



## **Putting Your Perennials To Bed**

**So you've started a perennial garden, or are thinking of it, but are unsure about what needs to be done to these beautiful performers to last through the winter? A few simple things to consider for maintaining your perennial garden over the winter will help it look even better next spring. A common misconception about perennials is that they are low maintenance plants. In fact, they require a fair amount of maintenance initially and every couple of years to keep them looking nice and bushy and full of flowers. If planted and maintained properly, your perennial garden will reward you with the most colourful blooms, interesting foliage and year round interest.**

**The following is a general guide for maintaining and over wintering your perennial garden.**

### **Planting:**

**Fall is a great time to plant and divide perennials. If planting and dividing in the fall, allow enough time when planting for sufficient root growth to occur before frost heaves plants out of the ground. Mid October is usually the latest you want to plant in. Dividing is sometimes easier in the fall because you can see how large your plant has gotten and divide, as you need to. Dividing is usually done every 2 to 3 years when the center of the plant dies out or becomes dead looking. Dividing the plant in half or thirds keeps the plant compact and new looking. Most perennials can be divided in the spring or fall, with the exception of grasses. Grasses should be divided in the summer. Lily bulbs are best divided in the fall. Peonies divide best in early fall. Make sure you leave each new piece with several eyes. Peonies do not require dividing as often as many other perennials.**

They can usually last many years without ever splitting them. They are not very forgiving plants when they are moved or divided at times that don't suit them, so be careful. Iris and Oriental Poppies should be divided in the fall and not in the spring.

### Pruning:

Fall pruning of perennials consists mostly of cutting back dead leaves and dead wood (on such things as lavender). Usually by late October you should start cutting back perennials to within 6 – 8 inches of the ground. This will keep water from rotting the inside of the plants and also help tidy up your garden for the winter. A pruning of perennials in the early spring will help clip off dead leaves that may have fallen over the winter and promote new growth.

### Problems and Solutions:

Some common sense advice applies here. When choosing any plant for your garden, choose the right plant for the right place. For instance, if a particular plant likes full sun, don't plant it in mostly shade, it will only be prone to problems.

Good hygiene applies in your garden as well. Continually clip off dead leaves and wood. Pinch back spent flowers as they finish. Good air circulation is essential in any garden. It will prevent spores hiding in areas, and help to dry out more moist areas. The major problems we find in the Vancouver area are mildews, rusts and leaf spots. Also because of the high amount of rainfall we get, rotting can be a problem. Such products as CIL Floritect can be used on most perennials to control fungal problems, although the best defense is keeping the plant healthy. Each perennial has certain requirements so carefully read the label when choosing plants and plant them in appropriate areas in your garden. Minor insect problems can usually be controlled with insecticidal soap. If you are unsure of the pest problem you have, try to bring a sample into your local nursery for further identification and proper instructions to combat the existing problem.

### Containerized Plants:

Perennials work wonderfully in containers as long as the container has good drainage. If your container does not have drainage, simply drill small holes through the bottom to allow drainage, and add at least 2 inches of gravel to the bottom of the container so that the roots do not sit in standing water. For the winter containers should be moved closer to the house or in an area where they will be protected from frost. Remember the

soil surface area in a container is smaller than the ground and will freeze quicker than the ground and that is the most important consideration for plants in containers. All pots unless they are plastic will crack in frost, regardless of their treatment, some will last a year or two longer but no treatment prevents clay or terra cotta from cracking, so moving the pots closer to the house or out of a frosted area will help the pots live longer as well.

**Perennials which should be mulched or protected over the winter:**

Mulching your perennials will insulate them for the winter. There are various types of mulch that can be used. Commercial bagged mulches, such as Natures Gold Landscape mulch provide insulation and nutrients to the plant over the winter. Straw, leaves, evergreen bows can also be used as mulch. Provide a good 2" layer of mulch around the plant and leave for the winter. Remember to move the mulch away in the spring or the plants will eventually be buried.

**Pennisetum 'Rubrum'** – This is a great fall grass with its soft pink spires of seed heads, but it detests wetness (as with many ornamental grasses) so make sure there is good drainage for the winter, and a layer of mulch will protect it.

**Zantedeschia atropurpurea - Calla Lily.** These bulbs must be lifted for the winter and stored in a cool dry area so that the bulb will remain dormant. Our soils are usually too wet for this plant and it will rot in the ground. Store the bulbs in sawdust or newspaper for the winter.

**Penstemon hybrids**

**Phygelius – Cape Fuschia**

**Mimulus**

**Bletilla**

**Asclepias**

**Verbena canadensis**

**Shizostylis coccinea**

**Helleborus species**

**Arum**

**Lavandula stoechas**

Most of your herbs will survive in containers close to the house for the winter. Pineapple sage, lemon verbena and basil should all be brought in the house. Tarragon and dill usually only survive for one year and may have to be replanted the next year.

The past two seasons have been quite wet and many people have commented on how they have lost all sorts of perennials. You may find that some seasons you will be more successful with perennials than others. Wet weather is hard on perennials. Every yard is different too. Some yards have rich topsoil, while others have high clay content. You will

**find certain things grow wonderfully in your yard, while other things simply never take off, whereas your fellow gardeners grow the same plant beautifully. Gardening is a lot of trial and error, so share your tips with your friends. If you ever have a gardening question don't hesitate to call one of the staff here at Cedar Rim Nursery for an answer!**