

The Planting of Potted Liners Safely

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Late summer or fall planting has many great advantages over spring planting. The roots will settle in and do some growing. The plants get a jump on spring growth. The plants will be able to tolerate next summer's drought much better. It can be a major win-win.

But two possible negatives are heaving up by freezing temperatures and death during a dry period right after planting. No one I spoke with can recall heaving being a problem in the last 30 years or so. It is easy to say, but irrigation should be available as insurance, especially for potted liners.

Potted liners are available in late summer and fall. It is too risky to lift and plant bareroot liners until they go dormant in early November. Bareroot liners must be dormant to transplant.

A producer told me years ago that he liked to plant potted liners during fair week in Warren Co. (first full week after Labor Day), because it always rains. I noticed that it did not rain that year, nor several since. In fact, I have heard of local farmers planning on taking up hay on school day during the fair to get free labor.

Potted liners are great, but too expensive to risk losing during a dry spell. Hauling water is no fun either. Gambling on rainfall is risky.

Allow me to back up and go through the sequence. Prepare the soil before the liners arrive to avoid delay. Potted liners should be watered as soon as they are received and unloaded. It helps settle the media from the bouncing around. Set them in the shade. Look at the roots.

Potted liners are normally watered daily during the growing season. Check the plants daily and water as needed. Lack of water for only a day or two can cause death of plant tissue because the plant may be root bound in a small container. Liners raised in plug trays will require daily watering, but over-watering can cause root rot.

It is good to separate the roots at planting. The degree of effort depends on the amount of excessive roots and encircling. It is essential to cut, rip or remove excessive encircling roots. Three shallow, vertical slits with a sharp knife may suffice. Cut away any roots that might become girdling roots in 10 years. Think about that.

Some producers without irrigation have learned to shake as much media from the roots as possible. Soaking the roots just prior to transplanting is a very good idea.

Many producers feel that dipping roots into a water holding hydrophilic polymer such as Terrasorb just prior to transplanting helps ensure survival if rains do not come as hoped.

A dry soil will pull moisture away from the media, so it makes sense to remove as much artificial media as possible. Plant a well watered root mass, use Terrasorb or just irrigate within the first few days, depending on soil moisture and rainfall.

I have seen potted liners die within the first week when planted into a dry soil and no moisture came by way of irrigation or rain. Irrigation sure is nice when you need it. Just how much effort would it take to get water to one field and lay drip? The Ag. Enhancement Grants can help.

Plant with no more than a half inch of soil over the media; but do cover it to eliminate the wicking of moisture. This is critical. I have observed plants that were planted 4 inches too deep begin showing symptoms by mid or late summer. It is usually too late to pull the soil back or lift them. Both activities have major negative consequences.

Check the moisture of the soil around the roots every 2 days after planting.

The planting of potted liners in late summer or fall is a great idea for those that can irrigate. It is a gamble without irrigation. Good luck.

Comm/Field/Plant potted liners safely, 9-08

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