

## Dividing Herbaceous Perennials

Watching perennial plants grow and increase their amount and size of blooms fascinates many gardeners. However, after some years, these perennial plants can outgrow their space, have very few blooms, become full of weeds, and seem to be dying in the centre yet be healthy on the edges, or show poor stunted growth. Any or all of these symptoms usually are corrected by simply dividing the plants.

Spring is the best time for dividing most perennials. However, the early spring flowering perennials are best divided after flowering.

To divide a perennial, wait until it is 1-2 inches in height. Make certain the soil around the plant is moist, but not too wet. Using a sharp spade dig a trench around the outside edge of the plant. Then angle your spade to dig under the roots of the plant. Loosen the root ball completely around the plant being careful not to damage too many roots. Once the plant is loose, pick it up and move it onto a tarp or working area. Pick up and drop the plant 3 or 4 times to loosen the soil around the roots. Wash the clump to expose the roots. Always keep exposed roots moist or covered.

Now take a good look at the roots. There are basically 5 types of root systems you may find. They are fairly easy to identify.

1. Some plants have roots that form on a branch that touches the ground. Cut that branch close to the mother plant. The branch becomes a new plant with roots, a stem, and small branches ready to replant.
2. Some plants have a long root that runs along the soil line. When the root reaches an open spot it forms its own set of roots from which a plant grows. Cut the root near the mother plant. The new plant is ready for planting.
3. Some plants will develop side shoots which grow very close to the mother plant forming a clump. Keeping 3-5 side shoots together,

break or cut the connection to the mother plant. Make sure this new clump has its own root system.

4. Some plants have a long root or rhizome that runs underground past the edge of the mother plant. There it forms its own roots and plant. . Cut the long root near the mother root and you have a new plant.
5. Some plants have a woody taproot from which shoots emerge. Cut off a piece of the root about the size of your closed fist that has 4-6 shoots. This piece of root is ready for planting.

Select young healthy root clumps to replant. Wash the roots carefully, check for any sign of insects or disease. Discard any unhealthy clumps.

Replant the root clump at its original depth. Use existing soil mixed with fresh topsoil, bonemeal, and organic matter like peat moss. Tamp the soil around the base of the plant. Water the plant thoroughly. Ensure that the plant has sufficient water while it re-establishes itself during the next month.

Extra root clumps may be planted elsewhere in your landscape, shared with friends, or discarded in your compost pile.