



Watering Natives in Dry Times

We're having the worst rain year since Friends of Sausal Creek started planting natives. These tips were originally drafted to provide some watering ideas for our restoration site leaders, but will be useful to home gardeners who've planted natives this fall as well.

Since many natives are "drought tolerant when established," some of these ideas can help with the establishment part of the process. For newly planted natives, the biggest stress is the dry season in the first year or two after planting.

At Planting Time

Water the Hole

When you're planting, water the hole! First, dig the hole, then fill it with water and let the water soak in. When it drains, fill it again and let it drain. Then put in the plant and backfill. Once you've firmed the soil around the plant, add a bit of water to settle the dirt. You've now got water down where the roots need it most.

Plant a Bottle Too

Cut off the bottom of a medium-sized soft drink bottle and remove the cap. When you dig the planting hole, make it big, and plant the bottle upside-down, next to the plant. Then, as you're watering throughout the season, you can pour water into the bottle, which will water the plant deeply, instead of just watering the soil surface, where the water evaporates very quickly.

Moving Water

Moving a Lot of Water

Water Bladder

FOSC has a 60 gallon water bladder that fits in a pickup or car trunk. It is filled and emptied with a hose. You're basically siphoning water (yeah, the suck-on-the-hose part, but it's a food-grade plastic) so it's much easier if gravity is on your side, and you can get the bladder higher than the planting site! Contact Michelle if you want to use it at your site. Here's the source:

<http://www.baytecontainers.com/60galwaterbag.html>

Wheelbarrow Bladder

FOSC just ordered a couple of these to try out; they're 20 gallon bladders that ride in a wheelbarrow and pour by tipping the wheelbarrow. There's a special output nozzle to make the flow gentler, so you can pour onto plants or use it for filling buckets. Note that 20 gallons of water weighs 160 pounds so it will take strength to handle the wheelbarrow! Watch the video at:

<http://www.baytecontainers.com/20-gallon-watering-bag.html>



Moving Smaller Amounts of Water

Obviously, you can ask volunteers to bring watering cans that you can fill from hoses, bladders other handy water source. And any sort of buckets you can round up will help. Here are some other ideas:

- Coffee “boxes”: If you get Peet's or Starbucks coffee for your workdays, don't toss those boxes! Rinse them out and save them. If you keep the lid, you can fill them at home. Try not to get the cardboard too wet or your box will disintegrate. But you can still use the foil liners; you might need a bucket to carry them in. We need to experiment.
- Plastic newspaper bags are amazingly strong, and they are easy to fill even in shallow water. Tie a knot and you've got a water balloon! You can transport several in a 5-gallon bucket. At the planting site, position the bag near the plant — landscape staples help on steep slopes. Then prick a small hole so the water will drip slowly only the plant. (This takes a lot of bags, they aren't re-usable. And I haven't tried other kinds of plastic bags.)
- Various other plastic containers — such as large soda bottles or gallon milk jugs — also work well. Drip holes can be poked high up on the necks or even in the caps, making it possible to fill a lot of containers at home or at a hose near your site and then transport them.

Drip Irrigation Buckets

Drip buckets are especially effective for deep-watering shrubs and trees during late summer and fall during the first year or two. You can often tell by looking carefully at your plants if they're starting to suffer from lack of water. Change of leaf color, especially reddening, is one sign. Loss of turgidity is another, when leaves start looking a bit limp.



You can use any good-size plastic bucket that hasn't previously held some nasty substance, but 4-5 gallon buckets are best. If you've got a neighbor who uses those wasteful kitty-litter buckets, you're in luck! Poke just one hole about the size of an ice pick in the bottom, near the edge. It's helpful to draw an arrow on the outside of the bucket that points to the hole.

Position the bucket so that the hole is close to the plant and not obstructed, and fill the bucket with water. It takes about 20 minutes for 4 to 5 gallons of water to drip.

If you have several buckets and either a hose or a bladder, you can position all the buckets and fill them. After they drain, move the buckets to the next group of plants and fill 'em up again.

Version 1, January 2014, the worst rain year! Many thanks to Susan Schwartz of Friends of Five Creeks for adding ideas and helping structure the document. Please send any suggestions or corrections to: kpaulsell@pacbell.net.