



Perennials for Beginners

All too often gardeners are hesitant to work with perennials. Their different bloom times and multiple varieties may seem daunting. However, most perennials are easy to grow and offer years of pleasure for your investment. You will need to see perennials as a trade off. Instead of blooming all season like an annual, their bloom time is shorter so they can come back to do it again. Remember that because perennials don't bloom all season like annuals, other characteristics of the plant become important (such as shape, texture, and foliage color). Annuals and perennials complement each other, so use them together.

What is a perennial?

A perennial is an herbaceous plant that lives three or more years. Herbaceous plants die back to the ground each winter. Most perennials are grown for blooms, but there are those (such as lamb's ear, hosta and artemisia) that are grown for the beauty of their foliage. The life span of various perennials can range from just a few years to decades

Where should I use perennials?

Almost anywhere. Perennials are probably the most useful, versatile plants around. Use them in beds, borders, with evergreens, in containers, in cutting gardens or anywhere you need them. There are perennials suitable for almost every site, from hot and dry to damp and shady.

How do I choose which perennials to plant?

The site itself is the most important element in choosing the right perennials. Do you have sun or shade? What is the soil like? After that, the most important is bloom color and season.

When should I plant perennials?

Almost anytime! Since most are now grown in containers, they can be planted throughout the growing season. When planting during the hot part of the season, be sure to provide extra water until the plant has had a chance to root out.

How do I plant perennials?

Easy! Perennials are resilient and require no additional planting instructions. Like annuals, perennials require a nutritious soil composition for optimum performance in your yard. Just be sure to keep them at the same level at which they were growing in the container.

Do they require any special care?

Just like all your other plants, they will need fertilizing. Check occasionally for disease or insect problems. Deadheading (removing spent blooms) will often extend the blooming season. After a killing frost in the fall, remove all the dead foliage. Most perennials will benefit from being mulched for winter protection late in the fall.

What about dividing?

Almost all perennials will perform best if divided every 3 or 4 years. Some of the more aggressive growers can be divided even more often, and others (like peonies) less often, or never! Most reference books will tell you which varieties prefer to be divided.