

HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIFFICULT TO TRANSPLANT ROOTSTOCKS

Maintaining proper moisture within the plant is a critical factor. Dehydration occurs through exposure to temperatures (both warm & cold), sunlight and dry air or wind. Exposure to these elements for even short periods can lead to problems with transplant losses and slow growth response. Conversely, too much moisture can promote mold and disease. So, what to do?

First, handle with care. Transport plants under cover to shield from wind and sun. Apply water and possibly dampened packing material at time of loading. Control temperature during transportation if possible between 38 degrees – 50 degrees.

Proper storage is the second step in the process. One option is to utilize a tote and stand the rootstocks upright in the tote with 6-8" of damp (**not wet**), sawdust or peat moss around the roots. With this method, the top tie on the bundle can be removed to allow the tops room to spread out. The media around the roots should be checked regularly (2-3 times per week), and moistened when necessary. If inspections reveal mold, fungicide spray can easily be applied. If storage is long term, poly can be secured over the top of the tote to retain humidity.

Prior to planting, many nurseries trim roots and tops and apply chemical treatments to the plant. This is another point where care must be taken to avoid dehydration during processing.

After dormant long-term storage, some plants respond best if awakened gradually prior to planting. This can be accomplished by sweating to encourage bud break. The process involves placing a poly tent over the tote of seedlings (stood upright in damp media). Cut several slits in the poly to allow for some air exchange. Move the tote to a location with indirect sunlight and moderate temperatures.

Inspect daily, monitoring media moisture and bud development. When the buds are swollen and start to break, the plants can be planted or moved back to cold storage for a short time until field conditions are right for planting. The sweating process can take from 17-21 days and make a significant difference for varieties such as Crataegus, Gleditsia, Tilia, Robinia and Cercis.