



## Establishing Your Annual Plantings in the Landscape

During the first 7 – 10 days, your bedding plants in the landscape go through radical changes in environment and care. At RCOP we use every method available to prepare your plants to perform in the landscape but the next, and most crucial steps, occur after the plants have been delivered.

- **Bed/ Soil Preparations:** Heavy clay soils will need to be amended to improve aeration and drainage. Loose sandy soils will need to be amended to improve water retention. Annuals have fine, fast growing root systems that are less tolerant of very wet or very dry conditions. They also have only a short period of time to become established before the mid-summer heat.
- **Irrigation:** Prior to receiving the plants, have the irrigation set up and test run it to be sure it will function. After the plants have been planted and are in desperate need of water is not the best time to find out that “Houston, we have a problem”.
- **Receiving:** Plants should be watered immediately after they have been unloaded. This is to settle jostled roots back into the pots and freshen up the plants after shipment. Pay special attention to the edges of the flats as these will dry out very quickly due to the increased air circulation.
- **Transporting and Preparing to Transplant:** Before moving the plants to the job site, be sure there are no dry pots. Irrigate as needed. When loading your vehicle, be sure to protect the plants from wind damage. At highway speeds, the plants experience the equivalent of near hurricane force winds.
- **Removing the Plants from the Pots:** Gently squeeze the sides of the pot to loosen the roots from their home. DO NOT PULL the plant out by the top. Instead, turn the container upside down and ease the plant out of the container.
- **The New Home:** The hole should be at least 1/3 wider and 1/3 deeper than the pot. Plant to the same depth as the plant is now. It is better to err slightly on the high side, remembering that planting too deep will lead to stem rot, and planting too high will cause unnecessary drying of the root ball and poor stability.
- **Watering In:** After transplant, the bed will need to be irrigated thoroughly to eliminate air pockets and set up the connection between the root ball and the soil. Follow the same methods you would use for a tree or shrub and allow the water to well up around the transplant, recede, and irrigate again. This ensures that the plants will be off to a good start.
- **The next 7 to 10 days are the Most Critical:** For the success of your new design, the root ball must be continually checked for moisture as the porous soil needed during production will dry much faster than the surrounding field soil. This will lead to plants wilting when the bed appears wet. You should check moisture levels at least daily for the first couple of days and gradually wean away as the roots start to move out of the transplanted root mass. As this happens you can then decrease the frequency of irrigation, but irrigate more deeply.
- **The Time between Irrigations:** This should be the amount of time necessary for the soil to dry to a depth just below the existing roots. The idea is to encourage the roots to chase that moisture deeper into the soil. If you do not water sufficiently deep (at least 6-8”), the roots will stay where the water is and you will not be able to get away from the ‘little bit every day’ cycle. Getting away from this cycle is crucial to your annual’s performance later in the season. The deeper the roots are the less often you need to irrigate. This means less labor, less disease from wet foliage, and plants that can better withstand the draught and heat stresses of July/ August.