

Home/Garden



Dividing the perennial wealth

This summer there has been an abundance of heat and rain, not always distributed as we'd like, but the result has been rampant growth in the garden. It's gratifying to have all this autumnal richness and as we work in and enjoy the fall garden, it will be apparent that many perennials have grown and multiplied until they are quite crowded. It's time to divide those large perennial clumps, allowing the garden to get off to a beautiful and healthy start early in the spring.

Dividing perennials is not difficult, but it may take some muscle and some sharp tools. I use a good spade and a sharp chef's knife; some people find a spading fork or two very helpful. It is also important to remember to water generously any plants you are going to divide, preferably the night before. Keep some water available during the replanting process. Roots that are allowed to dry out will die.

Two of the hardest perennials to divide, from a purely physical point of view, are daylilies and Siberian iris. The roots are dense and heavy and there is an abundance of foliage. Cutting the foliage back first will make the job a little easier, and will reduce water loss and transplant shock.

Then loosen the soil around the base of the plant and dig out the entire clump. Two spading forks pushed into the center of the daylily clump back to back can be wiggled back and forth, forcing the clump into two pieces. This will take some energy. Depending of the size of the original clump, you may want to divide these halves again.

Don't let a daylily plant get too large. I have a friend who had a gorgeous Hyperion daylily in the flower border and when she finally decided it had to be divided, it took the better part of a hot fall day.

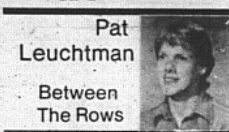
Siberian iris should be dug up like the daylily, but then cut apart with a spade. This is where I often use my sharp kitchen knife. Fortunately, daylilies and Siberian irises are very tough and no matter how you hack away at the roots, they'll probably survive.

After they have been divided, replant them in their new location, all prepared and fertilized, and water them well.

My Siberian iris grow so vigorously and multiply so rapidly, that in addition to dividing them properly, I'm prone to digging up pieces around the edge and giving them away to visiting gardeners. It's hard because the roots are so dense and both the mama and baby plant tend to look a little the worse for wear afterwards, but given good drinks of water and some time to recover they do fine.

Actually, I've dug up and given away plants at almost every season with good success, so don't think that dividing in the 'wrong' season will automatically be disastrous.

Fall is a good time to divide garden phlox. Phlox also has dense roots and is sturdy enough to survive some rough handling. I always take this opportunity to weed out grass that has grown into the middle of the



Between The Rows

clump. Besides watering them well before and after dividing, and replanting them as promptly as possible, I think the secret of success is to make good sized divisions and to plant them in soil that has been properly prepared and fertilized.

Many other perennials can be divided in the fall, achillea (yarrow), heliopsis, heuchera (coral bells), monarda (bee balm), oenothera tetragona (evening primrose) and veronica. Plants should not be blooming and they should have at least six weeks after replanting to develop good root growth before cold weather arrives.

All of these plants can also be divided early in the spring when there is only about three inches of new green growth. If you wait, longer the plant will have a little more trouble recovering and you may lose some measure of bloom.

Plants that really should be divided in the spring include astilbe and cimicifuga, which are too unwieldy to work with at any other season. Other plants that need to be divided in the spring include astilbe, coreopsis, chrysanthemum, cranesbills, physostegia and sedums.

Early fall is just as good a time as the spring to have a neighborhood plant exchange, or to press visiting gardeners into service, allowing them to take away the extra divisions. Fall is the season to share the wealth.

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Now is the

- purchase bulbs when the garden supply store is in season
- test the plants before you buy
- watch for signs of disease
- divide biennial plants before they have bloomed
- seal or cover around wind vents in cluster planters in your home
- leave mulch as long as frost will be sweet
- the "full slip" pulls away, leaving a small

FALL GARDEN

September is an excellent time to put out perennials. Choose from our large selection of Fall Blooming Plants and enjoy color right up to hard frosts. Fall Asters, Hardy Hibiscus, Boltonia, Helenium and Caryopteris are just some of the exciting possibilities.

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