

Planting a Shrub or Tree on a Slope

Over the years, plants generally establish and grow faster if certain details are attended to while planting, the main points being: you want to trap water as it flows down the hill and direct it to the plant, you want to improve the soil in the planting hole, and you want to mulch around the plant.

Just like preparing a planting hole on flat land, a planting hole on a slope should be at least twice as wide and just the same depth as the plant's root ball (though the hole can be a bit elongated to fit the contour of the slope as opposed to the typical round hole on a flat ground). Soil is improved with a 50/50 mix of good quality planting mix such as Master Nursery Planting Mix or Edna's Best Planting Mix. The trick with planting on a hill is that the berm you build around the plant to hold water is, of course, only on the downhill side of the plant. And the plant itself ends up being planted almost within the berm instead of beside it. A basin for holding water sits behind the plant on the hill rather than surrounding it.

Planting begins by first leveling out a terrace or table on the hillside where you want to plant. Carve away the slope above the planting hole with a pick and shift the resulting soil to build up a table area level with the eventual planting hole. This table will be pretty big and can provide a stable place for you to stand while you finish the work. Carve out a table 2 or 3 feet wide depending on the size of your planting container (2 or 3 times wider than the width of the root ball). Smooth out the hill above the plant where you have cut into the soil so that the old slope and the new slope transition together smoothly.

Dig a planting hole in this new flat terrace and improve the soil by adding planting mix at a rate that creates a 50/50 mix of native soil and planting mix. Feed with Master Start fertilizer and Osmocote fertilizer by adding the appropriate amount to the amended soil and mix together thoroughly. Gently rough the outer edges of the root ball.

Set the plant somewhat forward in the hole so that the top of the root ball is level with, or a little above the height of the original soil level, and so that enough space is left behind the plant to form shallow basin to hold water. The plant should be set at just the right level and position in the hole so that erosion over time neither exposes the root ball nor covers it up. A plant set too far back into the hill or too low in the hole is in danger of being covered over by dirt if debris falls down the hill from above. A plant set too far forward or too high in the hole is in danger of becoming exposed if water causes the soil around it to be washed down the hill. **(Never place any soil above the root ball, covering the stem.)**

When the plant is set and the back-fill is compacted around the plant, use all excess remaining planting soil to strengthen and enlarge the earth berm in front of the plant. The soil should be gently smoothed into the surrounding slope so that it looks as though it has been there a long time.

Mulching around the entire plant and over the face of the berm with 2-3" of shredded redwood bark will protect the soft new soil berm from eroding away. The mulch will also help keep the soil cool and prevent weeds. Keep the mulch 3" away from the base or trunk of the plant.

Water the plant well after you are finished planting. Let the water soak in, and then water again. If you are using drip irrigation, provide at least 2 drips to the plant and place them somewhat uphill from the plant so that gravity

carries the water down to the plant roots. Monitor the condition of the planting berm, especially during the first 2 months, and continue checking for a couple of years while the plant establishes.

If the plant has been installed correctly, the contour of the land will capture rainwater or irrigation water as it flows down the hillside. The berm will be built strong enough to weather a couple of winters without eroding away, and the plant will never be in danger of being covered up by dirt and debris falling down from higher up the hill.

