



Perennials are plants that live and bloom for three years or more. Most are herbaceous, meaning their foliage dies back to the ground each fall while the roots survive the winter and produce new growth in spring. Available in many sizes, forms, colors, and bloom times, perennials can be combined to provide garden color from early spring through late fall. In general, they require minimal care beyond watering, fertilizing & mulching.

Planning Your Garden: Choose plants that are well suited to your site. Consider whether your garden receives full sun or shade, and take note of your soil type. Think about the space available for each plant—some perennials can grow quite large, so select varieties that will fit comfortably as they mature. For continuous interest, choose plants that bloom at different times throughout the growing season, and consider those with attractive foliage, which adds texture and color even after flowers have faded.

Planting Instructions: Potted perennials can be planted at any time during the growing season as long as the ground is workable. Follow these steps for best results:

Step 1: Ensure Good Drainage

Most perennials do not tolerate consistently wet soil. Choose a planting location with good drainage or raise the bed to help improve drainage.

Step 2: Prepare the Bed (skip for individual plantings)

Remove grass, weeds, and debris. Spread 2–3 inches of **sphagnum peat** & **composted manure** over the soil. Add **Espoma® Plant-tone** according to package directions & work amendments into the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches.

Step 3: Dig the Planting Hole

Dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball and the same depth. Loosen the soil at the bottom and sides of the hole.

Step 4: Prepare and Place the Plant

Water the plant thoroughly while still in its container. Remove it and inspect the roots; if they are matted, gently loosen them. Place the plant in the hole at the same depth it was growing in the container. Some perennials—such as Daylilies, Peonies and Irises—require precise planting depths, and planting too deeply may reduce blooms.

Step 5: Backfill the Hole

Prepare a backfill mixture using equal parts **Bordine's Complete Planting Mix** and existing soil. If you prepared the bed with sphagnum peat, there is no need to further amend the soil. Mix thoroughly, then fill the hole around the root ball, lightly packing the soil as you go.

Step 6: Water and Apply Root Stimulator

As you cover the roots, water thoroughly with **Root & Grow Root Stimulator** mixture according to package instructions, ensuring the roots are fully moistened. Allow the solution to soak in before filling the hole with the remaining soil.

Step 7: Apply Mulch

Apply 1-2" of mulch over the soil, keeping it 2-3" away from the base of the plant. See *Mulching Guide* for additional instructions.

Step 8: Prevent Weeds

After planting, apply **Preen®** to help prevent weed seeds from germinating.

Fertilizing: Fertilize in spring as new growth begins using a slow-release fertilizer such as **Espoma® Plant-tone**. Continue feeding monthly through the growing season, stopping by late July so plants can harden off before winter. Do not fertilize fall plantings until spring. Instead, use **Root & Grow Root Stimulator** to help establish a strong root system before winter dormancy.

Watering: There is no magic formula for watering. Temperatures, rainfall, wind, sun exposure, and soil type all influence how much water your plants need. Water when the soil begins to dry, usually every 3–4 days, ideally in the early to mid-morning so leaves dry quickly and stay healthy. A soaker hose works best, as overhead watering can leave foliage wet and encourage fungal disease. Lawn sprinkler systems are usually not sufficient for perennial beds. Perennials develop deeper root systems than turf and benefit from deeper, less frequent watering.

Staking: Tall perennials often benefit from extra support, as heavy flowers, wind, or rain can cause stems to flop or break. Staking helps keep the garden tidy and protects your plants. One method is to place three or more poles evenly around the plant and tie string from pole to pole, wrapping once or twice around each as you go. For plants like Lilies, stake individual stems by inserting a pole next to the stem and loosely tying the stem to it—avoid tying too tightly or puncturing the bulb. Bushy plants with heavy blooms, such as Peonies, are best supported with a peony ring or grow-through grid placed early in the season to support the stems and extend the life of the blooms.

Deadheading: Remove faded flowers to encourage more blooms and extend the flowering season while keeping plants and the garden looking tidy. Cut the spent flower stem down as far below the leaves as possible, being careful not to remove buds that may bloom later. Plants with attractive seed heads or foliage, such as Rudbeckia, Sedum or Ornamental Grasses, can be left for winter interest.

Cutting Back/Pruning: Once the first round of flowering has finished, cut the plant back by about two-thirds, leaving one-third intact. Fertilize with **Espoma® Plant-tone** and water thoroughly to encourage new growth and a second flush of flowers in just a few weeks. Other than this rejuvenation cut, most perennials need minimal pruning beyond removing dead or diseased stems.

Pests and Diseases: Healthy plants and good garden sanitation usually prevent most pest and disease problems. If an issue does appear, act promptly and treat only the affected plants rather than the entire garden. For example, if one or two Garden Phlox develop mildew, there's no need to spray everything. If you're unsure what's causing the problem, bring a sample of the plant along with photos to our Garden Store—our staff can help diagnose the issue and recommend the best solution.

Dividing: Most perennials benefit from dividing over time, especially if the center begins to die out, flowering declines, or the plant has outgrown its space. Spring is the easiest time to divide because plants have not fully leafed out and are easier to handle. Early fall is another good time, particularly for spring-blooming plants like Peony and Iris, when growth has slowed and plants can be trimmed back for easier management. To divide, dig up the clump and separate it into smaller sections by hand or with a knife or spade, making sure each division has healthy roots. Discard any old or diseased portions, then replant the divisions at the same depth as before. Water thoroughly with **Root & Grow Root Stimulator** mixture to encourage new root growth and reduce transplant shock.

Winterizing: When frost ends the growing season, it's time to clean up your garden. Most perennials can be cut back to about 4–6 inches from the ground. Exceptions include plants that provide winter interest, such as Sedum, Coneflower, Ornamental Grasses and those with evergreen foliage. Dispose of any diseased debris in a landfill, and compost the rest. For tips on protecting your perennials through winter, see the winter mulching instructions below.

Mulching: Applying the proper mulch is important year-round. The type & timing of mulch will vary with the season:

Spring/Summer Mulching: Mulch helps retain soil moisture, suppress weeds, prevent erosion, and keep the soil cool. Use shredded bark or similar mulch products, which will also decompose and add nutrients. Apply 1–2 inches over the soil, keeping 2–3 inches of space around the base of each plant to avoid crown rot.

Winter Mulching: For winter protection, wait until the ground has frozen before applying 4–6 inches of light mulch, such as straw, pine straw, or cut evergreen boughs. This layer prevents repeated thawing and freezing around the crown, which can damage spring buds. Avoid fallen leaves, as they become wet and compacted, leading to rot. Mulching is particularly important for shallow-rooted plants and those planted late in the season. Apply at the proper time to avoid creating shelter for rodents, and remove the mulch in spring as temperatures rise.

