

The humble daisy



Pretty, hardy and prolific, common varieties like shasta daisies and black-eyed Susans are staples in the perennial garden. But there's much more to the daisy than that. The word daisy comes from the Old English "day's eye" – a flower that opens in the morning and closes at night. The daisy (or *Compositae*) family is thought to be the largest genus with over 1,200 species. It includes such garden favourites as chrysanthemums, dahlias, sunflowers, asters and calendulas (marigolds).

Now is the time to start most varieties outdoors from seed unless they are biennials – plant these in the Fall to flower the following year. (Note that many varieties self-seed prolifically, something to keep in mind when you are trying to decide where to plant!) Here are some planting tips:

If the seeds have a hard coating to shake them in a jar filled with coarse sand and let the seeds soak overnight in water. Prepare the bed by raking the soil to an even surface and add some peat or compost (no fertilizer! Water the soil if it's dry. Sow the seeds thinly (you can mix really small seeds with fine sand for easier sowing). Cover the seed with a little soil and firm gently. Cover the area with chicken wire or twigs to prevent birds from eating the seed.

Depending on the variety, some seeds germinate within days others take weeks. When the seedlings are big enough to handle they need to be thinned out leaving one seedling every 2 inches. A week later thin out again leaving the seedlings 4 inches apart. Bigger plants should be spaced 6 inches apart.

If you have perennial daisies in your garden you'll probably want to divide them after one or two seasons. The best time to do this is early Spring or Fall. This would be a good opportunity to pot up a few for the GGG Garden Sale (see front page article). As a general rule, when dividing plants it's best to avoid times when it is too wet, too dry or very cold. Here's how you do it:

Lift the daisy with a fork and then carefully divide the root ball either with your hand or with the fork into smaller pieces, trying to damage the roots as little as possible. Shake off the soil and choose the healthiest looking pieces. These are often the pieces from the outer ring of the plant. The center of the plant is usually woody and shouldn't be used. Cut off any old and untidy looking bits and then replant or pot! Work as quickly as you can so the fine roots don't have time to dry out. Water your new plants thoroughly.

It's said that dreams of daisies in the Spring bring months of good luck, so plant some daisies and buy a lottery ticket. Who knows?

For ***much*** more information about daisies of all kinds, visit www.daisyparadise.com.