



national
tree day

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Drought-busting Tips

Caring for native plants must continue whatever the weather.

Here are some tips from the experts to help you through a 'dry' planting.

Tips from the Australian Native Plants Society (formerly ASGAP)

Navigating the first year can be tough for seedlings, especially if we have a dry spring and summer. These easy hints will help you give your trees the best chance at growing into a wonderful natural haven for wildlife and an oxygen factory for the planet.

Selecting The Plants

Plants grow best in soils they are suited to, so it is critical to find out not only what the local plants in your area are, but where they grow best. This includes determining soil type, aspect and position; for instance, some may grow better in swampy areas, others preferring better drainage found on the tops of hills or preferring either a sunny or shaded site.

Healthy growing plants tolerate adverse conditions better than those that are struggling.

Seek advice from your local council or local native nursery or find your local branch of the [Australian Plants Society](#), [Bushcare](#), [Greening Australia](#) or [Landcare](#) group for trees suitable for your local area, position and soil.

And finally, remember to include shrubs and small plants because these understory plants are really important for food and shelter for native animals.

Preparing The Site

- **Clear the weeds.** Weeds compete with your plants for water and nutrients. Dig them out gently by the roots. Wherever possible, add weeds to your mulch (remove those that seed readily, like onion weed and

moth vine). **Make sure you only remove plants that are weeds!** If in doubt, do not remove any plant that you cannot identify as a weed. Ask your local Bushcare Officer or Environment Officer at your local council.

Planting The Trees

- Before planting, soak the seedlings in their containers in a tray of water
- Fill the hole with water (before the plant goes in) and allow to drain
- Trim any roots protruding from the bottom of the plant container. If you have to do this, also tip prune the plant to reduce stress and dehydration.
- Shape the soil surface to make a **shallow depression 3cm around the plant**. This will collect water from rain and hand watering. The depression should hold at least half a bucket of water.
- Water in gently, up to half a bucket per plant depending on soil dampness. Apply water **upslope** from the plant, **not** directly onto the root area.
- Check that **roots are not exposed to watering**. Add more topsoil if necessary.
- **Mulch** lightly around the plant to conserve soil moisture. Suppress weeds that may compete with the plant for water. Use dead leaves, compost or contact your local council for supply. Avoid heaping mulch against the plant as this can bring on stem rot and insect attack.
- Download our 'How to Plant a Tree' poster at <http://treeday.planetark.org/coords>.

Maintaining The Trees

- Monitor the new plantings for wilting. In **sandy or loamy soil, you may need water at least once a week - half a bucket of water** or more. In hot weather, water **every 2-3 days** for the first month until the plants are established.



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- In **clay soil**, water less frequently - **once every week to 10 days** for the first month.
- Water **early in the morning** or **late in the evening** to reduce evaporation.
- **Less frequent deep soaking** is better than more frequent light watering. A good soak encourages plants to develop strong, deep roots, which eventually reach the watertable. Shallow, light watering encourages roots to grow towards the surface, leaving them vulnerable to wind and dry periods.
- **In clay soil, be careful not to overwater.** Clay soil traps moisture and too much water will cause roots to rot.
- It is best **not to stake plants**. Staking can alter growth shape and encourage **smaller root systems**. When you have to stake a tree, use three stakes and soft material like an old stocking, forming a triangle. Remove the stake as soon as the plant will stand upright on its own.
- Surround the plant with a milk carton with the bottom cut out or a plastic guard held in place by 3 small stakes. This will create a **humid atmosphere** around the plant.

Tips From Greening Australia

Why plant in a drought ?

- Droughts are really challenging and there are no simple solutions.
- Lack of soil moisture is one of the biggest problems for tree planting.
- One way to cope in drought conditions is to water the plants in (ie hose or tip a bucket of water onto the seedling just after planting) and commit to after care. This is particularly important for community plantings - people need to share the load. New plants can get very heat stressed.
- The only good thing about a drought is that there is less competition from weeds for new plants.

Tips for improving survival of trees

- **Guarding** - if planting in an area where there are rabbits and other pests, recommend a tree guard like a milk carton and bamboo stakes.
- **Select local species** - trees, shrubs and grasses that are native to the area are likely to have the best chance of success. [Greening Australia](#) can assist with providing information on local species.
- **Ongoing care** - someone needs to take responsibility for keeping a check on weeds - these are competition for new plants. People also need to watch for pests, signs of stress if it's dry and in rural settings, it's important that sheep or cattle are not let in too soon after planting.
- **Preparation** - eg chip an area around the plants so that weeds don't get close. For a large scale site, it may be helpful to rip the site about 30 cm deep. If it's wet or waterlogged people can include mounds. [Greening Australia](#) can help with site preparation advice.
- **Avoid isolation** - don't have one tree on its own. Better to plant a group as they share the insect burden.

Alternative activities for drought-stricken areas:

Apart from planting trees, there are a range of activities that can take place in order to maintain the positive environmental outcomes and momentum of Tree Day in spite of the drought. These include:

- Bush regeneration
- Weed and pest control
- Native seed collection (please refer to [Florabank](#) guidelines)
- Direct seeding
- Monitoring
- Rubbish removal
- Interpretive nature walks