

Is it too Late to Plant This Year?

Published 7/20/20 - The image is public domain with the title "Wretched lettuce... I am spending entire days watering it and it is still thirsty," from 'The joys of country life,' published in *Le Charivari*, October 4, 1865.

I vacillated between naming this article what I did and "It's Not Too Late to Plant This Year." There's probably some educational or writing reason to choose one over the other, a reason I am unaware of, but either gets us started onto the topic.

The "is it too late" question is one we hear this time of year more than any other. For whatever reasons, most people believe spring is the only time to plant. For annuals and most vegetables that is correct. For most perennials it isn't the only time to plant. Actually in a little more than a month we'll be in a really good time to plant most trees, shrubs, and perennials. Not that now isn't a really good time, it's just more probable that we can have more really hot days this month than the following months. Really hot doesn't preclude planting, it just means more care has to be given as far as watering and mulching.



For our area the first frost (32 degrees) or hard freeze (below 28) generally occurs within the first 10 days in October. A hard freeze signals the end of the growing season for most plants and initiates serious plant preparations for winter. So going backwards 3-6 weeks from the beginning of October gives a newly planted plant enough time to acclimate and root into the ground brings us to the last part of August to the middle of September. If planted and cared for correctly, the plants have a wonderful start to their lives as part of your landscape. When the freezing winter season finally does arrive, the plants simply go into dormancy, a process that most newly purchased trees, shrubs, and perennials have successfully accomplished at least once before.

Once in the ground all plants benefit more from two actions than anything else; watering and mulching. Mulch can be organic like shredded cedar bark or inorganic like rock. At least 2 inches is the recommended minimum depth, anything over 4" is unnecessary. The mulch provides a barrier to the soil and not only helps suppress weed germination and growth but also moderates soil moisture levels.

Watering is a definite and like I mentioned in the previous article the majority of outdoor plant failures is due to a lack of water. This then begs the question, how much to water? Answer: it depends. Specifics on watering alone can take up much more space than we have here. Daily temperatures, wind, slope, and soil type all play factors. In general, for a new tree or shrub, plan on watering daily or every other day for the first couple of weeks, with the goal of providing 2-3 gallons each time for a 5' tall ornamental tree; bigger needs more, smaller less, hotter and windier more, denser soils less. Established trees even need watering in the hottest periods, not on a daily basis, but measured in the tens of gallons of water weekly.

We'll get into watering details again. I will conclude today with this message, a message that will be repeated again and again in the future: do not rely on lawn sprinkler systems to adequately water trees and shrubs.

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