

Planting Perennials

Tips for Success



Getting Your Garden Started

SELECT THE RIGHT SITE

Place your gardens where you'll see them easily and often. Choose a location that's close to a water source and understand the environmental conditions of your site: soil, water, light, wind and temperature.

ASSESS YOUR SOIL

Most of us have to improve our soil with lots of organic matter. Add 4 inches of organic matter to new beds (we recommend 'Sweet Peet', a new amendment available, fine pines (also known as pine soil conditioner) or composted manure) and mix it in to a 12" depth. An alternative is to build a raised bed with a trucked-in soil mix to a 12" height. The majority of perennials require well drained soils. Create raised beds or install drain lines to meet this requirement.

You might want to perform a pH test as a safeguard. Most perennials do well in a slightly acid soil, between pH 6.0 and 6.9. You can chose to match plants to your pH or adjust the pH to match the plants. 3-4 lbs. of Sulphur per 100 sq. ft. will lower the pH one

point. 10 lbs. of Lime per 10 sq. ft. will raise pH one point.

If you are planting in established beds, dig the planting hole twice as wide and 4 inches deeper than the container and add one third by volume of an organic amendment mentioned above.

TAKE A LOOK AT THE LIGHT

While you're preparing the soil for your garden, look at how much sunlight it gets. Our plant labels list the following sun exposures.

Full Sun– 6 hours of strong sun

Partial Sun / Partial Shade– 3-5 hours of sun with protection during the hottest part of the day

Full Shade– less than 2 hours of early or late day sun

ZERO IN ON YOUR ZONE

Your hardiness zone represents the average annual minimum temperature in your region. We label plants by the USDA Plant hardiness Zone map. Cincinnati and vicinity is listed in Zone 6 with an average annual minimum temperature of –10 to 0 degrees Fahrenheit. As you move north the numbers decrease. Plants with Zones listed as 6 or below should be winter hardy in our area.

(Ex: a Zone 3 plant can withstand –40 winter temps but will also grow in our area.) Remember that zone hardiness ratings are a guideline, not a guarantee of plant survival.



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Factors such as snow cover, soil moisture levels, exposure to wind, and microclimates within a region can all affect a plant's hardiness.

ELIMINATE WEEDS

You will want to eliminate weeds in your planting bed prior to planting. You can dig or pull out any perennial weeds, spray Round Up (an herbicide) or cover the area with black plastic until all vegetation is killed. Allow a 2 week period to ensure adequate clean up. If possible, repeat this process again after you have added the soil amendments and tilled or prepared the planting bed, because new weed seeds will be brought to the surface and will germinate.

PLANTING THE PERENNIALS

The techniques for planting a perennial are essentially identical to the ones you use for planting any other plant. The night before planting, water the pot with a half diluted liquid tomato food or half strength 10-10-10 fertilizer. (if available, use manure tea).

Reduce the amount of time the plants are removed from the pot and the roots are exposed. Plant each individually rather than un-potting all at once. When removing the plant from the pot, don't pull it or you may damage the plant. To remove the perennial from its pot, hold the bottom of the pot, tip it over and slide out the plant, supporting the root ball with the palm of your hand. Tap the bottom of the pot if needed.

Tease the roots apart. If severely root bound, make three cuts into the root ball to help promote branching of the roots into the newly prepared soil.

Generally, plant at the existing soil level. Scatter fertilizer around the plant and nestle in the soil. Slow release fertilizer is the safest, such as Osmocote 14-14-14. Do not fertilize if planting in September or later. Water the plants to settle them in and eliminate air pockets. Apply a pre-emergent herbicide to reduce weeds if desired— read the label for cautions on certain varieties. Mulch to a depth of one and a half inches but keep the mulch away from the plants crown.

DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF

Remember that your perennial garden can include plants besides perennials. Trees and shrubs, roses and ornamental grasses all give structure to the garden. And annuals along with spring and fall blooming bulbs can help provide continuous color and extend the season of interest. It's tough to get a garden right the first time. Half the fun is in the tweaking that follows so don't be afraid to move a plant that doesn't look right in your garden.

Consult these resources for additional information: **The Natural Gardener— lesson from the landscape** by Chris Beardshaw, BBC Worldwide Limited / 2003 and **The Well-Designed Mixed Garden** by Tracy DiSabato-Aust, Timber Press / 2003



726 Stephens Road
Maineville, OH 45039
(513) 683-5249
www.greenfieldplantfarm.com