

# Dividing and Transplanting Perennials



Grandma's front perennial gardens, along Route 48.

Very early spring, after March 15th in our zone 5B, is the best time to divide and transplant perennials to make new gardens and share your plants with friends. The second best time is in the fall after flower production has slowed down but before plants are dormant, to encourage fall root production.

Certain plants such as hosta, daylilies, sedum, and ornamental grasses actually benefit from being divided every 2 to 3 years. Daylilies and grasses, in particular, die down in the middle of the plant as their foliage increases and sunlight on the crown of the plant decreases. Toss out that unhealthy crown and make new plants with the surrounding vigorous growth.

Plants can be divided in one of two ways. If you do not care to divide and transplant the whole plant, you can separate it into sections by using a very sharp shovel or trowel. Be sure to get a good piece of the root system with each section.

To divide the whole plant, dig deep to remove most of the roots. It's best to dig after a soaking rain or heavy watering. If digging in spring and last year's stems are no longer visible or have been removed, dig as soon as the foliage appears at the crown. Waiting until after March 15 is best, so there is little risk of injury to plants stressed from low overnight temperatures. Single digit temps can be harmful.

After you have dug up the plant, try gently pulling the roots apart by hand. If this doesn't work, use a sharp knife or shovel to slice through the root system, doing as little damage as possible. A few plants with smaller root systems should not be divided any smaller than in half. Two such plants are *Dicentra* (bleeding heart) and *Monarda* (bee balm) which will die if divided too far. For larger plants such as lythrum, large hosta and grasses, dig an 18" wide hole. For smaller plants, dig 12" wide. Mix *Grandma's Planting Mix* with existing soil in the hole. This is a great time to improve the soil with compost if needed. Place plant or division in the hole and gently backfill the hole, then water in well. Use *Fertilo-me Root Stimulator* to water again and help avoid any transplant shock. It is best to re-plant the same day plants are dug or divided, so roots do not dry out. If there is no rain to keep new beds moist, water as needed.



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