

Native Plant Establishment in Late Summer

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Native vegetation evolves to survive and flourish with local climates, soil types, and ecosystems. Traditionally planting projects have been done in early winter to take advantage of local rainy seasons. In the Western United States planting is done in this traditional manner. The purpose of this study was to determine if a single application of a time-released water gel with the added nutrient Zinc could provide enough moisture to successfully establish the root system of a native plant. This study applied the time-released water gel providing 90-days of continuous moisture during late summer/fall plantings. The study takes place in the Western United States and includes and presents results from August, September and October of 2009 plantings one year later.

Study results show that while late fall/early winter planting can provide the plants the water necessary to survive the winter; it does not enable substantial root growth needed for long term sustainability. Planting trees or scrubs that are dormant or near dormant late in the season does not create optimum rooting conditions. Planting trees in August appears to provide an adequate timeline allowing roots to push growth for a few months before the plants become dormant. The challenge is providing cost effective irrigation from August until the dormant season around November. In our study, root mass had the greatest overall increase when plants went into the ground during August. Our testing shows that the additional root growth on plants from August to November can provide increased ability to uptake water as nutrients over traditional methods. Our testing data indicates a 69% average increase in root mass over plants that went into the ground in September and October. Increased survival rates along with the improved root mass, reduces the need for long term irrigation.