

GROWING AND OVERWINTERING PERENNIALS

BED PREP / PLANTING

The key to successful perennial beds is starting with good soil. If necessary, prep the beds with some high-quality organic matter and work it up properly. The next important thing is to be sure to site the plants correctly (sun lovers in the sun and shade plants in the shade).

MULCHING

Once the perennials have been planted, be sure to include a good layer (3-4" thick) of organic mulch like shredded bark around and in between all of the plants. The addition of organic mulch prevents weeds, moderates the soil temperatures, and maintains a good moisture level. Perennials typically "sleep" the first year while they re-establish, "creep" the second year, and "leap" the third year. In many cases you will be dividing perennials by the third spring.

MAINTENANCE

Maintaining clean healthy perennials beds is not maintenance free, but does not have to be time consuming. Keeping beds mulched, weeds plucked, and dividing plants that have overgrown, as well as fall clean up and spring pruning will make you one happy gardener.

OVER-WINTERING

Once your perennials have had several frosts on them in the fall, you may choose to trim back some plants. It is always important to remove any foliage that may have had disease on them, so that the disease does not overwinter in your garden. Many like to leave the perennials up and unpruned over the winter to catch the snow and offer some seeds for bird feeding. Ornamental grasses really show off their beauty during the winter months and should not be pruned back until spring only, or the hollow stems can let water into the crowns of the plants and they may rot out.

Once mid-November rolls around (in our part of the country) we typically have had some nice frosts on the plants, and the ground may have started to freeze. If you have some marsh hay or some evergreen bows, you may cover newly planted perennials or marginally hardy perennials at that time. This will help to keep the ground frozen and prevent it from thawing and re-freezing which can cause the plants to heave out of the ground, dry out, and die. Covering plants with marsh hay or evergreen bows also helps hold moisture, shade the plants and offer some protection from cold temperatures and wind, until the plants get covered with snow.

Properly maintained, your perennials will offer you years of color.