

## SPIRIT OF GARDENING

### Perennials Care and Maintenance

#### PERENNIALS

A perennial plant is a plant that lives for more than two years. Perennial plants can be short-lived (only a few years) or they can be long-lived, as are some woody plants like trees which can live for over 4,000 years. Perennials are a good investment, not only providing the same benefits as annuals but they even come back and get bigger

Perennials, especially smaller flowering plants will bloom over the spring and summer and then die back every autumn and winter, returning in the following spring from their roots rather than seeding themselves as an annual plant does. These are known as herbaceous perennials.

Before planting, even purchasing perennials, it is important to consider the existing site conditions to determine what type of perennial is best suited for that area. Know the site conditions—light, temperature, soil, slope, drainage, and air circulation.



#### SOIL

Most perennials grow best in soil that is well drained with good fertility and a pH of 6.0 to 7.0. Adding organic matter to soil improves the fertility, texture, and water-holding capacity. Apply a two to three inch layer of mulch to conserve water, reduce the need to weed, and keep soil temperature cool.

Applying a winter mulch of evergreen boughs when the ground is frozen prevents plants from being pushed out of the ground by alternate freezing and thawing. Winter mulch is used only on newly-planted or divided perennials and tender plants. This mulch must be removed gradually in the spring.

#### WATERING

Soak the plants immediately after planting and check regularly to prevent drying out. The rule of thumb is to add one inch of water per week for established plants. Less frequent but deep watering encourages perennials to root deeply. Perennials that are said to tolerate drought are drought tolerant only after they have become established. The addition of mulch will help to reduce the need for frequent watering.

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### **DIVIDING PERENNIALS**

Most perennials benefit from lifting and dividing every three to four years. Dividing perennials rejuvenates the plants, improves flower production and increases the quantity. However, some perennials resent being disturbed and are better off being propagated by cuttings or seed. The perennials that die in the middle or don't seem to produce as many blooms need to be divided. Or sometimes they've just outgrown their space, and need to be divided.

Spring is the best time for most perennials to be divided. After spring flowering plants are finished blooming is a good time to divide the plant. Peonies should be divided and moved in September

In most cases, when dividing, the plants should be dug out of the garden and cut apart. Don't worry – most perennials are tougher than you think and will thank you later for splitting them up. Begin by watering the plants to be divided. Cut back on top growth prior to dividing to reduce stress. Dig up the root ball with as much dirt as possible and then separate the young off shoots from the centre. Replant the new plants at the same depth immediately and water deeply.

When dividing plants, rejuvenating the soil by incorporating organic matter such as leaf mold or compost is important. Treat the newly divided plants as you would newly planted ones. Water them until they're well-established again.

### **FERTILIZING PERENNIALS**

Regular feeding with 20-20-20 fertilizer through the growing season will provide you with steady growth, maximum blooming and a longer plant life. Avoid fertilizing past the end of July. This, in conjunction with reduced watering will prepare the plants for the fall and ready them for the cold months ahead.

Many over-fertilized perennials will produce excessive soft growth and produce very few flowers. A soil test will help to determine the amount of fertilizer needed.

