



Perennial Care

Perennials grow and bloom over the spring and summer and then die back every autumn thru winter, then return in the spring from their root-stock rather than seeding themselves as an annual plant does. These are known as herbaceous perennials. However, depending on the rigors of local climate, a plant that is a perennial in its native habitat, or in a milder garden, may be treated by a gardener as an annual and planted out every year, from seed, from cuttings or from divisions, such as lantana, dahlia and similar in our climate.

Mulching

During warm weather, mulching will help to keep the soil cool and prevent loss of moisture. Mulching also deters weeds, and the mulch itself can add nutrients to the soil. Winter mulching should be considered in our climate. In the fall one can add ground leaves or straw to protect the plant's roots from severe weather. Remember to remove the winter mulch gradually in the early spring to allow the plants to slowly grow accustomed to the sunshine and warm weather. Additional hardwood mulch should not be added every season, consider a light top dressing of richly prepared leaf mulch.

Dead-heading

A personal choice in the garden, but dead-heading (removing spent flowers) will promote more blooms and will enhance the strength and health of your perennials. Deadheading before a plant goes to seed will also prevent invasive perennials from overtaking less aggressive plants. Additionally, many perennials are not very attractive when in seed. The exceptions to the deadheading rule are in perennials that have ornamental seed heads, which are attractive in their own right, or if you wish to collect seeds for future propagation. That said I also leave up plants for winter interest, (grasses, sedums...) and for habitat feeding (rudbeckia, echinacea...).

Staking and Pinching

Many tall perennials will look and fare better if they are staked or tied up to avoid slumping over on the ground. Peonies, for example, often bend over under the weight of their large blooms. Using a support, such as a wire peony hoop can keep several varieties of perennials upright. Tall-stemmed flowers can easily be tied to bamboo stakes in order to keep them off the ground. If you don't want to use stakes, try pinching plants in the late spring. Pinching plants along the stem while they are growing will promote bushy growth, rather than upward growth, so that the plant will be less likely to need a stake when it blooms.

Division

Division entails splitting larger plants apart into smaller plants. Division not only maintains the health of your perennial garden through the years, but it also is an easy way to propagate your plants. Perennials such as iris or hemerocallis (daylily) will show a noted decrease in blooms over the years if they are not divided, division can be done every 2-4 years. Plants should generally be divided in the fall, although fall-blooming flowers should be divided in the early spring.