



# Perennial Gardening Basics



Yarrow

Remember the name “**perennial**” when preparing your garden bed or border for these beautiful and durable plants. A clump of peonies or poppies can live for 75 years, and most perennials live for at least 3 to 5 years. Give your garden the attention and soil preparation it needs **before** you put in your plants.

Good soil is the backbone of a good garden. Well-prepared soil is fluffy and loose so that water, air, and nutrients can filter down easily, and roots have room to stretch. Whenever possible, composting is ideal (See our Essentials of Composting handout). If not, an excellent “cake mix” consists of 1/3 parts existing soil, 1/3 parts soil conditioner (a very fine pine bark, for example), and 1/3 parts mushroom compost (or Black Kow Manure). A good fertilizer combination to use is bone meal and blood meal; the bone meal for phosphorus and the

blood meal for nitrogen. Bone meal is applied at 10 lbs. per 100 square feet (10' x 10'), and blood meal at 2 lbs. per 100 square feet. Plantone™ fertilizer can also be used at the rate of 2 lbs. per 100 square feet. These are organic fertilizers that will stay in your soil for 3-4 months. Rake in fertilizer after preparing your raised bed or border and then water in.

Raising your prepared beds and borders is beneficial in many ways. First, it provides good drainage so that plants will receive adequate water while avoiding the wet conditions that promote root rot. Secondly, it allows for the plants to receive maximum sunlight to all areas of the raised bed. Thirdly, the roots will stay housed in the prepared bed so they should continuously receive the maximum benefits of drainage, fertilizer, and nutrients. And finally, a raised bed will achieve a nice presentation for your perennial garden, with the middle of the bed showing good height and depth.

## **Planting, Watering, and Mulching**

To plant a container-grown perennial, quarter the side and bottom with a garden spade and flatten out the bottom in a radial fashion. For bareroot and/or fibrous rooted perennials, radially lay out the roots on a mound of dirt in the middle of your planting hole.

There are some important things to remember when watering your perennials:

- Water thoroughly and deeply making sure that at least the top 5" -6" is moist for deeper root growth.
- Water the ground and not the plant foliage, preferably by hose instead of sprinkler, or by drip or trickle irrigation.
- Water in the morning hours before the sun hits the garden directly. Evening waterings encourage mildew growth and root rot.

Mulch your garden area 2"-3" deep. Many types are available from pine bark products and shaved wood to more novel ideas like cocoa shells and cedar. Mulching will help cut down on your weeding, conserve water, stop runoff, add nutrients to the soil, and keep soil temperatures even.



Baptisia

## ***Pinching, Disbudding, and Deadheading***

🍷 Pinch out the growing tips of each stem of perennials for bushier plants with more flowers. To disbud perennials (i.e. dahlias) for fewer but larger blooms, pinch out side buds leaving on the central or highest bud in each cluster.

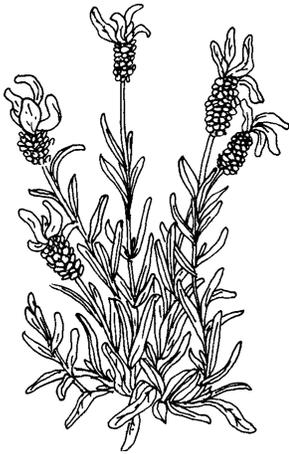
🍷 Flowers usually fade after pollination so, if you leave them on the plant, you are encouraging seed formation. This robs the plant of vigor since it takes a great deal of the plant's energy to mature seed. By deadheading you'll allow the plant to channel that energy back into flower, leaf, and root production. Removing spent flowers (and potential seeds) keeps invasive perennials from self-sowing all over your garden; always an unwelcome surprise the following season. Deadheading often extends the bloom season. The plants will keep flowering (in a continuing attempt to set seed) rather than stopping after the first flush of bloom. In fact, if you shear back some plants after bloom, you'll often get a second flush of bloom.



Coreopsis

## ***Dividing Perennials***

Perennials will continue to expand each year often losing vigor as they become overcrowded. Consequently, most will benefit from being dug up and divided periodically. Once the center of a clump has begun to wither and die out leaving new growth at the edges, the plant should be divided. Dividing also helps prevent mildew growth. Lift the plant in either spring or fall (fall is best) with a spading fork or shovel. Carefully, break the clump into new, fairly substantial plantlets with your hands or a sharp knife. Some plants can be easily divided by hand whereas others receive less root damage by being cut with a knife. Do as little damage to the overall root mass as possible. Resettle the new plants into the ground. If you have too many plants, friends and neighbors are usually happy to get freebies from you!



Spanish Lavender

## ***Choosing Your Perennials***

🍷 When planting perennials, choose carefully and make sure that the spot you have picked will be a good one. Check for sunlight, soil, and water requirements as well as time of bloom or interest. Don't forget to plant according to height as well, so as not to hide other smaller varieties. Plant invasive plants in pots and then place them in the ground to control them.

🍷 A lot of fun can be had planting a bed. Don't restrict yourself to just perennials, mix in some annuals for prolonged color and interest. Plant some evergreens for year-round color, and ornamental trees and shrubs to give your garden height and depth. Theme gardens such as white gardens, blue gardens, hummingbird and butterfly gardens, herb or Asian gardens can narrow the focus in helping you decide what plants to buy and where they need to be placed to grow and flourish. Plus, they're fun!

These are some of the basics of perennial gardening. As always feel free to come by or call the nursery with any questions you may have.



Black-eyed Susan