

# Dividing Perennials

Dividing your perennials is an easy and inexpensive way to gain additional plants for your garden and share plants with friends. If the plant performance has dwindled and the center is becoming “bald,” or it has outgrown its bounds, it is time to divide the plant. If it has been in the same place for more than 3 years, it also is a likely candidate.

Dividing perennials in the season opposite their bloom is a general rule. Divide plants that bloom in mid to late summer in the spring, and early-season bloomers in the fall. Many gardeners divide perennials in spring to gain an entire season of growth before winter comes.

There are a few plants that resent dividing and can suffer a serious setback as they re-establish. These plants should not be divided except under unusual circumstances: artemisia, balloon flower, bleeding heart, butterfly weed, candytuft, carnation, columbine, euphorbia, evening primrose, false indigo, foxglove, gentia, hellebore, gypsophila, lavender, lavender cotton, lupine, monkshood, poppy, rosemary, Russian sage, and trillium.

Prepare beds for new plants, adding organic matter and a light application of Bone Meal. Water plants to be divided thoroughly a day or two before you work. Prune the stems and foliage to 6 inches from the ground.

Lift the parent plant in an entire clump using a shovel or spading fork. Shake off loose soil and remove dead leaves and stems. To divide mature clumps of perennials, select only the vigorous side shoots from the outer part of the clump and discard the center of the clump. Divide the plant into clumps of 3 to 5 shoots each.

**Spreading root systems:** These plants can usually be pulled apart by hand or cut apart with shears. Some may need forceful separation with digging forks.

**Clumping root systems:** These originate from a central clump with multiple growing points. It is often necessary to cut through the crowns with a knife. Keep at least one developing eye or bud with each division.

**Rhizome division:** Bearded irises are the most common perennial with this type of root system. Cut and discard the rhizome sections that are one year or older. Also, inspect for disease and insect damage and discard if too badly damaged.

Plant the divided section immediately in the garden or in containers at the same depth they were originally. Firm soil around the roots and water well after planting. Continue to water deeply once a week. For fall division, place mulch around the plant after the ground freezes.

