

## Growing Perennials

**P**erennials offer a wide range of flower forms, plant forms, flowering seasons and flower colors. They require less maintenance than annuals since they remain in place for several years. However, perennials are not maintenance free. They may require division on a regular basis, staking and removal of faded flowers during the blooming period.

**P**erennials may grow for many years, depending upon the species. Although the foliage dies during the winter, the roots remain alive to produce a new plant that flowers the next year. Biennials require two growing seasons to complete their life cycle. During the first year they are vegetative, often having a rosette growth habit. The second season the plants produce flowers, set seed and die.

### Selection and design

- In planning your garden it is important to match the right plant to the right site. Most plants have fairly specific requirements for light and moisture. The same design principles apply to a garden as to any other artistic endeavor. The plants should be considered for their size, shape (of the plant and flower), texture and color. One last thing to consider with all of this is the bloom time. After the design is done you are ready to begin planting in the spring.

### Planting

- Before planting perennials the soil should be prepared with a good compost mixed into the soil to a depth of 6 inches. A good choice would be “Back-To-Earth” compost. (The plants benefit from generous amounts of organic matter.) Good drainage is also necessary.
- After the soil is prepared you are ready to plant. Dig the holes large enough so that roots won't be cramped when they are spread out. The depth of the hole is determined by the roots of the plant. The point where the roots meet the stem or crown should be placed right at ground level. When planting container perennials run a knife along the root ball to keep the roots from growing in a circle and girdling the plant.

- Fill the hole in with soil and firm it around the plant. Water thoroughly with diluted “Ferti-lome Root Stimulator”.

### Care

- Check the soil moisture carefully for the first few weeks until the plant is well established. After the plant is established the soil should be allowed to dry out between waterings. The simple rule for watering correctly is to water well and thoroughly. To check if you are watering thoroughly, dig down 3 to 4 inches and the soil should be moist. For perennials the best method of watering is with a canvas or plastic soaker hose laid permanently among the plants. This will keep the foliage as dry as possible.
- Apply a balanced slow-release fertilizer such as “Ferti-lome Gardener's Special” to the bed every spring. A mid-summer feeding will benefit most plants, though it is not absolutely necessary. This feeding should be lighter than the spring one (about 2 lbs. Per 100 square feet). If individual plants need additional feeding during the growing season use a liquid fertilizer such as “Ferti-lome Blooming and Rooting” (9-59-8).
- The proper use of mulch (straw, prairie hay, cypress) in the summer reduces moisture loss, cuts down on weeding and keeps plant roots cool and moist. A 2 to 3 inch layer is suggested. Do not mulch over the crown of the plant as this can cause rot. Routine mulching of established plantings in the later fall is good insurance against winter injury. Remove winter mulch as soon as the plants begin growth in the spring.
- Flowers will need to be removed after blooming. This will help most plants to produce more flowers and it keeps the plants looking tidy.
- Pests and diseases are remarkably few for the perennial group. By watching and taking action at the first signs, most chemical control can be avoided. A few steps to follow are: keep old leaves picked up; hand-pick as many pests as you can; encourage birds into your garden; pull weeds when they're small; remove and destroy any leaves that become diseased; do a thorough cleanup before winter.



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### Dividing

- There are three reasons for dividing perennials: 1st) to control size; 2nd) to rejuvenate; 3rd) to propagate. The general rule is to divide spring and summer blooming plants in the later summer or fall. And divide fall blooming perennials in the early spring.
- A few days before dividing, water the bed well and prune perennials severely (6 inches from the ground). This will make it easier to see what needs to be done. Dig the entire clump out as completely as possible. Divide the living portion into smaller clumps to replant where you like. Where roots are so snarled that you can't pull the plants apart, cut them apart with a knife. Water thoroughly with "*Ferti-lome Root Stimulator*".