



Hop in Rhizome Planting Tips

How to Plant Quality Hop Rhizomes from Northern Girls Hops

How do I care for the hop rhizomes when I receive them?

Your hop rhizome has arrived in a dormant state – it is not yet ‘woken up’ from its winter sleep, packaged carefully in sealed plastic bag and absorbent peat to prevent drying out and damage to delicate root buds. CAUTION: The small root buds on the rhizome are very delicate - careful handling is required to prevent the root buds from snapping off. Place the bag with rhizomes in a cool dark location until you are ready to plant (a refrigerator is ideal, although please ensure that the rhizomes are separated from food for food sanitation reasons). The rhizomes will stay dormant and can stay safely stored at cool temperatures below 4 C for several weeks. While the rhizomes are dormant, locate a site to plant the hops and prepare the ground for planting.

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.

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 rhizomes should be planted in late April to early May. If this is not possible, plants can be planted into container pots, kept through the summer as container plants, and planted in the fall after the first frost when the plant goes into dormancy. Plants remaining in a 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 during the summer.

How should I prepare the ground and plant the hops?

Hops are planted in ‘hills’, similar to planting squash or zucchini. Make a mound of 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. Scoop out a long shallow depression into the hill for the rhizome, about 2 inches deep and the length of the rhizome. Now for the big moment: remove a rhizome from the bag and place horizontally into the shallow hole in the hill. Be picky about the depth! Be careful to not plant the rhizome too high leaving the roots exposed, or too

deep. You are aiming for the rhizome depth to be from 1 to 2 inches under the soil. Planting the rhizome too deeply may reduce successful establishment of the plant. Cover the rhizome with soil, patting the soil down firmly to give good root-soil contact, but gently enough that you are not breaking the root buds on the rhizome. Water well directly after planting.

How do I train a hop plant?

Hop plants do not have tendrils, the curly tips of vines that allow climbing vines such as peas to attach themselves to the nearest object. The lack of tendrils on hops means that: 1. hops technically are termed 'bines' rather than vines which have tendrils, and 2. Your hops will need to be trained to climb. The following directions describe how to train a hop plant.

Stringing the twine: When your hop plant bines are about a foot and a half to two feet tall, they will need a twine to climb up. Specific twine designed for hops is available – these are made of either paper (which composts nicely) or various fibers. You can also use heavy string made of hemp, commonly found in hardware stores. Twine made of synthetic plastic fibers are avoided as hops do not climb well up this type of texture. You can expect your hop plants to grow about 6 to 8 feet in the first year, although in some locations and with excellent care first year plants are known to reach over 12 feet. Anchor the twine at the base of the plant with a stake or a twine anchor. Extend the twine vertically 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!