

## Alternate Planting Method

Some people like to use a “mudding in” system to plant ocotillo and other plants where it is hard to get the dirt packed in around and under the roots.

For this method, dig your hole to the proper depth and place the ocotillo in the hole. Have someone hold the ocotillo straight up and then add a few inches of soil. Turn on the hose to start filling the hole with water. As the water wets the soil, slowly add more soil so it gets wet as well, making a heavy muddy mixture. Slowly, chop it with your shovel to mix it up some. Be careful not to hit the roots. Don't get the mixture too wet, not like soup.

Large ocotillo may need temporary stabilization for the “mudding in” technique. Leave the canes tied up and use 3 ropes as guy-wires, tied to the canes about two thirds of the way up. After the soil dries out in a few days, remove the guy-wires and untie the ocotillo canes. The three stake stabilization method can then be installed if needed.

## Ocotillo Living Fences

Ocotillo fences are made from canes cut off a live ocotillo and held together in a row with wire weaving in and out to hold them vertical. The base of the canes are planted in dirt so the canes can grow and stay strong. Not all the canes will root but hopefully many will. The use of a root growth stimulation hormone may help. Ocotillo canes that are harvested and planted will never become a fully rounded plant, basically just remain a single cane although some branching may occur over time. These fences are expensive and not too plentiful as they are labor intensive to make and results in the destruction of many healthy ocotillos.

## Arizona Native Plant Tags

The yellow State of Arizona Native Plant tag is to remain on the ocotillo until planted. It is against Arizona laws to transport a native plant that was removed from its original growing location without a valid tag attached to the plant. This does not apply to cultivated plants grown from seed or cuttings. Violation of the law may constitute a felony and may subject the violator to a fine, up to \$250 per plant. Once the ocotillo is planted, remove the tag and keep it as proof of ownership. The tags may not be reused.

You may relocate ocotillos on your property or destroy them without any tags or permits unless you are clearing 1/3 of an acre or more. Then a permit must be obtained and a native plant inventory will probably be required.

## Three Stake Stabilization Method

The three stake method can be installed to stabilize an ocotillo if you think the roots are not large enough to hold it steady. Small movements at the base can break off new fine roots. Once you untie the canes, you can then pound three stakes evenly spaced around the ocotillo. The stakes should be about 2 to 3 feet long. Steel half inch rebar, metal conduit, or steel water pipe works well. Locate each one about 12 to 16 inches from the base and next to a large cane. Drive the stake with enough left to securely tie it to a large cane. Leave stakes in place for 3 to 4 years.

## TCSS Contact Information

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# Planting & Care of your bare-root Ocotillo



*Your ocotillo was rescued by volunteer members from the “Cactus Rescue Crew” of the Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society.*

*It was rescued from a Greater Tucson area to be cleared for new development, a road widening, or possibly a new utility line.*

*Thanks to a conscientious developer, the Cactus Rescue Crew, and you, this Native Plant will have a new home instead of being destroyed.*

## Find the South side of the Ocotillo

The ocotillo canes are tied together to make digging, transporting and replanting easier. It also minimizes the breakage of the canes when handling. We normally put a half inch diameter white dot on one of the canes on larger ocotillo. Usually it is about a foot up from the ground to indicate south on the ocotillo. We feel it is important to orient plants in the same direction that they were growing when you plant them although we have no proof that it does make a difference for the ocotillo.



## Trim Broken Roots and Canes

Before planting, trim only roots and canes that are broken. Trim above the broken part leaving as much of the root as possible. Also trim the jagged ends of the roots that broke off when it was dug up.

## Pick a Good Location

Pick a location that will not have standing water from heavy rains (ponding). Ocotillo do like more water than cacti but still need good drainage. Ocotillo grow in the open and like full sun. Shade cloth is not needed.

## Dig a Hole

Dig a hole the diameter of the roots and deep enough to plant it to the soil line on the base of the plant. The soil line is generally a few inches below where all the canes join together for a six foot tall ocotillo. Planting a half inch to one inch deeper won't hurt. Be sure the soil in the bottom of the hole has good drainage (a sandy granular soil). Digging too large a hole will make the packing and stabilization process very difficult.

## Plant it

Position it in the hole so the soil line is at ground level. Place sandy dirt around and under it so the roots are in contact with soil (use the end of your shovel or a digging bar to firmly pack the soil to hold it vertical). Guy-wires do not work well as the canes are too flexible. The base should remain stable in winds so the new fine growth roots are not broken off.

If you think you need to stake a larger ocotillo because the roots do not extend out very far to stabilize the ocotillo, you can use the "Three Stake Method" described on the back page. For medium sized ocotillo, you can press rocks into the ground above the roots. This helps prevent rodents from digging up your soil as well.

## Untie the Ocotillo - Please...

Carefully remove the tie-wires or rope from the ocotillo to allow the canes to open up. If multiple ties, do the top one first. The canes will spring outward, be careful and stand back. Untangle any canes if needed, use gloves.

## Watering **\*\* VERY IMPORTANT \*\***

Many people believe the ocotillo gets some of its water through the canes. Before and after planting, spray the canes daily. Use a hose so they are totally wet, go around all sides. Do this for the first several months or more. In hot months it is best to spray twice or three times a day. Spraying the canes will help get moisture into the plant while the roots recover and generate new fine roots from the ends that were cut off. Spraying the canes will also encourage leaf growth which will facilitate the root growing process. The leaves will drop off quickly when the plant can not sustain them any longer, this is normal.

Water the soil around the plant thoroughly a week after planting it so the roots get soaked. Water about every 3 to 4 weeks in cooler months, about once per 7 to 10 days in hot months for at least a year or two until established. Larger ocotillo may take another year. Keeping the roots wet all the time will cause rot, killing the plant. Some people put ocotillo on a tree drip system, this may be too frequent and/or too much water.

Once established, the ocotillo should not need supplemental water except possibly in very dry summer months. It may bloom soon after planting or during the first year but that does not mean it is established. It may also leaf out, especially after a rain. This is a very good sign but does not mean the ocotillo has fully re-established itself.

The ocotillo may not show any signs of life for the first year but don't give up on it. If you think it is dead, bend a cane slightly near the middle to see if it snaps, check other branches as well. You can also bend a spine sideways and look for wet green tissue.