



perennials general care

Perennials are plants that grow and flower for three years or more. Most perennials are considered 'herbaceous': they die back to the ground each fall, but the roots remain alive to produce new foliage in the spring. A wide range of sizes, forms, colors and bloom times are available to suit your needs. With careful planning, a perennial garden can provide color from early spring to late fall. Most perennials are low maintenance. They require little more than basic care which includes fertilizing, mulching and a general overall grooming from time to time.

Planning Your Garden: It is important that you choose appropriate plants for the site. Is the garden in a sunny area or does it get a lot of shade? What type of soil do you have? A soil test will give you specific information about your soil. Get to know which plants will tolerate your conditions or add amendments (sphagnum peat and composted manure) and whatever else is recommended to help improve the condition of your soil. Choose plants that bloom at different times so you will have color throughout the growing season. In addition, spring flowering bulbs will provide color before your perennials are in full bloom. Many perennials also have very attractive foliage which adds interest to your garden when their bloom time is over.

Preparing The Bed: Good drainage is essential. Most perennials do not do well sitting in constantly wet soil. Remove grass, weeds and any obstructions from the area you wish to plant. **Preen**, added after the garden is planted, will keep any weed seeds still present from germinating. Incorporate 2-3" of sphagnum peat and composted manure over the planting area. Add **Espoma Plant-tone**, following the instructions on the package. Work into the soil to depth of 8-12".



Planting: Water the plant thoroughly before removing it from the container. Dig the planting hole as deep and twice as wide as the container from which the plant has been removed. Check the root ball. If the roots are matted, loosen the soil and roots so that the plant grows into the surrounding soil more easily. The plant should then be set at the same depth as it was planted in the container. Once the plant is set securely in the ground and the roots are well covered, water thoroughly with **Root & Grow Root Stimulator** per package instructions. Water regularly until your plants are established. Some perennials such as Daylily, Iris or Peony require a precise planting depth. Placing these too deeply may result in fewer blooms. Also, pay close attention to the recommended spacing. Plants like Hosta can grow quite large compared to its size at the time of purchase.

Fertilizing: Fertilize in the spring when new growth begins using a slow release fertilizer, such as **Espoma Plant-tone**. Fertilize once a month during the growing season ending by late July so that your plants can harden off properly in preparation for winter. Potted perennials can be planted at anytime during the growing season. Fall plantings should not be fertilized until spring except for the use of **Root & Grow Root Stimulator**. This will help establish a strong root system as the plant enters winter dormancy.

Watering: There is no magic formula on how often and how much water to apply. Just keep in mind that temperatures, precipitation, winds, sun exposure and soil all affect the needs of your plants. Water in early to mid morning if the soil begins to dry, usually every three to four days. Use of a soaker hose under summer mulch is ideal, as wet leaves from overhead watering on any plant can encourage fungal disease. A sprinkler system for watering the lawn is usually not sufficient to water your perennial plants. Perennials have root systems which go much deeper than those of your lawn and need more water but less often.

Staking: Tall perennials can benefit from some extra support, as they tend to fall open due to heavy flower, wind, rain and other factors. In this instance, staking is recommended to keep the garden tidy and tall plants from breakage. One option is to place three or more poles evenly around the plant. Tie string from pole to pole, wrapping once or twice around each pole as you go. Another option is to stake the individual stems as in the case of Lilies where the pole is inserted into the ground next to the stem. The stem is then tied to the pole. Be sure not to tie the stem too tightly to the pole or puncture the bulb with the pole. Peony rings are great for Peonies and also for other bushy plants such as Baby's Breath.

Deadheading: This means to remove the faded flowers. Deadheading encourages the plant to produce more flowers and therefore lengthens the bloom time. Also, it improves the appearance of the plant and the garden in general. Remove the flower stem as far below the leaves as possible without cutting off buds that may bloom in the future. Plants with attractive seed pods or fronds like Rudbeckia, Sedum or Grasses can be left alone to add interest during the winter months.

Cutting Back: Once the initial display of flowering has ended, cut back the entire plant by 2/3, leaving 1/3 of the plant. Fertilize with **Espoma Plant-tone** and water to promote new growth. You'll be rewarded with another dazzling display of flowers in just a few weeks!

Pruning: Most perennials do not need pruning other than to remove dead or diseased stems on the plant. Trailing perennials may be pruned back if they are overcrowding neighboring plants.

Pests and Diseases: If your plants are kept healthy and you keep your garden clean, you should not have pest or disease problems. If you do notice a problem, it is best to act quickly. Treat only those plants that are in need of treatment. For example, if one or two Garden Phlox have a mildew problem, it is not necessary to spray the entire garden. Our Garden Store carries a wide variety of products to assist you with these problems.

Dividing: Although some perennials can grow in the same location for many years, most need to be divided at some time. The most noticeable indications of this are when the plant dies out in the center, flowering decreases or the plant has grown too large for the space. Spring is the best time for dividing as the plant has not yet leafed out and is easier to handle. Early fall is also a good time to divide and is best for any spring flowering plants such as Peony and Iris. The plant has slowed down its growth by then and can be trimmed back for better manageability. To divide, dig the clump out of the ground and break the plant into several pieces using your hands to pull it apart or use a spade or knife to cut it into smaller clumps. Make sure that each division has some roots. Discard any parts of the plant that are old or diseased. Replant the divisions at the same depth as they were previously growing. Water thoroughly using **Root & Grow Root Stimulator** for a good burst of new root growth and to lessen transplant shock.

Winterizing: When the season comes to a close and frost has ended the growth of your plants, it's time to clean up. Most of your perennials can be cut back at this time to about 4-6" from the ground. Exceptions would be those that add winter interest to the garden such as Sedum, Coneflower and Grasses. Discard any diseased debris first and then compost the cuttings from your garden.

Mulching: Applying the proper mulch for the season is very important, especially with new plantings. The different mulches used for summer and winter are described below:

Summer: The application of a summer mulch helps hold in moisture, reduces weeds, aids in erosion control and keeps the soil cool. Shredded bark or similar mulch products can be used. Some of this mulch will decompose and add nutrients to the soil. Apply 1-2" over the soil making sure to leave 2-3" of space at the base of the plants. Mulch placed too close to the crown can cause crown rot.

Winter: Mulch your perennials with 4-6" of a light mulch for winter protection. Ideal materials include straw, pine straw mulch and cut evergreen boughs. The mulch should be applied after the ground freezes. Its purpose is to keep the ground around the plant from thawing and freezing repeatedly, causing damage to spring buds on the crown. Mulching is especially critical for shallow rooted plants and anything which is planted in late summer or fall. This mulch should be removed in spring as weather begins to warm.

Helpful Hints: Fallen leaves are discouraged as winter mulch material because they become too wet and heavily compacted. The wetness and weight may smother your plants and cause them to rot. Timing is also important. Mulch applied too early may become a great winter home for rodents.

Everything you need to plan, prepare and plant a lovely perennial garden is available for you here at Bordine's!