



The Grass Tree Guide

*A guide to
planting &
maintaining
your Grass
Tree*

Grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) make a stunning visual display in any garden and are totally unique from any other plant in the world. Their striking burnt black trunks and green foliage stand out both in the Australian bush and through our city landscapes. Growing at an extremely slow rate of approximately 3cm per year larger specimens can be well over 150 years old and any trunk at all could take as long as 10 years to form.

When choosing to have these epic plants in our gardens it is vital to choose the correct specimen and know how to maintain the health of the plant throughout its life (or yours).

Step 1 – Choose wisely

To begin with it is essential only to buy from those who know. Grass trees are a harvested plant meaning these are dug up from the ground and re-potted for sale. This process of transplanting grass trees needs to be performed by experienced and knowledgeable experts.



Rushing the process, not getting enough root structure, digging unsuitable plants, and not enacting a maintenance plan will result in an unstable plant that although may look good when it comes to market may only go backwards after you take it home.

So how do we know we have the best? Well, we have over 20 years of building a close relationship and understanding with our harvesters and their methods. We won't accept second class service and we pay more for a premium product. Working with our harvester we have ensured a process where the plants are selected and dug extremely carefully. The plants are then inoculated with a mixture of fertilisers and microorganism stabilising products (a product which we encourage all our customers to use). They are then held for at least 6 months to ensure they recover from the harvesting process and they show strong root and new foliage growth. After the grass tree arrives in Melbourne we once again inoculate it and enact a management plan to observe and maintain its health before it goes on sale.



No matter where you go to buy your grass tree you need to ask questions;

- Do you have the legally required government issued permit tags to sell these grass trees?
- Can you guarantee that this plant was harvested by a professional harvester?
- Has the plant been inoculated?
- What products can I use to maintain the health of the plant long term?
- How long from harvest has the plant been held for?
- How long have you been selling grass trees and what feedback have you had?

If you are happy with the response of the seller then it is now time to choose your grass tree. Look for plants that have nice full foliage which is bright and green. You should avoid plants that show signs of scale or root rot (black rings in the foliage of the plant). Equally avoid any grass tree that looks like it has been in the pot for a long time as these may be root bound and potentially rotting in their pots. Think about the look you are after. Grass trees come with varying thickness of trunk from 10cm wide to a monstrous 50cm. Also the straightness or lack thereof in the trunk; some people want dead straight trunks but waving or leaning trunks are equally healthy and can be more of a feature.

Step 2 – Planting

There are two keys to planting grass trees;

1. Minimise any disturbance to the root structure
2. Ensure great drainage

Grass trees have sensitive roots structure that can be easily damaged by rough treatment and in the longer term can rot in stagnated water. To avoid these problems you first need to prepare where you are planting your grass tree.

For pots, the job is fairly easy. Just ensure that the drainage will not be blocked and that you use a premium potting mix.

For ground planting however the job can be a little more challenging. First consider the location. Grass trees like full sun to semi shaded positions and will not respond well in an area that is boggy or damp. Once you have your location you will best be served by performing a drainage test (see our website for how to perform a drainage test).

If you are not happy with the drainage then don't fret there are options to better your drainage and get your plant where you want it.



The first option to improve drainage is to dig a hole approximately double the size (depth and width) of the pot the Grass Tree is in. Fill this hole back in with a thin layer of scoria or stones to help with the drainage process. Then use a premium garden soil or potting mix to raise the depth of the hole back up to the depth of the pot your grass tree is in. Then try another drainage test.

You can help drainage by planting your grass tree at the top of a raised mound. Building a raised mound is extremely easy to do. Simply mound up a premium garden soil to increase the run off of water and encourage the soil to dry more quickly. A raised mound can be used in conjunction with the method above or can be a simple way of planting in extremely hard soil types. It also has the added benefit of raising the grass tree up and creating a more impressive feature.

One thing a lot of people make the mistake of doing is pulling the grass tree out of the pot. Never do this! You will simply damage the roots and stress the plant. You should either simply cut the plastic pot away from the soil or, as we highly recommend, plant your grass tree with some of the pot still attached. Just cut off the bottom to help with drainage, put a few slits in the sides for the roots to grow out, and lose the rim of the pot for better presentation.

Next simply stick into the hole or pot you prepared earlier and back fill with premium soil or potting mix. As with most plants you should then give it a good soaking to remove air pockets from the soil before inoculating the plant with a microbe mix that you can receive in store. This will help the plant with getting use to its new home and for large specimens a second mix should be given a couple of days later.

Do not fertilise for the first couple of weeks as it won't help the process.

Finally you should apply a thin layer of mulch.



Step 3 – Ongoing maintenance

Watering

Counter to the common belief grass trees will respond better to regular watering particularly in the first 12 months. This is why drainage is so important, for as long as the water is draining away and not becoming stagnate under the plant, then nearly impossible damage or kill your grass tree by over watering. It is however possible that you could kill your grass tree by under watering.

How much watering is really a case by case question as no two locations are ever going to be the same as there will always be differences in drainage, sunlight, wind and much more. Get in touch with us if you are concerned but just remember that the key is drainage; if your grass trees' have great drainage you should not be able to over water it and therefore can water amply. Just water the soil only and not the foliage of the plant.

Fertilising

Fertilising is also important to keep the foliage in the best possible condition. We recommend using liquid potash for foliage growth and a high quality native fertiliser such as Native Focus. You can use sea weed products as an additive feed but don't use these products as a primary fertiliser as they lack key ingredients.



Potash (potassium) is an essential plant nutrient. It helps to produce and form flowers and foliage and it plays a vital role in thickening and strengthening plant cell walls.



Specifically formulated with low levels of phosphorous in order to avoid toxicity in our phosphorous- sensitive, Australian natives.



Microbes

We also highly recommend using our microbe mix on your grass tree every 6 months. This product is designed to encourage the microorganisms that live within the root structure of the grass tree. Without these microorganisms the grass tree will slowly die back. In fact, if your grass tree show any signs of bad health then the first response should be to microbe the plant as soon as possible.



This microbes mix is used to increase Mycorrhiza bacteria naturally found in the Xanthorrhoea Species (grass trees) root system.

The microbes occur naturally in the wild, therefore the microbes mix is ideal to maintain the natural environmental conditions required to keep your grass tree thriving.

Using fire

Every 8-10 years or so it is important to burn away the old dead foliage around the trunk of your plant. This old foliage once it builds up can become a hiding spot for pests and bugs that can in time hurt your grass tree. By burning this away you limit the opportunities for these pests to thrive. You also will be encouraging new growth and perhaps a new flower. To perform this task the best method is to tie the foliage of the plant up and wrap it with a damp cloth. Then wrap the trunk with some newspaper and get some matches. As it burns you should have some damp garden gloves on to just pat down the flames as you go to protect the crown from burning. Take it slow as you perform this action.



About Us

The Palm Place Nursery is Melbourne's largest tropical nursery stocking a huge range of palms, tropical, indoors, trees, grass trees, and much much more. We supply to a range of customers including retail, landscapers, builders, and councils, and strive to provide only the best quality plants.

Our combined experience of over 60 years in the nursery and landscaping industry means that we can ensure that our customers get the very best at the lowest price.

We have sold our Grass Trees for over 20 years and we are in constant communication with our harvesters to ensure that our customers receive only quality plants. We have developed new techniques for both harvesting and planting grass trees to best ensure the health of the plants. Our microbe mix was developed in partnership with our harvesters to create a mixture to boost root growth and ensure all grass trees get the best chance in their new homes.

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