COLORFUL STEM WILLOW CARE

LIGHT

Willows grown for colorful winter stems, including Flame, Little Flame, Winter Torch, and Rubykins, generally need full sun for the strongest display. Provide reliable moisture and space for the specific cultivar. Some become substantial shrubs or trees unless managed, so check size before placing them near buildings or drains.

WATER

Water slowly through the root ball and surrounding soil after planting. Check moisture regularly and water deeply when needed, keeping roots consistently moist during establishment. Adjust for rain, weather, and soil conditions rather than a fixed daily schedule. A new root ball can dry out even beside damp ground.

SOIL & PLANTING

Plant with the root flare at or slightly above the surrounding ground level. Keep any graft union above soil. Mulch lightly across the root zone without touching stems. Protect roots from compaction, lawn equipment, and repeated digging. Leave room for the plant's mature spread rather than relying on repeated hard cutting.

FEEDING

Use a soil test to guide fertilizer and pH changes. Healthy willows may need little feeding. If nutrients are needed, apply a modest spring dose of tree or shrub fertilizer at the label rate. Avoid heavy nitrogen and late-season feeding; fertilizer cannot correct poor siting or damaged roots.

SEASONAL CARE

On established own-root plants managed as shrubs, remove older stems or use planned renewal in late winter or early spring to encourage colorful young shoots. Let newly planted willows establish first. Avoid treating grafted standards or mature untrained trees this way; their pruning must preserve the trunk and graft.

HELPFUL TIPS

Red, orange, or yellow young stems are intentional ornamental features; older wood becomes less vivid. Heavy renewal can reduce catkins and changes the plant's natural form. Choose a consistent maintenance approach rather than alternating neglect with drastic cuts. Check for stem cankers or dieback before assuming dull color needs more fertilizer.