

Dividing perennials isn't difficult

Why we divide perennials

There are lots of reasons, the reasons can sound complicated but really it comes down to a few basics.

1. A plant is way too big, it is taking over space that belongs to other plants
2. It isn't flowering the way it used to and doesn't look good
3. The centre of the plant is dying
4. There are weeds growing all through the clump
5. You want more of this great plant to use in other places of your garden
6. To give to a neighbour or donate to a plant sale



When to divide perennials

The old rules say divide fall-flowering perennials in the spring and spring-flowering plants in the fall. The new rule says spring-flowering plants should be divided right after they flower so they have the entire summer to settle into their new spots. Dividing when the plant is not flowering allows all of its energy to focus on regenerating root and leaf tissue. Late summer or early fall, when plants are still actively growing, is an excellent time to divide most perennials, provided you finish the job at least 30 days before the first hard frost. That way, divisions will have an opportunity to send new roots into soil that is still warm. This is especially important in areas with early frosts, harsh winters and unreliable snow cover.

Very often we split plants when we have the time to do it and not when rules old or new say it should be done. It is often much easier to split a plant in the spring because the plant is smaller. If you only follow one rule it should be this one: to get the best results divide plants on cloudy days and make sure they are well watered a day ahead and for at least a week after.

How to divide perennials



You will need a sharp spade, at least one garden fork, for very large plants a shovel can be helpful to pry the root ball out of the ground. For plants with dense, woody roots, a pruning or hand saw or even an axe may be needed to divide the root ball. Dig straight down in a circle around the entire plant. Use your tool to lever the plant out of the ground. Remove any loose soil so you can see the roots. Some perennials when dug from the ground will almost fall apart into pieces. Others will need a lot more effort to split. Separate the plant into smaller divisions by teasing the roots apart or cutting them with a sharp knife or spade. Plants may also be separated by placing two forks in the center of the clump back to back and pulling them apart. Each division should have 3 to 5 vigorous shoots and a healthy supply of roots. Keep these divisions shaded and moist until they are replanted. Replant at approximately the same depth as the original plant. Add compost to the planting hole and water well.

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If you have garden questions please contact us at streetsvillehort@hotmail.com check out our website at www.streetsvillehort.ca