



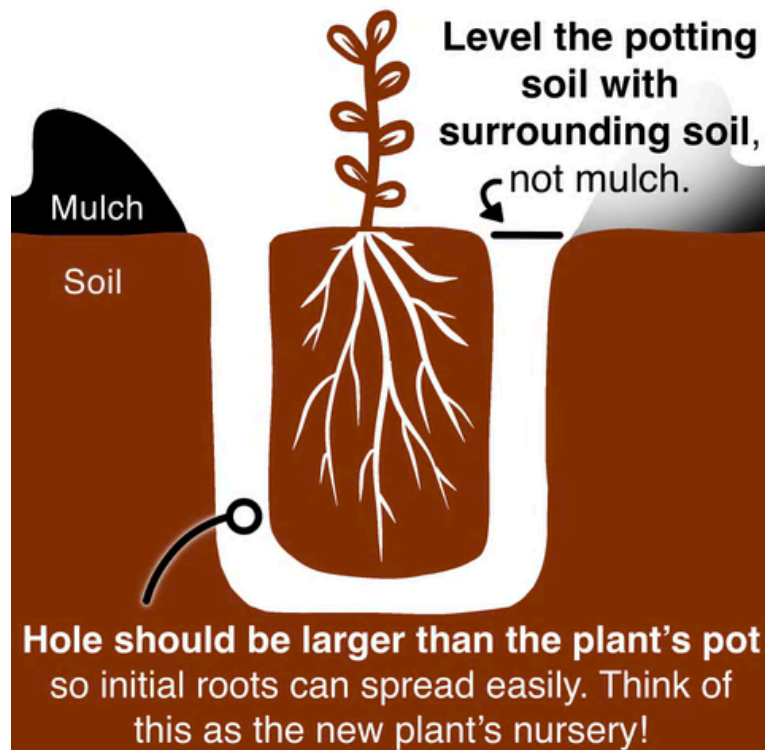
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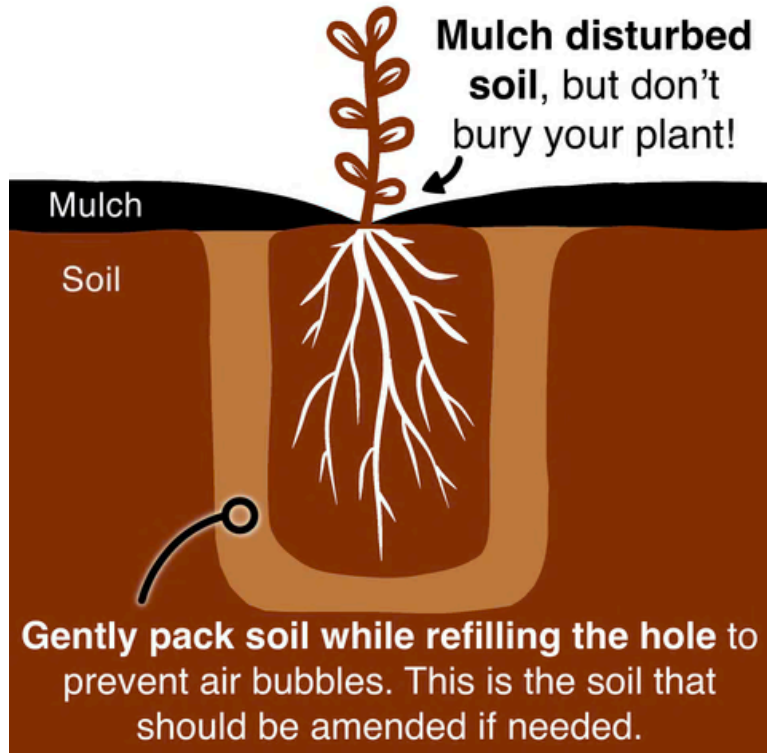
## **How to Plant Natives**

So you've acquired your new native plants- now what? We often get questions from beginner gardeners- or experienced gardeners just getting into natives!- who want to make sure they're planting their new additions *properly*.

We've got good news- **planting natives is no different than planting any other potted plant!** It's nothing to worry over! If you have gardening experience, you're good to go. If you're new and want a rundown, or experienced and want to brush up, read on. We'll start with some helpful info graphics, then elaborate with a step-by-step list.

### **The Helpful Info Graphics:**





A picture's worth a thousand words- but it's challenging to get this angle with a physical camera. This is the gist of it, just remember to water plants when you're done to help them settle in! There's only one curveball in there: that soil can be "amended." We'll explain that in the step-by-step below!

### The Step-by-Step

- 1. Don't stress about getting it perfect.** If a plant doesn't thrive in one spot, it can, almost without exception, be moved. Large woody plants or plants with taproots will be more stressed and may have somewhat lower transplant success but, given adequate water while their roots reestablish, most herbaceous plants are hardly fazed by transplanting. Gardening is always a learning experience, and involves some trial and error. Do your best with the tips below, but don't let uncertainty stop you! Start small if you're worried, but start!
- 2. Select your planting site.** Know what conditions your species wants (water, light, and soil requirements) and it's adult size, and plant accordingly! Native Plants Unlimited has resources available during our pre-orders and public sales that give the growing requirements of each species. Feel free to save digital info or take pictures of our plant cards on your phone for future reference! Lost that info, or want more? No problem, there's information available online for most native species and a quick search usually does the trick. Remember: common

names are often used for multiple, possibly very different species- look up information using the scientific name for the best results!

- 3. Dig your hole.** Set aside any mulch to be replaced after planting is finished. The hole should be larger than your plant's pot so it will have plenty of loose soil to root into right away! There's no hard and fast rule for this, but it's good to be able to fit your fingers in the hole along-side a small pot on all sides- this makes it easier to pack dirt in the hole as you refill it. The larger the pot, the more extra room you should give it. If the soil is very compact and/or clay, you can make cuts into the sides and bottom of the hole with your digging tool to make it easier for the plant's new roots to spread into surrounding soil.
- 4. Optional: amend your soil.** Think of the soil around the roots of your new plant as its "nursery". If conditions aren't optimal for a particular species, you can tweak their nursery space to give them a strong start and the best odds of adapting to your overall conditions. In central Indiana, this often means mixing nutrient rich soil in with native clay soil to create a nursery with clay loam soil that is much easier for roots to establish in than hard-pan clay.\* Species that prefer dry and/or well drained soil (i.e. butterfly milkweed, prickly pear) often benefit from soil amended with sand, and maybe a small amount of gravel, to encourage drainage and keep their roots from rotting. Soil does not generally need to be completely replaced (some more particular woodland or wetland species are a possible exception).
- 5. Place the plant.** Add some of the soil that was removed (or amended soil) to the hole until the soil surface in the plant's pot (when placed in the hole) is equal to the surface of the surrounding soil. Do not level the soil surface inside the pot with the top of surrounding mulch! Mulch is full of air pockets, and roots may dry out and die if exposed to too much air. After the plant is leveled, pop it out of the pot and place it in the hole. Younger plants might lose some soil off their roots- don't panic, just try to keep as much soil in place as possible. Older plants whose pots are dense with roots appreciate their root ball being loosened up before planting- tap the root ball against the side of the hole, or use the tips of your fingers to rough up the outside it a bit. Place plant in the hole again and adjust the depth of the hole as needed to re-level the plant.
- 6. Fill soil in around the plant.** Time to tuck in the new addition! The main concern here is to avoid leaving large pockets of air as you fill the hole. Gently press the fresh soil down as the hole is filled to prevent voids. Do not pack the soil tightly, as compaction can also harm roots.
- 7. Mulch the disturbed soil.** Mulch keeps soil from eroding and drying out quickly, so is good for most species! Mulch can be leaf litter, rough chipped wood, typical landscaping mulch (avoid dyed mulch and rubber mulch), or, in dense, mature plantings, simply dead leaves and stalks from the previous year. Cover

all disturbed soil with mulch, but don't bury your plant's stem! Just as roots don't like being exposed, stems don't (usually) like being covered!

8. **Water the new plant.** A bit of water helps the soil settle and ensures all of the soil the roots are now touching have the same moisture level, which keeps the roots happy. No need to flood the plant out, just thoroughly moisten the new soil.
9. **Be ready to protect your plants from deer and rabbits if necessary.** We've got tips for protecting your plants and making fencing/cages in a different blog post- [click here to jump to our blog post masterlist!](#)

That's it, you did it! That's all there is to it- don't be stressed by some traditional gardening sources that give specific measurements for pot size v.s. hole size. This advice is well meant, but unnecessary in native plantings. Remember, if you're planting native plants, you're planting species that *want* to grow in your area. Keep an eye on new plants in their first summer and keep their soil from completely drying out\*\*, but after that most plants will be established and maintain themselves well.

That's it for this primer, we hope it helped! Best wishes to you, your new native plantings, and all the wildlife it will support, from the NPU Crew!

\*Don't fear the clay in clay loam! Clay loam is suitable for most commonly planted prairie species including coneflowers, black-eyed susans, penstemon, common milkweed, asters, and more. Many native species tolerate poor soil very well, and not "spoiling" these species on nutrient rich loam can help limit their height, and so limit the need to tie up exceedingly tall plants that have flopped over.

\*\*Species that need dry and/or well drained soil should be watered less (such as butterfly milkweed, that is commonly killed by overwatering), and woody plants that take longer to establish and may need supplemental water in their second year. Knowing the requirements of the species you're planting is key!