

Fall is the Best Time To Plant

By Mark Peterson, SAWS Conservation Consultant



The “green” industry regularly promotes fall and winter as the best times to plant. This is true, but have you ever wondered why? It seems a bit illogical to plant a plant just as it enters — or will soon enter — dormancy. Here is the answer, short and simple.

In south Texas, we have two (maybe three) seasons: bearable, unbearable and intolerable. Native plants have adapted to the hot, dry summers by geminating their seeds in the fall or by extending their roots during the temperate winter. By developing a deep and extensive root system during the dormant season, native plants can survive extensive summer droughts fairly well.

But it's the dormant season, how can roots grow during the dormant season, you ask? Our soil doesn't freeze like northern soil, so plant roots are able to grow, albeit at a slower rate, throughout the fall, winter and early spring months. Extensive root systems equal survival and growth. So planting during the fall and winter provides the absolute best opportunity for plants to grow and thrive for the rest of their lives.

Follow these simple tips for great planting success.

- **Dig wide holes.** Whether roses or lantanas or red oaks, the wider the hole, the better. The minimum hole width should be twice the diameter of the container it came in.
- **Dig the hole only as deep as the root collar** (where the trunk and roots meet). Always check the top of the rootball. Some unscrupulous nursery people will throw dirt on top of the rootball when they upgrade the plant to a larger size pot, thus hiding the root collar resulting in a plant planted too deep to reach full potential.
- **Always use the original soil, plus a little compost and organic fertilizer,** to backfill the hole. Water the rootball and backfill thoroughly.

Finally, cover the planting area with two inches of woodchip or pinebark mulch. And, remember to water weekly using the 3-2-1 method.