

Divide & Conquer!

... a guide to dividing perennials.

A perennial is any non-woody plant that makes growth for three years or more. Most perennials naturally grow out from the crown and root, forming clumps. This makes propagating these plants by division an easy choice. If your mature perennial has lost its luster, the division process can give new life to your plant, as well as provide additional plants for your garden.

Fall and early spring are the ideal times to divide spring blooming perennials. Avoid dividing your plants when the weather is hot and dry, or during times of freezing temperatures. Most perennials need to be divided every three to four years, although this varies according to type of plant.

Your perennial can be divided either by digging up the entire plant or by taking pieces from the side of the growing clump. To do this, use a spade to loosen the soil around the plant and gently pull it out of the ground.

The best way to separate an especially thick root is to insert two garden spades back to back into the clump and pry the roots apart (see example at right). The root can also be cut apart using a sharp knife or spade, but pulling apart gently does less damage.



It is important that when the root is separated that each piece has a good root system and several new shoots. Avoid old woody root systems and opt instead for new strong growth. The larger the piece after divided, the sooner the piece will mature. The smaller the division, the longer it will take to mature. Throw away any pieces that may look diseased or weak.

Do not let the newly exposed roots dry out. If you cannot plant them right away, then it is necessary to heel the plants in, either in the ground or in a plastic box that contains soil.

Got Questions? We've Got Answers

- Soil Testing
- Insect Identification
- Plant Disease Diagnosis
- Plant Identification

For Horticulture questions, please contact me at 859-623-4072, or e-mail, amanda.sears@uky.edu.
You may also stop by and visit me at the Madison County Extension Center.