

WATERING CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANTS

WE LIVE IN AN AREA WITH LATE FALL AND WINTER RAINS BUT WITH DRY SUMMERS AND EARLY FALL. One advantage of many natives is that they seldom need to be watered once they are established.

There are exceptions to the following Suggestions.

1. All native seedlings and cuttings need regular moisture when they are getting established. So the best time to plant is after the first fall rains.
2. Most natives need some summer water during their first few years until they develop a deep root system. Check with a probe to see if the soil is moist,
3. Occasional watering of established plants in summer may improve their appearance. Some do not tolerate water on their leaves when it is hot.
4. Natives to wet areas need some summer water as will natives from the high mountains.
5. Natives of Redwood and other coastal forests also need some summer water when planted in inland areas.
6. Natives planted in sandy soil may require more summer water. BUT some natives can be killed by summer water (after established). Soil fungi grow rapidly when conditions are wet and warm. Many chaparral shrubs and native oaks are sensitive to summer water. Heavy clay soils do not drain well and are not tolerated by many native plants.

The following are a few “rules of watering” But each native plant species has its own set of requirements

1. Water in the early morning or evening. Much water is lost during midday watering. Evening water May encourage mildew.
2. Water thoroughly and deeply. You want roots to grow deeply so the plants can survive dry periods. Dig a hole or use a probe to see how deep the water has penetrated. Lawn roots are shallow so should be on separate watering schedules.
3. How frequently you will need to water will depend on the soil type, the type of the environment the plant comes from, the slope of the area, the season the amount of wind, and the amount of organic matter in the soil. A layer of mulch at least an inch deep can help retain water and restrict weed growth.
4. Drip systems can often be best for establishing shrubs and trees. Sprinkling systems with computerized timers simplify watering but must be used with care.
5. Plantings in the shade and on the damper north-east slope of hills and mountains Do not need as much water as those in full sun on the dryer south west slopes of hills and mountains.
6. Water a lot after planting and the first year. After this you can gradually cut back on water, particularly summer water. BUT check the plants and the soil to make sure that they are getting adequate water.