



'Hop in a Box' Planting Tips

How to Plant Quality Hop Plants from Northern Girls Hops

How do I care for the potted hop plants when I receive them?

Your potted hop plant has arrived adapted to cool morning temperatures and ready to plant outdoors. It is packaged in a careful blend of soil composed of sand, cured llama manure, and peat. It will have all the nutrients it needs until you are ready to plant. Place your plants outside in direct full sun and keep evenly moist until you are ready to plant. Hop plants need lots of water but also do not like to have wet 'feet'. The roots must be well drained, so avoid having the pot sit in water. Important note: plant roots will rot in water-logged soil! The young hop shoots are fragile so place in a protected place where they will not be brushed accidentally or buffeted by strong wind.

Where is best to plant hops?

The ideal site for maximum plant growth and cone production has full sun throughout the day, is protected from strong wind, and has a place to attach twine for the hop bine to climb as it grows. If you do not have a site with all ideal conditions this doesn't mean you can't grow hops! Hops will grow in partial sun and windy locations but may not reach maximum growth or cone production.

How should I plant the hops?

Hops are planted in 'hills', similar to planting squash or zucchini. Mound up soil in a hill about one foot wide and half a foot high. Hops are greedy for nitrogen, so this is a good time to work in a shovel full of well-aged compost such as cured sheep manure. If compost is not at hand during planting, not to worry, your hop plant has been packaged in a blend of composted llama manure to keep it happily satisfied for nutrients for the first several weeks. Your plant has arrived with an eye anchor to attach twine. Sink the eye anchor into the hill to its full length, leaving the eye loop poking out the top of the hill. Now for the big moment: remove the plant from the pot and place into the hill covering with soil firmly around the plant to get good root-soil connection. Be careful to not plant the hop too high leaving the roots exposed, or too deeply burying the stems of the plant. You are aiming for the level of the soil around the plant to be the same as it is in the pot. Water well directly after planting.

When should I plant?

Plant hops after danger of the last frost has passed. Ideally, to establish maximum root mass before the winter, the hop plants should be planted in late May to early June. If this is not possible, plants can be kept through the summer in the pot and planted in the fall after the first frost when the plant goes into dormancy. Plants remaining in the pot during the summer should be watered carefully to prevent drying out or becoming too wet. At Northern Girls Hopyard, plants that are in pots through the summer are heeled in to the ground to help keep the roots evenly moist and well-drained.

How do I train a hop plant?

Stringing the twine: Your plant has arrived with twine designed specifically for hops. The twine is not coated with chemicals as some hop twines can be, and meets organic production standards. It is composed of paper providing the texture hop bines require to grasp and climb. The twine can be cut off at the end of the growing season after the hop bine dies back and composted. When your hop plant bines are about a foot and a half to two feet tall, extend the twine vertically to its full length and tie firmly to an overhead trellis or surface. The hop bine will want to wind around the twine so be sure to leave space on all sides, rather than have the twine flush against a wall surface.

Training day: Now that you have strung the twine, you are ready to show your hop plant the way. Hops must be trained to climb onto the twine. Some varieties are easier to train than others. Select the strongest 3 or 4 bines, wind them around the twine in a clockwise direction. The bines will only grow clockwise as they follow the sun. The bines may need to be trained for several days before they stay twined, or you can gently tie them on to the twine. Every hop must be trained by hand making training the biggest chore of the spring at Northern Girls Hopyard. Enjoy this intensive time to intimately get to know your plants!

How do I care for the hops to establish them successfully?

Keeping hop plants healthy to establish successfully requires attention to watering and nutrients. The first year of growth is all about establishing the root mass, so regular watering is critical and your main task in the first year. Typical watering frequency in June will be every other day during periods of no rain. Notice how well your soil is draining and be careful to avoid either under-watered bone dry soil or sodden water-logged soil. As the plants develop deeper roots, you will want to encourage this deep root growth by less frequent and heavier watering through July and August. In early September watering is stopped to encourage the hops to go into dormancy before the first heavy frost.

Mature hop plants grow quickly up to half a foot per day. Typically hops reach a height of 8 to 10 feet in their first year. For this rapid growth, hops require large amounts of nitrogen. Fertilize the hop plants once at mid-summer by top dressing with composts with high nitrogen content. In mid-July tuck a shovel-full of compost such as well-aged sheep manure amended with fish compost or sea weed around the base of each plant. Alternately, explore liquid fertilizers at your local garden nursery or high nitrogen teas available from most vermicomposting businesses.

Exact water and nutrient requirements will vary between hop varieties, as well as from region to region and season to season depending on variations in soils, weather, and microclimates. Hop growers tend to become familiar with their plants' specific needs as the hops mature. Enjoy getting to know your Northern Girls!

Happy Hop Growing!