

MIDSUMMER TRANSPLANTING OF WILDFLOWERS

Tips for Success

The best time to transplant native plants, indeed, the best time to transplant most perennials - native or horticultural -- is when they are dormant. In most states, this is usually in early spring and in fall. That is the time when transplanting least disturbs the plant's root system and when stress on the plant is minimal.

But sometimes transplanting must take place at less than ideal times: spring and summer when the plant is in bloom or fully leafed out. WITH MUCH CARE it is sometimes possible to have success transplanting at this time of year too. The more of these 18 steps you can follow, the more you are apt to have your hard work of transplanting pay off. Experienced gardeners will find most of these suggestions to be simple common sense.

Equipment needed:

- sharp spade
- pruning shears
- ice cream size pails and/or child's plastic toboggan for transporting plants
- plastic shopping/grocery bags for the same purpose
- water and watering cans
- mulch

Steps:

1. Get permission from the landowner or manager before transplanting.
2. Ahead of time, determine the site into which the wildflowers will be planted. Too often people dig plants and then are unable to figure out a good place to put them.
3. Transplant on cool, rainy days.
4. Wait until the cool of the evening (after 5:00PM) to do your digging.
5. Ideally, plants should be watered well several hours before digging. If that is not possible, water them in their temporary holding container ASAP.
6. Ideally, with a sharp pair of pruning shears, remove all flowers or fruits (seed capsules, berries, etc.) Before digging. If that is not possible, remove them at the earliest possible time. This will allow the plants to expend their energy on growing new roots and not on forming seeds and flowers.
7. Using a sharp spade, dig up as much of the root system as possible and keep the moist soil around the roots. Don't shake soil off of roots. The goal here is to disturb the roots, especially the fine root hairs, as little as possible. Equally important is the preservation of the mycorrhizal fungi that often are associated with the roots of your wildflower transplant. These fungi help the wildflower in many ways.
8. Reduce the amount of foliage with a sharp pair of shears, especially at the tips of the plant, by as much as 50%. Use your good judgement here. Your goal is to match the above ground parts of the plant to the root system below. If, when you dig up the plant, you sever some roots, you should then reduce the foliage above ground accordingly.

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9. Keep your transplants cool and moist (protect from drying winds) as you transport them to the recipient site.
10. Re-plant as soon as possible. The same evening that you dig is ideal. The following evening is next best. Avoid re-planting during the heat of the day.
11. If you can't transplant immediately, store your plants in a protected, cool, moist place such as a cool garage or under the dense shade of shrubbery.
12. Re-plant in a site that matches the habitat from which the plant was taken: similar shade, slope, soil, moisture levels, associated plants, etc.
13. Re-plant at the same depth that the plant was growing originally. Often the stem of a plant changes color at the soil surface; perhaps white below the soil and green above. Use this plus your at-site observations as a guide.
14. Add soil around the transplant to the proper level. Firm the soil gently around the plant to eliminate large air pockets.
15. Mulch the transplant well with weed-free grass clippings, leaves, etc. The more you can match the natural mulch of the plant's native habitat, the better.
16. Water your transplant well using water that is close to the temperature of the air or slightly cooler. Avoid hot or cold water.
17. If despite your best efforts, the plant shows signs of wilting after transplanting, try to provide protection from the direct rays of the sun and from drying winds.
18. Keep the roots of your transplants evenly moist for at least two weeks. Too much water and the plant roots will rot; too little water and the plant will wilt, shrivel and may die.

As with life in general, so it is with transplanting or salvaging wildflowers. It is often impossible to do everything you would like. Unexpected problems arise -- and time to do the job may be limited. Still, with knowledge and experience, you can be optimistic about the possibilities of success.

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