

PERENNIAL FLOWERS

What Are They?

Perennials are non-woody plants that live two or more years. The above ground parts of these plants are generally killed by the first frost in the fall while the roots live through the winter. While perennials do not require yearly replanting, regular maintenance is necessary.

Site Analysis

Notice should be taken of soil type, exposure and the amount of sunlight, shade, and wind that each perennial bed will receive. Most perennials that flower will require six to eight hours of sun per day. Many perennials are adaptable to different situations, although certain conditions like heavy shade and wet soils will reduce plant selection. Adequate soil moisture is needed during the growing season. I

Soil Amendments & Planting

To improve soil quality and drainage, amend the planting site with 1/3 perlite, 1/3 compost and 1/3 existing soil. Soil amendments should be worked to a depth of 6-10" prior to planting. In addition, *Myke Annual & Perennial Transplanter* can be applied to the perennials root ball. Myke is a product containing beneficial fungi called mycorrhizae which encourages rapid rooting into the new planting site and utilization of soil nutrients. A balanced garden fertilizer may also be used at planting. Upon removal of the container grown plants, if the roots are visible and winding on the outside of the soil mixture, they must be scored to a depth of about 1/4 to 1/2" to free the root system. This allows the roots to grow out into the surrounding soil. Generally container grown plants can be planted at any time during the season. Water in newly planted perennials with a mixture of Superthrive which is a concentrated hormone that encourages fast development of fine feeder roots, which pull moisture and nutrients from the soil. A plant that establishes feeder roots quickly will have reduced transplant shock.

Maintenance

Watering, fertilizing and mulching are essential maintenance practices that help perennials perform at their best. Thinning, pinching and dead heading are maintenance practices that promote longer blooming periods. One inch of water per week is suitable for plant establishment. It is best to hand-water directly under the plant to ensure that the moisture is getting to the roots. Sprinkler irrigation will be deflected by the foliage and fall outside of the rootball. Once established, many perennials will require watering only during prolonged dry periods. Watering should be deep, infrequent and applied directly to the soil. A slow release fertilizer, like *Gardener's Special* can be beneficial to established perennials. Mulch should be applied at 2" deep around the perennial but avoid covering the stems. Do not use Rock as a covering. Deadheading (cutting off the flower and stems of spent flowers) helps encourage stronger, healthier shoots. Perennials that die back after frost can be cut down to about 2-6" in late fall. However, letting the foliage die over the crown will provide extra protection over the winter. The hollow stems can house beneficial insects, as well. Cutting back the stems and foliage could kill them. Some perennials require periodic division to maintain vigor and maximum flowering. See our guide on "*Dividing Perennials*" for more in-depth information.

