

Dividing Perennials

Why divide?

Perennial plants often need to be divided to rejuvenate overgrown foliage and to stimulate new growth. Plants that are overgrown or too crowded can be easy targets for disease. Plants that grow or spread rapidly can be controlled through regular divisions.

Dividing existing plants is also a great way to get new plants for your garden without spending a dime!

Signs plants need divided

Plants that need to be divided become overgrown with dead, unsightly centers, or their vigorous growth has sent them to places in your garden where they are not welcome! Plants have fewer flowers and are in overall poor health due to the plant depleting the fertility of the soil as it crowds itself.

Let the plant be the gauge, not a calendar.

When to divide

- In general, most perennials need to be divided every 3 to 5 years.
- Spring is a great time for dividing. This is when you can do the least amount of irreparable damage. The plants are coming out of dormancy and are ready to grow. Some argue that specific plants respond to dividing better later in the growing season.
- The recommended time for Oriental Poppy, Peony and Siberian Iris is late July to early August, but spring is acceptable if that is the only time you can divide.
- **Early spring bloomers:** Divide after bloom and they have all season to anchor new roots and set buds for next spring.
- **Summer-fall bloomers:** Divide in spring and they too will set roots, bud and flower.

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Photos by Martha Smith.





How to divide perennials

1. Lift the mature clump and remove any loose soil from the root ball.
2. If the center of the clump is dead, discard that section and save the active growth areas to replant or give away.
3. Large clumps can also be divided into smaller sections using a knife or sharp spade. Some will separate easily using your hands.
4. Prepare the planting area by adding compost or aged manure. Remember, a perennial can be expected to live in that spot for several years so take a few minutes and amend the planting area. Replant new sections immediately or keep them in a cool, shaded spot until planting to avoid drying out the roots.

Tips for Dividing

- **Don't Over-Divide:** Leave a proportionate amount of roots to crown. Too few roots cannot support a large crown, which has a better visual display. Too large a clump may mean you will be dividing again soon.
- **Rotate Divisions:** Stagger divisions so the whole garden will not need dividing at once. A good rotation plan will yield a nice annual flower display.