

# Top Maintenance Tips & Tricks

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Starting your maintenance program goes hand-in-hand with pre-booking your order with your supplier. *A Timeline for Working with Your Grower* is featured in the Volume 1 (Spring 2008) issue – find it in our Newsletter Archive at [balllandscape.com](http://balllandscape.com).



## Buy “Fresh”

- Fresher plants **establish quicker** in the landscape. Avoid overgrown and rootbound plants that have been “held” too long.
- Work with your grower to receive plants at “**first bud stage**” rather than in flower.



- If you do receive **rootbound plants**, pop out the plant and gently uncoil the roots with fingers. This speeds the plants’ ability to root and take up nutrition. Avoid cutting or crushing plant roots as this introduces disease and slows establishment.

## Make Your Bed

● Know **pH levels** (soil alkalinity) – most bedding plants prefer slightly acidic soil with a pH of 6.5 to 6.8. Most plant yellowing is a result of pH problems. Petunias and geraniums show yellowing at higher pH and with too much watering. Beds amended with peat moss and pine straw will have lower pH. Amend with lime as needed.

- Get a **hand-held pH meter** for crew leaders and save yourself money from “overcorrecting soil problems.”

● Check for too much salt. **Leaf burn** caused by high EC (salts) may be corrected by “leaching” (heavy watering) with clear water before planting. Beds exposed to Winter salts should be leached thoroughly before planting.

- Incorporate a slow-release granular fertilizer for **season-long plant health**.

A single shot of liquid fertilizer at planting will help overcome transplant shock as roots establish.

● **Don’t rototill last year’s mulch** into beds. Uncomposted mulch binds the soil nutrition, resulting in yellowing. Treat these beds with high nitrogen feed at planting to “green up” and establish the plants quickly.



## Hold ‘Em

If plants have to be held for a few days before planting in the landscape, keep them well-watered and out of areas with extreme heat, like full-sun parking lots.

## Plant at the Right Height

Transplant plants too high and they dry out. Too low and they form secondary stem roots, making them less stable and more likely to fall over in the wind. Set plants at the same height as they were growing in their container.



## Thumbs Up for Smart Watering

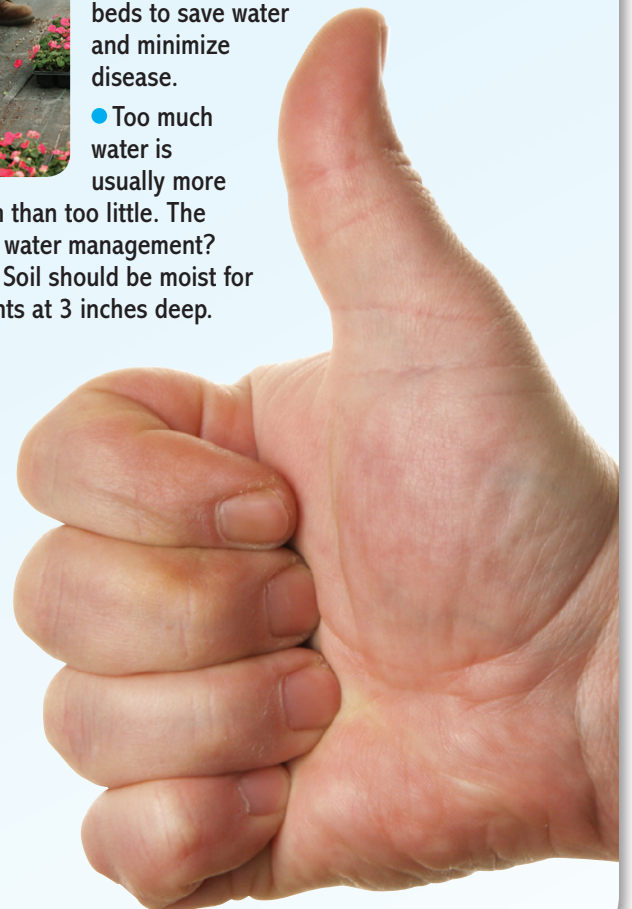
● Water your planting flats and beds prior to planting. This avoids the “plant float” associated with the first watering in heavily amended beds, and helps plants to establish faster.



- Set irrigation to water beds in early morning. Plant leaves will dry during the day and lower disease incidence. Water less when plants fill in beds to save water and minimize disease.

- Too much water is usually more

of a problem than too little. The best tool for water management? Your thumb! Soil should be moist for bedding plants at 3 inches deep.



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