

Planting & Feeding Perennials

A soil test is always advised before adding lime, gypsum, and other nutrients.

- 1) **Planning your layout** is important when you are planting multiple perennials or creating a perennial garden. Below are some tips for pre-planting.
 - Place the potted plants in their locations prior to planting to make sure the design looks the way you want. It's easier to adjust the design while the plants are still potted versus trying to move them after they have been planted.
 - Give the plants a good drink before they are planted.

- 2) **Preparing the planting hole**, the right way will help in getting your perennials off to a good start. Below are some tips for preparing your planting hole:
 - Dig your hole shallow and wide. Don't dig the hole any deeper than the depth of the pot the plants came in. You will want to dig a hole at least twice as wide as the pot, this allows the roots to push out into the loosened soil quickly to gather moisture and nutrients. The faster they can do that, the more quickly they will adapt to their new home and grow.
 - If you've prepared the soil in your new bed with lots of compost, don't add more to the hole. The roots may never push out into the surrounding soil if you make the soil in the hole too rich. But if you're planting new perennials in an established bed, you'll want to amend the soil with extra compost as you dig.

- 3) **Preparing the perennial** for planting is another key point to help ensure your plants get off to a healthy start.
 - Loosen the roots. You may see roots circling at the bottom of the root ball. Pull them loose or they may continue to circle instead of spreading out into the soil, which can stunt or eventually even kill the plant. Don't worry if a few roots tear — the plant will recover quickly.
 - Occasionally, you may come across a plant that's been growing in its pot so long that the roots have grown into a hard, solid mass. When you find one of those, you'll need to take more drastic measures to loosen them. Make one slice (a **soil knife** works well for this task), about a third of the way up, into the solid mass of roots. Then make shallow cuts on two sides to keep the upper roots from continuing to spiral. Gently pull the two halves apart. When you set the plant into the hole, keep these sections spread apart.

- 4) **Planting the perennial** and preparing the area around it is the last step in the planting process.
- Put the root ball in the hole and spread the roots out in the bottom. Lay something straight, such as the yardstick, across the top of the hole to check the planting depth. When in doubt, it's better to plant the crown a bit too high rather than too deep.
 - Push a couple inches of soil back into the hole as you see in the photo above and adjust the depth if you need to. Gently firm the soil around the root ball to support the plant.
 - Water the new plants by pouring water around the roots instead of on the crown. The plant is less likely to sink this way. Let the water drain away and check the depth again. Finish backfilling the hole, making sure to cover all the potting mix. (If you don't, it can wick moisture away from the roots.) Don't tamp this upper layer of soil.
 - Add mulch around the plants. Leave a little space between the mulch and the base of the plant, this will help to avoid any problems with crown rot.
 - With everything planted, soak the area with a sprinkler. Run it enough to keep the bed moist for the first week or two, then slowly decrease the watering to encourage root growth.
- 5) **Fertilizing perennials.** Ideally, the plant should not need fertilizer in subsequent weeks because it has been placed in enriched garden soil, where the necessary nutrients are already in place and available to the plant once the root hairs start to grow. However, if you choose to apply a fertilizer during planting, you should consider using an organic starter fertilizer which will help jumpstart the root growth. After a season of growth, you can start using regular slow release plant fertilizers.

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