



## Perennials

### *permanent plantings that get better every year*

Gardens often begin with a master plan and each element has a role to play in that plan: trees and shrubs give a permanent living structure to a design, groundcovers and lawns give the space and clarity to highlight that structure and flowering annuals bring continuous color to the various shades of garden green. But perennials are the queens of the garden, giving it seasonal grace and meaning. Each blooms and flourishes in its own time, giving us the joy of anticipation and the satisfaction of dependability.

### *preparing for planting*

- Observe your garden at different times of day to know what areas are full sun (minimum 6 hours), part-sun (4 – 6 hours), or full shade (less than 4 hours of sun). These terms cover a spectrum with many variations: morning vs. afternoon sun, pockets of hot sun, high shade under tall trees, dappled shade, dense shade cast by a structure or evergreens.
- Some areas will naturally hold more moisture while other spots may be very dry. Amending the soil with *Surface* will improve drainage, help aerate compacted clay soils, and aid in moisture retention. Adding high quality compost such as *Dr. Earth Motherland* before planting will ensure that each plant gets off to a good start. It is better to amend a designated area before planting rather than amending as you go along, which will disturb the roots of plants already beginning to establish.

### *choosing perennials*

- Perennials are defined as those that are hardy in your zone, a USDA measurement of the average annual extreme minimum temperature. In the St. Louis area, Zone 6b is roughly bounded by Highway 141, transitioning to Zone 6a beyond that.
- As gardeners, we are often captivated by the new and different – and every year there are developments to surprise us. Remember to balance this enticing novelty with plants that are tried and true. There is a reason they have reached that status and they can be the stalwart background for all your experimentation.
- ‘Sleep, Creep, Leap’ is an old saying about perennials: consider them a long-term investment. The first two years they won’t seem to grow much beyond their original size. Once they hit the third year, however, watch out!

### *planting*

- Dig each planting hole twice as wide as the plant’s container as this will encourage horizontal root growth. The hole should be only as deep as the height of the container. If you have already amended the soil, there will be no need to amend each hole.
- Do not try to plant when the soil is overly wet as digging can severely compact the soil, preventing oxygen from reaching plant roots. If the soil has been amended properly, a handful should crumble easily when squeezed.
- Remove plant carefully from its container. Loosen any roots visible on the outside of the root ball. If the amount of roots visible is excessive, use a shears or knife to create several vertical cuts in the roots.
- Place the plant in the hole and backfill the newly mixed soil halfway up the root ball. Water down to fill any large gaps. Add remaining soil. Fill only to the level of the soil as it existed in its original container.
- Mix a slow-release perennial fertilizer such as *Espoma Plant-Tone* into the top few inches of soil and water thoroughly.
- Mulch your perennials with more compost or hardwood mulch. Two inches deep should be sufficient but the area directly under the plant should be kept free of any mulch, basically the circumference of the plant’s former pot.

## *care of your newly planted perennial*

- Newly planted perennials generally need approximately 1" of water per week in order establish a strong root system.
- In the absence of sufficient rain, water thoroughly, deeply and directly at the roots of the plants about twice a week, checking the soil every other day.
- If the soil at 2" below the surface is dry, water thoroughly. If the soil at that level is cool and moist, wait to water and check again the following day.
- Once your perennial has settled in and started producing new growth, follow the care guidelines for that particular type of plant.

## *perennial planting diagram*

