

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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To a gardener, there is nothing quite as nice as receiving a plant as a gift. The plant connects you in an intimate way with your friend, and makes that corner of your garden special as you remember the occasion and the giver through the years. However, after several years of gardening, perhaps you have noticed that some of the gift plants you have received are “the gifts that keep on giving.”

It is important to understand the growth and propagation habits of the plant before making it a part of your garden. How quickly does it grow? Is it of such a large size that it that will crowd out other plants in the bed in its first season? Does it grow so quickly that you will be required to do one or multiple prunings each year? Will it require special supports to support its height or weight?

Does the plant reseed so profusely that you will soon be calling it a weed as you pull up its successive generations? Does it have a delicate growing pattern that will allow you to enjoy it for a few years before dividing or does it propagate by runners that will pop up in unexpected places? Will the plant bring enough joy to justify the dividing and deadheading required?

Here are some of the beloved, yet sometimes troublesome plants that may be passed on to you by well-meaning gardener friends. They are listed by their method of propagation: seeds, divisions or runners.

Propagation By Seed

- Basket-of-Gold (*Aurinia saxatilis*) is a showy spring bloomer that will soon take over in its corner of the garden. It does best in a rock garden where it can cascade over the edge of a wall.
- Cornflower (*Centaurea montana*) begins as a neat perennial in the border with interesting flowers that attract bees and butterflies. But its floppy growing habit will require frequent division; soon you'll be planting it throughout the garden and offering it to your friends as well.
- English daisy (*Bellis perennis*) can self seed and become invasive in lawns. Some gardeners find them charming, but if you enjoy a perfect lawn, be sure to place these plants far away and consider deadheading them to avoid self-seeding.
- Forget-Me-Nots (*Myosotis* spp.) are short-lived plants that have tiny blooms that appear early in the spring. The plants will blacken and dry up, but will self-seed readily. They can especially be invasive in damp woodlands.
- Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) has beautiful foliage and delicate flowers. It can be a beloved friend in the border if sufficient space is allowed for its large growth habit. Frequent deadheading is necessary if self-seeding is not desired.
- Mallow (*Malva* spp.) is an old-fashioned bloomer bringing charm to the cottage garden. It may require staking to keep it erect. It is short-lived; to prolong its bloom, you will need to deadhead often. It readily reseeds and can become invasive.
- Snow-in-Summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*) has lovely small white flowers in spring and early summer, but later can brown out looking a bit shabby in the summer garden. It is a very vigorous grower and will quickly overtake other varieties in the rock garden.
- Violets (*Viola* spp.) are happy plants but can become invasive with their self-seeding habit of pouring seeds into every available crack and bed. Plants are easy to pull, but they will soon reappear where you least expect them. They can reproduce so freely that they may overwhelm other small plants.

Propagation By Division

- Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* Hybrids) have been garden favorites for many years, but they require frequent deadheading to remove the day-old blooms and keep the plants looking neat. Daylilies must be divided every two or three years, resulting in many tuberous root starts that you will have to plant somewhere in your garden or give away.
- Gayfeather/Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*) is a beautiful purple spiking flower with nice clumping foliage. It freely reseeds in rich soil or can be divided every three or four years, yielding multiple plants. It is a great addition to the garden, but plan to share some of these with friends.

- Golden Marguerite (*Anthemis tinctoria*) are bright spots in the garden, but clumps can quickly die out in the center, causing them to lose their charm. They must be divided every two or three years to keep them looking their best, yielding many, many give-aways.
- Iris (*Iris spp.*) is a colorful old-fashioned favorite that can bring charm to any garden but can be troublesome if not located in appropriate soil for the variety. Irises can be infected with leaf spot and can be plagued by borers, which eat the root. Propagated by division, they will yield many bulb or rhizome starts that will require new homes.

Propagation By Runners

- Bellflower (*Campanula spp.*) has many forms. The spreading and trailing forms can be good for rock gardens, spilling over rock walls. However, their running habit can take them into undesired areas of the garden where they can entwine with roots of other plants making it difficult to eliminate them.
- Lily-of-the-Valley (*Convallaria majalis*) is a poisonous plant that grows quickly and will spread indefinitely if not given a firm boundary. Lily-of-the-Valley can become invasive once it is firmly established.
- Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) is a very easy-to-grow groundcover with sweet white flowers. It can work well in a partially shaded area, but can become invasive. Select your location well!
- Bamboo (*Poaceae gramineae*) is a giant grass that can be dramatic in the home landscape. Selecting clumping bamboo rather than running bamboo ensures that your bamboo stays where you have planted it. Running bamboo will require a deep barrier of concrete, heavy metal or plastic to limit its spread.

Welcome all gifts, but do some research before incorporating new plants. Contain invasive gifts in isolated areas of the garden or in pots on the deck. Doing so will help you to enjoy your garden more, and keep you smiling as you welcome your generous friends.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Perennials for Washington and Oregon*, Alison Beck and Marianne Binetti (see alphabetical listings for particular pages)
2. *Sunset Western Garden Book*, edited by Kathleen Norris Brenzel (see alphabetical listings for particular pages)

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