

Perennial Planting

Herbaceous perennials are plants that live for more than two years and have stems which die down to the ground. They grow back from the roots the following year. This versatile group of plants can be used in beds, borders, rock gardens, naturalized in woodlands, meadows, sunny or shady areas of the garden, bogs, cutting gardens and containers. Perennials, like all plants, need the proper conditions to flourish. Soil, moisture, temperature, and light are all important in finding the right plants for a given location, or the right location for particular plants.



The Right Plant:

In choosing a plant for a particular site in your garden, consider first the cultural structure of that site, look for plants able to thrive there, and then choose the plant with the right color, texture, and form for the location.

Cultural Requirements:

Not all perennials require the same light, soil and moisture. Hostas, for instance, prefer shady, moist sites while *Liatris* need full sun and well drained soil. Some need lean soil (*Artemisia*) and some (such as *Astilbe*) are heavy feeders and benefit from additional fertilizer.

Soil Conditioning:

Since soil is the medium from which plants take water and numerous nutrients, it is important to check your garden soil before planting and continue to amend it as your plants grow. Perennials generally require a loamy, well-drained soil for good growth. Humus (organic matter) improves soil texture, provides nutrients and helps maintain soil moisture. Adding organic matter in the form of compost, peat, or dehydrated manure is beneficial to most herbaceous plants.

Preparing the soil can be done at any time, however the best time is in the Fall. Prepare the soil by digging deeply. This allows more room for root growth. Dig at least 18" deep, but 12" is adequate.

When to Plant:

Container grown perennials can be planted at any time during the growing season. For Fall planting, try to plant early enough (late Aug-Sept.) for roots to get established before Winter, and it is best to avoid planting in the heat of a Summer day (try early morning or evening). Mulching late plantings can help prevent Winter heaving.

For Spring planting, avoid working in soggy or cold soil as this can do considerable damage to soil structure.

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How to Plant:

Check root ball after removing plant from its container. Encircling roots need to be gently loosened from the tight mat of root-bound plants. If roots are very dense at bottom of pot, slice off the bottom 1" or so. This stimulates new root growth into the surrounding soil of its new home, and establishes more quickly. If the roots are seriously disturbed when planting, consider cutting back some foliage to reduce the water stress that will occur. Less roots mean reduced ability to supply water to all the top growth. Cutting off those leaves early means a healthier plant for many years. Be sure to plant at the same soil level as the plant was in its container.

Watering:

New plantings need to be carefully monitored for watering. Develop a routine so that your plants do not wilt from lack of water or 'wilt' from overwatering. These symptoms are very similar so be sure to check soil moisture up to 3-4" deep before deciding if it's time to water. If watering by hand, be sure to water early in the day to prevent fungus problems. Trickle and drip irrigation are beneficial for water conservation, plant health and good deep watering.

Fertilizing:

Preparing the soil is the best way to feed your plants. However, a light dressing of 5-10-5 is useful in Spring for a boost. A dressing in mid to late Summer is helpful if soil is poor or if Spring is exceptionally wet. Do not feed too late so plants have a chance to harden off for Winter.

Mulching:

Organic mulch is beneficial for perennials in the summer for moisture retention and in the Winter to insulate roots from extreme temperature fluctuations.