

# Choose a Good Plant

Now that you have good soil in your garden it is up to you to get the best plant possible. The best plant may not be the most convenient, or the easiest. Here's my list in descending order:

1. **Seed** Best because it is natural. Seed-grown plants always have the best roots, the best branching structure and ultimately the quickest growth, however not everything is easy to grow from seed and many desired plants are hybrids or selections that are not reliably obtained in seed form. Also most homeowners and homeowner associations want larger plants installed.
2. **Bulb** Excellent but only a fraction of plants are obtained as a bulb.
3. **Balled & Burlapped** Excellent. This is the best way to get a desirable woody shrub or tree. These plants are grown in the ground for several years. When sold they are dug up with burlap holding the roots and soil together. The transplanted plants perform as if they had grown on site all of their life. Unfortunately less than 10% of landscape plants are grown this way today.
4. **Bare Root** Excellent. Quite a few ornamental trees and bushes and fruit trees and vine are planted as Bare Root. Similar to *Balled & Burlapped* but the soil is removed and many small roots are lost. Not suitable for large specimens (due to current harvesting techniques) but excellent results with smaller (1-3 year old) specimens of many plants. However, nearly all are deciduous plants (a few conifers and misc.) and only available for 3-4 months of the year.
5. **Container** Good to Poor. The soil in containers is not only has a vastly different texture than your garden soil, it also usually contains a significant amount of compost. Younger plants in smaller containers are preferable. The soil on 1-gallon up to 5-gallon can be changed. (See *Repairing Plants*) It is difficult to detect a root crown defect (sharply circling roots) caused by confinement in containers. It may be difficult to determine what type of wood or bark product was incorporated by the grower. (Decay resistant materials give better results.) Different growers use much different soil mixes and get varying results. The specimen with the largest leaves usually is the healthiest at that moment.

For a little more than a decade, Laguna Hills Nursery has grown plants in containers utilizing a soil (substrate) that contains no wood or bark products. Generally our plants grow faster, with larger leaves and better foliage color. The most important factor, however, is long-term performance. Our container substrate is 70%+ inert materials. Peat moss (0-30%) is the only organic matter we use but we do not depend upon its permanency to create volume or aeration. Because our substrate doesn't shrink significantly, our taller plants and trees won't lean.

Of all of the wholesale nurseries that we have done business with, the following provide plants that have performed well over a longer period of time. All of these grow plants in soil that contains wood compost, however, they differ from other growers in that the wood is redwood, the slowest decomposing wood. **Suncrest Nurseries, Otto & Sons Nursery, Pacific Nursery**. Although I prefer no wood compost at all, redwood seems to be the least *bad*.

There are a number of bedding plant growers that do not use wood or bark products in their soils. The best growers use peat moss with perlite. These include **DoRight's, Golden, Dynasty**. Because of their smaller size, bedding plants from bad growers are easier to repair. (see *Repairing Plants*)