

Three reasons for dividing perennials

THERE ARE THREE REASONS FOR DIVIDING PERENNIALS ? to control their size, to propagate new plants, or to rejuvenate old plants. Most perennials can be divided in early spring as they start to produce new growth, or in the fall after the first heavy frost. Some perennials need splitting every couple of years to stay healthy, while others can be safely left alone for many years.

Which method you use for dividing plants depends on their root structure. Large plants such as delphiniums grow in clumps. The original plant grows outward forming an ever expanding, tight root ball. Eventually the centre part of the plant will die leaving a number of smaller plants around the perimeter. Dig up the root. Using a sharp spade cut the root in half and cut the halves into smaller sections each with two or three shoots and a mass of roots attached. Replant these as soon as possible. Ground covers and other plants that creep across the ground root where the stems touch damp soil. Divide these simply by digging up small sections complete with roots. Place the new plants in shallow holes and press a little soil on top. Plants that send out thin underground runners or rhizomes can be hard to control. Digging around the main plant and removing the wandering rhizomes at least twice a year can help to keep them in check. To propagate, plant any of the rhizomes that have small hair roots.

Irises have thick rhizome roots. Try separating them by gently tugging them apart. If this doesn't work, take a *sharp* knife and cut them apart at their narrowest point. Remove any parts that are soft or damaged. Replant the healthy rhizomes, ensuring that each has one or two "eyes". Plant bearded irises in shallow holes with just the tops of the rhizomes exposed. If you plant them too deep they won't flower. Bulbs should be dug up carefully and gently separated. Discard any damaged bulbs. Dig spring bulbs after they flower and the foliage has begun to die down, but while they are still easy to locate. Lilies are best moved in the fall.