if necessary. Wiggle it gently to make sure the mud seeps into the spaces left in the rootball.
7. Mulch, mulch, mulch. Three inches of wood chips is what I typically use.

