

The Planting & Care of Perennials

The first step to ensuring your success as a perennial gardener is to prepare a healthy soil. See our handout 'Creating a New Bed' for specific information. Adequate drainage is also a key issue for the success of growing perennials through our rainy winter months. While plants are dormant it is essential that they not be sitting in puddles of water. If at all possible build up your beds to provide proper drainage if they hold water immediately after a rain.

The most colorful perennial garden should have 6 or more hours of direct sunlight a day. As the level of light decreases your selection of plants will also decrease. If your garden gets only filtered light most of the plants you can choose from will not bloom. It is very important to pick the right plant for the light that you have. While there is a plant for every situation, you can not make a sun lover enjoy the shade or vice versa.

Perennials can be planted any time of year although summer is a much more difficult time to establish them. Fall is ideal. There is still plenty of time for plants to root out and become well established before the heat of the following summer. Spring is by far the most popular time to plant and you will find the biggest selection of plants in the nursery then.

To plant, dig a hole larger than the plant's root ball. It is important to plant perennials at the same depth as they are in the pots you purchased. Don't bury them deeper and don't let the root ball sit higher than soil level. Fill in and cover lightly with your garden soil and press it firmly around the roots.

Water plants in deeply by hand. Do not depend solely on your sprinkler system until the plants begin to establish. If the weather is hot, water each day if needed. Mulching after planting is highly recommended. 3 inches of shredded hardwood, cypress, cedar or pine needles put on top of the soil after planting works well. Mulch helps retain soil moisture, and keeps the soil temperatures even. The best feature of mulch is that it inhibits weed growth. This allows you time to sit and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Cut old flowers off as they fade. This will encourage your plants to re-bloom and keep the garden tidy. Once the plants have finished blooming, prune the spent flower stems back to the foliage.

Fall blooming perennials benefit from pruning back about halfway during the early summer. This will encourage the plants to become full and bushy and produce the most color possible.

While perennials do require a little care during the growing season they will reward you with color for years to come.