

PERENNIALS

Bennett's carries perennials to meet all your color gardening expectations. The numerous possibilities allow you to choose the right perennial to meet your needs and the site requirements. This Helping Hand Hints issue contains general information applying to nearly all perennials. For more specific information or specific plant variety information, please consult our staff or other Helping Hand Hints brochures.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PERENNIAL

Your personal taste determines most of your plant choices. However, there are a few factors you need to consider. How much sun will the plant get? Is the area wet or dry? Do you need something tall or short? When is blooming desired? With over 900 varieties from which to choose, Bennett's has perennials to fit all these categories. Please consult with your friendly Bennett's salesperson to help pick the right one for you. We can also help design a perennial garden that will bloom during the entire season.

THE SITE

Most perennials prefer a slightly acidic to neutral soil (pH level of 5.5 to 7.5). The soil at your home can be amended by adding organic material in the form of peat, leaf mold, compost or one of the many commercial products that control pH. Amending an area will help make the soil easier to work, improve the drainage, and help plant roots grow easily. These materials should be worked into a new bed either by roto-tilling or turning the soil over with a spade, depending on the size of the area to be planted.

PLANTING YOUR PERENNIALS

Place the potted plants on the prepared bed to determine their final location. Dig a hole for each plant using a hand trowel or shovel. Remove the plant from the pot by tapping the bottom or sides of the pot and removing the soil ball. *Never* pull the plant out by the leaves and stems. Place the plant in the hole, add slow release fertilizer, and fill in the soil around the plant with your hands. The crown of the plant should be 1/2" above the ground level to allow for settling. Water the ground thoroughly to help settle the soil. It is extremely important to not allow your perennial to completely dry out during its first few years. When the ground is dry, water thoroughly to the depth of 1 1/2" to 2". Applying a water-soluble fertilizer once a month throughout the first growing season will help perennials become established quickly.

MULCH

Until your plants are well established and have covered enough area to shade out weeds, it is a good idea to mulch around them. Bennett's recommends a shallow layer (1/2" to 1") of fine mulch, such as our forest fines.

For best results be sure the mulch does not cover the crown of the plant. This layer of mulch will also help retain moisture and insulate the soil, keeping it cool in summer and help prevent excessive soil heaving in the winter and spring.

WATER

Varieties of perennials come from all climates and situations. Some are native to swamps or bogs and others thrive in the dry desert. The cycle of watering you implement needs to reflect the plant's native climate. Many of the soils in the greater Lafayette area are clay based and retain water (i.e. not well drained); this makes it very easy to overwater your perennials. To avoid overwatering, pull back the mulch at the base of the plant and feel the soil. If it feels damp, the plant does not need more water. Many perennials have shallow roots and show signs of stress quickly (i.e. wilting or diseases) when their water requirements are not met. If you see any signs of wilting, *check the soil moisture* and if dry, water immediately. Water deeply and infrequently instead of shallow and often. Do not allow the plant to sit in water. It is best to water early in the day so that the foliage has time to dry, which will help prevent foliar diseases. Afternoon heat stress may cause the plant to wilt even if the root area is moist. For more information see our Plant Care Guide or one of Bennett's sales staff.

CARE OF YOUR PERENNIALS

Proper watering and mulch can cut down on the amount of weeding that is necessary, however your perennial garden will need to be weeded. If you keep up with weeding, it makes the job easier. There are a variety of weed preventers and post emergence weed killer products for perennials. Check with us for different products and about their use on specific perennials.

Many perennials benefit from fertilizer when they are in bud. Pick a low nitrogen fertilizer (5-10-10) to get better flowering and avoid excess foliage. Also, after blossoming, most perennials will benefit from a balanced fertilizer application. Allow at least six weeks between applications of fertilizer.

After your plant is established and putting out new growth, it may need to be pinched back. This is done to encourage more branching, control blooming, and control height. Some perennials that may need pinching are: Tall Phlox, Garden Mums (please consult our Helping Hands Hint for Mums), and Asters. After your perennial blooms, you can remove the faded blossoms. This is known as deadheading. This process will focus growth potential in the plant rather than seed production.

Divide overgrown perennials in the early spring before the foliage is 2" high. You can pull small clumps apart with your fingers or use a sharp spade or ax to cut the clump in pieces. If the plant is very large you can use two digging forks placed back to back in the center and push them apart to divide the plant.

WINTER CARE

Remove dead and dying foliage from your perennials to keep harmful insects and diseases from overwintering in your beds and harming the new shoots as they emerge. Ornamental grasses do not need to be cut back in the

fall and make an interesting accent in the winter landscape. These can be cut back in the early spring or not at all.

Some new or very tender perennials need extra winter protection in the form of an insulating mulch. Mulching materials differ widely. We recommend forest fine bark, peat moss, or shredded bark because they will decompose and enrich the soil. Other options could be straw, evergreen bows, hay or leaves. These mulches are used to keep the soil temperature constant and are usually applied after a hard frost.

Remove the covering mulch from plant crowns in spring before the plants put on too much growth, but not so early that the new growth will be killed by late frosts. This should generally be done between late March and mid April.

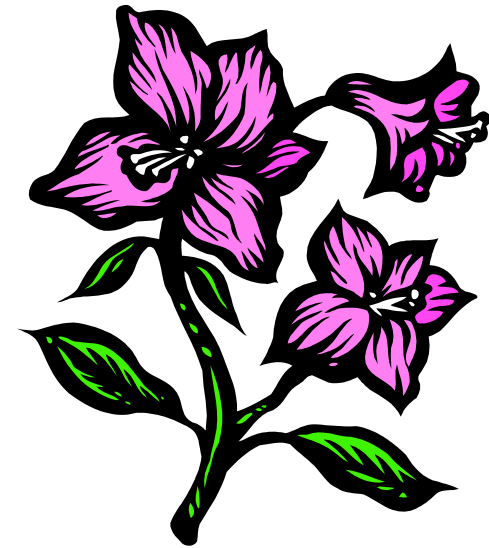
Following simple guidelines throughout the year for most perennials is easy and can lead to enjoyment of even the smallest garden. A well balanced garden should include a variety of perennials, annuals, bulbs, trees, and shrubs. To help you with information on specific plants or design ideas, please contact a Bennett's professional.

We at Bennett's are here every day to give "HELPING HAND HINTS" personally, one on one. Many gardening problems are very specific, and we couldn't possibly cover all aspects in these pamphlets. Anytime you have a specific problem or need help, feel free to call. It's our job to help you be successful in your growing endeavors, and we thoroughly enjoy giving you a "helping hand".

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HELPING HAND HINTS



Perennials