



## PLANTING PERENNIALS FROM POT TO GROUND

Perennial plants are the backbone of nearly every flower garden. Perennials offer a show of flowers; textural leaves; eye-catching seedheads; and a wide range of diversity, from the amount of sunlight they prefer to bloom time. People grow perennial flowers because they are such easy-care, dependable performers, and because they offer an enormous variety of color, texture and form. One thing perennials all have in common is they grow best when they are planted correctly. Follow these simple steps for successful planting:

### Timing

Technically, you can plant perennials any time your soil is workable. The Spring and Fall seasons allow plants to get settled and grow new roots before summer's hot, dry weather arrives or winter's frost settles in.

Coincidentally, the best time to buy perennials is in fall, when garden centers are trying to reduce inventory before winter. The best selection comes in the spring when choices of new and standard varieties are plentiful.

### Soil

When planting a new perennial garden, prepare the soil well at the outset. That may be your only opportunity to loosen the soil, remove rocks, and add organic matter. Perennials live in the same spot for many years. Adding lots of organic matter creates a base that helps plants thrive.

In any case, add as much organic matter to your planting area as you can. Use things like compost, old leaves, mushroom compost, shredded bark mulch, bark fines or composted manure. Tackle this task a few days, months or even a whole season ahead of planting. Many gardeners prep soil in fall and follow with a spring planting. If you can take the heat, prepare soil in summer for fall planting.

### Buy Your Plants/Read the Label

Smaller perennials in 4-inch pots cost less and catch up to larger perennials within one year after planting. Please read the plant identification label carefully. While it may be tempting to buy flowering plants, try to purchase ones that are not yet blooming. Why? Once in the ground, the plant can use its energy on new root growth increasing its chances for thriving and not spend energy on growing new flowers.

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The plant label describes the specific conditions needed for the plant to thrive. All plants should be clearly labeled with cultivar information (flower color, bloom size, mature height), hardiness zones, and their area of origin.

## Time to Plant

To prevent stressing your new plants, transplant early morning or late afternoon. The best time to get them in the ground is when it's cool and cloudy, a day or two after a light rain. The next best time is when you have time to do it! So, make sure the plants and the garden are ready when you are.

1. Water the Plants - Water the perennials you will be planting before you start digging any planting holes.
  - a. Water your potted plant thoroughly at least an hour before planting; let it drain.
  - b. Store plant in a cool, shady location until planting time.
2. While your plant is draining, prepare the planting hole.
3. Dig the planting hole twice the width of the plant root ball, but no deeper than the plant is planted in the pot.
4. Fill planting hole with water and allow to drain.
5. Carefully turn the pot upside down and slide the root ball out before setting plant in planting hole.
  - a. Gently untangle the root ball with your fingers to fluff out the roots.
  - b. If the plant is root-bound after removing it from the pot, cut or unwind any roots growing in a circular pattern.
6. Spread out the roots and arrange them outward in the planting hole.
7. Position the plant in the planting hole so the crown of the plant is at ground level.
  - a. Look to make sure you have it facing the way you want (many plants have a better side, especially if they were in a crowded display).
  - b. Check the planting depth. Aim to position the plant, in the hole, so that it's at the same depth it was in the pot. Avoid burying the crown, the spot where roots and stems meet.
  - c. An easy way to test planting depth is to lay a stick or tool across the planting hole from surrounding soil to the perennial root ball. A level tool means your plant has the best chance of success.
  - d. Plants planted too high can dry out. Plants planted too deeply can rot.
8. Carefully backfill the planting hole with the soil that was excavated. When the hole is halfway filled, water to help settle the soil. Finish filling the hole, gently firming the soil around plant. Use your hands for this task, not your feet.
9. Water the newly planted perennial. Soak soil thoroughly, so that water soaks as deeply as the root ball and eliminates air pockets.

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10. Apply two to three inches of organic mulch around the plant, keeping it away from the stem. Perennials thrive with organic mulch, like compost or triple-ground shredded hardwood bark mulch. This type of mulch breaks down over time, helping to nourish and build soil.
  - a. Avoid piling mulch against perennial plant stems or covering the crown (this leads to rot). Keep mulch pulled back from around perennial stems so it forms a donut with the plant in the hole. Mulching conserves water moisture and reduces weed growth.
11. Keep newly transplanted perennials well-watered for the first few weeks. Water deeply to saturate the entire root ball and establish good contact between the roots and the surrounding soil.

Keep your new perennial going strong by watering it about once a week if it doesn't rain – more often if it's hot. Even sun perennials do better with a little shelter from the hottest part of the day for a few weeks until they get established.

Check plant regularly to prevent drying out and to encourage roots to grow more deeply.

The following publications were used for researching this information

- Colorado State University Extension: [Perennial Gardening](#)
- Kansas State University Extension: [How to Plant Perennials](#)
- University of Georgia Extension: [Flowering Perennials for Georgia Gardens](#)
- University of Maryland Extension: [Perennials](#)