



## Perennials : 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 one 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 discover what areas are full sun (6 hours or more), part-sun (4-6 hours), or full shade (less than 4 hours of sun). In addition, there is variety in the quality of light: morning vs. afternoon sun, pockets of hot sun, dappled shade, high shade under tall trees, and dense shade cast by a structure or evergreens.
- Some areas will naturally hold more moisture while other spots may be very dry. Add *Turface* to improve drainage, help aerate compacted clay soils, and aid in moisture retention.
- If needed, amend the soil with *Dr. Earth Mother Land Compost* before planting.

### Choosing Perennials

- Learn the zone range each plant. The St. Louis city area is in Zone 6b (average extreme minimum temperature range is -5 to 0). The county transitions to Zone 6a (-10 to -15) beyond a rough boundary made by Highways 270 and 141.
- Every year new and different plants arrive to surprise us. Choose plants that have gained tried-and-true status to balance all this enticing novelty. These perennials will 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

- Do not try to plant when the soil is overly wet as digging can severely compact the soil which will prevent oxygen from reaching plant roots. If the soil has been amended properly, a handful should crumble easily when squeezed.
- 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 root mass. Build a soil mound in the center of the hole to spread the roots.
- Remove plant from the pot and carefully loosen the roots, allowing the potting mix to fall to the side (to be used later).
- Spread the roots outward, tickling and teasing them somewhat, and place them over the soil mound in the hole.
- Vigorous plants may have become rootbound. You may have to cut through dense or circling roots with pruners or a garden knife. Sometimes a disc or ‘frisbee’ forms at the base of the rootball and this should be cut off completely.
- The crown of the plant should be at or slightly above grade. Backfill with the native soil and then water in to settle the soil, adding more if needed. Use the rest to build a low circle around the plant to act as a watering well (see diagram).
- Use the leftover potting mix as a first layer of topdressing and then spread 2”-3” of wood chips or compost as mulch.
- Keep the area directly under the plant free from mulch, basically the circumference of the plant’s former pot.

## Caring for Your Newly Planted Perennial

- Newly planted perennials generally need approximately 1" of water per week in order to 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. Maintaining good mulch coverage will help to retain moisture and keep down weeds.
- 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 plant has settled in and started producing new growth, follow specific guidelines on water needs, fertilizing, deadheading, pruning and stress prevention for that particular plant.

## Perennial Planting Diagram

