



## DIVIDING PERENNIALS

Perennials are divided to rejuvenate plants, increase their numbers, or control their size. The optimal time for division depends upon the perennial.

### Tips on Dividing Perennials

Divide when the plant is healthy and looks good. Prune stems and foliage to six (6) inches from the ground - this helps to cut down moisture loss and makes division easier.

#### Take into account the type of root system:

- *Spreading root system*: can be pulled apart by hand or cut apart into clumps of 3 - 5 vigorous shoots each. Examples: Aster, bee balm, lamb's ear, purple coneflower
- *Clumping Root System*: cut with heavy, sharp knife through the central growing area. Leave at least one developing eye or bud with each section. Examples: astilbe, daylily, ornamental grasses
- *Rhizome Division*: from one month after flowering to end of September, cut healthy, young rhizomes with one fan of leaves cut back, a few inches long. Replant with the top of the rhizome just showing above soil level. Example: bearded iris
- *Tuberous roots*: cut with sharp knife retaining a piece of original stem and growth bud. Store pieces for spring planting. Example: Dahlia

#### Digging up

- Starting at the plant's natural drip line, dig a trench around the clump, cleanly severing any roots.
- Then cut at an angle down under the clump from various points around the edge until you can lever the plant out of the hole.
  - For very large plants, you might first dig the trench, then slice through the center of the plant (like a pie) halving or quartering the plant before undercutting and lifting out.

#### Dividing

- Use smaller vs. larger plant sections. Pieces for replanting should be at most 20% to 25% of the original clump. These smaller sections show the best growth and tend to produce stronger blooms.

- Watch for and discard unhealthy pieces. Examine clumps for eroded crowns and roots, and discolored stems.

### Planting Divisions

Watch that the root tip does not turn up or curl back on itself to fit into an undersized hole or pot.

- Chemicals flowing from leafy stems to the roots regulate root tip growth. When a root is planted up instead of down, the natural flow is interrupted, resulting in a root tip that does not grow as vigorously.

| Plant Name  | spring | summer | fall | clumps | spreads | Comments   |
|---|--------|--------|------|--------|---------|--|
| <b>Artemisia</b><br><i>Artemisia spp.</i>               | √      |        |      |        | √       | Roots easily, especially the tall, spreading types; divide mounding types every 3 to 4 years to prevent falling open in the center         |
| <b>Astilbe</b><br><i>Astilbe spp.</i>                   | √      |        | √    | √      |         | Divide in early spring or after it stops blooming in late summer to early fall; will bloom better with regular division every 2 to 3 years |
| <b>Bachelor's button</b><br><i>Centaurea Montana</i>    | √      |        | √    |        | √       | Easy to divide; needs to be divided often (every 1 to 2 years) to keep plants vigorous   |
| <b>Bearded Iris</b><br><i>Iris hybrids</i>              |        | √      |      | √      |         | Divide in summer when flowering is over, at least 6 weeks before frost so plants have time to get established                              |
| <b>Bee Balm</b><br><i>Monarda spp.</i>                  | √      |        | √    |        | √       | Spreads quickly; easy to divide; for ease of handling, divide in spring as foliage is emerging   |
| <b>Blackberry lily</b><br><i>Belamcanda chinensis</i>   | √      |        |      | √      |         | Divide so that each rhizome division has a fan of foliage; reseeds readily; new seedlings are easily transplanted                          |
| <b>Black-eyed Susan</b><br><i>Rudbeckia spp.</i>        | √      |        | √    | √      |         | Easy to divide; divide every 3 to 4 years; for best appearance next season, don't make divisions too small                                 |
| <b>Blanket flower</b><br><i>Gaillardia xgrandiflora</i> | √      |        | √    | √      |         | Easy to divide; roots usually pull apart easily by hand; divide every 3 to 4 years   |
| <b>Bleeding heart</b><br><i>Dicentra spp.</i>           | √      |        | √    | √      |         | Divide in late spring to early summer, after blooming but before foliage goes dormant in summer; roots are brittle to handle with care     |
| <b>Brunera</b><br><i>Brunnera macrophylla</i>           | √      | √      |      | √      |         | Divide in late spring to early summer, after blooming; will reseed but divide to keep specific cultivars true                              |

| Plant Name   | spring | summer | fall | clumps | spreads | Comments  |
|--|--------|--------|------|--------|---------|---|
| <b>Butterfly weed</b><br><i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>           | √      |        |      | √      |         | Difficult to divide because of taproot; for best results, purchase new plants   |
| <b>Campanula</b><br><i>Campanula spp.</i>                    | √      | √      |      | √      |         | Easy to divide; most are clump-forming, although some are spreaders   |
| <b>Columbine</b><br><i>Aquilegia hybrids</i>                 |        |        | √    | √      |         | Doesn't like to be disturbed; do in late summer to early fall if necessary; reseeds easily so that may be a better way to get more plants             |
| <b>Coreopsis</b><br><i>Coreopsis spp.</i>                    | √      | √      |      | √      |         | Roots easily; dividing every 2 to 3 years will keep plants alive longer as they tend to be short-lived if left undisturbed                            |
| <b>Daylily</b><br><i>Hemerocallis hybrids</i>                | √      |        | √    | √      |         | Divides easily; make sure that each division has 2 or 3 shoots; will bloom better if divided regularly  |
| <b>Delphinium</b><br><i>Delphinium spp.</i>                  | √      |        |      | √      |         | Blooms best if divided down into small sections; regular division (every 2 to 3 years) will prolong plants' life                                      |
| <b>European Wild Ginger</b><br><i>Asarum europaeum</i>       | √      |        | √    |        | √       | Easy to divide in spring or early fall  |
| <b>Fall anemone</b><br><i>Anemone spp.</i>                   | √      |        |      | √      |         | <i>Doesn't like to have main clump disturbed; sends out underground runners, so dig small new plants around the edges to transplant</i>               |
| <b>False indigo</b><br><i>Baptisia australis</i>             | √      |        |      | √      |         | <i>Difficult to divide because of taproot; for best results, purchase new plants; if you have to divide, dig deep</i>                                 |
| <b>Feather reed grass</b><br><i>Calamagrostis acutiflora</i> |        | √      |      | √      |         | <i>Divide in spring; lift entire clump and cut into sections, may need saw or hatchet to divide roots</i>   |
| <b>Garden mum</b><br><i>Chrysanthemum hybrids</i>            | √      |        |      | √      |         | <i>Easy to divide; divide every 2 to 3 years to keep plants blooming and vigorous; discard dead central portion</i>                                   |
| <b>Geranium, hardy</b><br><i>Geranium spp.</i>               | √      |        | √    | √      |         | <i>Most species rarely need dividing, but divides easily; most can be pulled apart by hand</i>  |
| <b>Globe thistle</b><br><i>Echinops ritro</i>                | √      |        |      | √      |         | <i>Reseeds; new seedlings can be transplanted; will often flower in summer after spring division</i>  |
| <b>Goldenrod</b><br><i>Solidago spp.</i>                     | √      |        | √    | √      |         | <i>Divide every 3 to 5 years to keep plants vigorous</i>  |
| <b>Hosta</b><br><i>Hosta hybrids</i>                         | √      | √      | √    | √      |         | <i>Easy to divide in early spring when foliage is emerging; dividing large clumps later won't harm plants but leaves them lopsided for the summer</i> |

| Plant Name  | spring | summer | fall | clumps | spreads | Comments   |
|---|--------|--------|------|--------|---------|--|
| <b>Joe-Pye weed</b><br><i>Eupatorium purpureum</i>      | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Divide in early spring for easy handling; for fall division, cut back flowers; may need a saw or hatchet to cut apart woody crown        |
| <b>Lady's mantle</b><br><i>Alchemilla mollis</i>        | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Divide in spring or fall; easiest in early spring as leaves begin to emerge; doesn't need frequent division                              |
| <b>Lily of the valley</b><br><i>Convallaria majalis</i> | ✓      |        |      |        | ✓       | Divide in early spring or after blooming; spreads rapidly to divide often to establish new areas of groundcover                          |
| <b>Maiden grass</b><br><i>Miscanthus spp.</i>           | ✓      |        |      | ✓      |         | Divide in early spring; use a hatchet or saw to cut clump apart; can dig whole clump to divide or chop out segments                      |
| <b>New England aster</b><br><i>Aster novae-angliae</i>  | ✓      |        |      | ✓      |         | Divide every 2 to 3 years to prevent dead centers in clumps; discard dead central portion on older clumps                                |
| <b>Oriental poppy</b><br><i>Papaver orientale</i>       |        | ✓      |      | ✓      |         | Has taproot, so difficult to divide; but if necessary, divide in early summer after flowering  |
| <b>Peony</b><br><i>Paeonia spp.</i>                     |        | ✓      | ✓    | ✓      |         | Rarely needs to be divided; make sure each division has at least 3 eyes (growing points); may take several years to bloom after dividing |
| <b>Purple coneflower</b><br><i>Echinacea purpurea</i>   | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Easy to divide; divide every 4 to 5 years for healthier plants   |
| <b>Salvia</b><br><i>Salvia spp.</i>                     | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Divide every 5 or 6 years or when plants dies out in the center  |
| <b>Sedum (tall)</b><br><i>Sedum spp.</i>                | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Can be divided into summer; easiest to divide in spring when foliage is still small  |
| <b>Sneeze-weed</b><br><i>Helenium hybrids</i>           | ✓      |        |      | ✓      |         | Divide in early spring when foliage is just emerging; dividing every 3 or 4 years will keep plants vigorous and blooming heavily.        |
| <b>Tall garden phlox</b><br><i>Phlox paniculata</i>     | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Easy to divide; regular division keeps clumps smaller, less prone to powdery mildew; discard woody, dead center of clump                 |
| <b>Veronica</b><br><i>Veronica spicata</i>              | ✓      |        | ✓    | ✓      |         | Easy to divide; dividing keeps clumps smaller so they don't fall apart in the middle   |
| <b>Yarrow</b><br><i>Achillea spp.</i>                   | ✓      | ✓      |      |        | ✓       | Easy to divide; most types spread quickly so divide every 2 to 3 years   |