KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“How to Divide Perennials”

December 7, 2021

The mere thought of dividing perennials has always been quite intimidating for me. Researching this topic has given me newfound confidence.

Many perennials in the garden outgrow the space you allotted, while others begin to decline with age. Good news, even the oldest perennials can be rejuvenated by digging and dividing the plant.

Signs of plant decline include weak blooming stalks, fewer flowers, and smaller leaves. If these signs are present, it’s time to divide. Tips include:

1. Prepare the soil where you plan to plant the new divisions by watering deeply a couple of days before hand and, add organic material or compost.
2. Clean and sharpen your tools before you start. To prevent the spread of disease, use an antiseptic wipe or prepare a 10% bleach/water mixture.
3. The best time to divide a plant is early spring, or fall (after the stems are cut back). Dig around the outermost drip line of the plant. Shovel under the clump several places and lift the plant roots.
4. Although you can divide any time of year, it’s best in cooler weather when the soil temperature is warmer than air temperature. This enables the roots to establish before the plant puts on top growth.
5. You can divide plants while in bloom, (early spring or fall bloomers), but be extra gentle and keep the roots moist.
6. Transplant only healthy sections. Watch out for discolored stems and roots. If dividing a large plant, the best divisions are often the outside edges. Many perennial grasses die out entirely in the center.
7. If you are unable to replant the division right away, place the plant in a container in the shade and keep the roots moist. (Cover roots with potting soil or a damp newspaper.) If the roots dry out, place the plant in a bucket of water for an hour to rehydrate before planting.
8. After digging, shake off the soil or hose it off and look for natural sections to divide. Depending on the size of the parent, 3 to 6 divisions may be possible. Each new division should have at least two growing points per clump.
9. Determine the root type for making divisions:
   1. Clumps/offsets types (including Echinacea and Hosta) have new/small clumps at the base. You can cut between the parent and new clump.
   2. Surface root types, (Monarda, Rudbeckia, Sedums) form a new crown and root clump separate from the parent. Simply cut between the stem clumps.
   3. Underground running root types, (including Geraniums and Anemones) called suckering types, can be cut between clumps where sucker roots have formed.
   4. Taproot plants (such as Papaver) can be divided by using a knife. Much like dividing a potato, be sure each division contains an eye or two with some viable roots on it.
   5. Woody rooted plants (including Phlox and Lavender) tend to form new roots when the stems rest on the soil (or became buried). Simply cut the stem between the newly rooted portion and the parent plant.
10. Dig the new planting hole wide enough and deep enough for the roots. Form a small hill in the bottom of the hole to spread out the roots and ensure they are pointed downward before you cover with soil. The crowns should be even with the soil line.

Given proper growing conditions, perennials can multiply quickly. By dividing into healthy, smaller divisions, you should get a more vigorous plant with stronger blooms next season. Enjoy many more blooms without spending much money.

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, go to our website gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at it on KPOV, The Point.

References:

<https://extension-oregonstate.edu/gardening/flowers-shrubs-trees/perennials-how-dig-divide>

<http://today.oregonstate.edu/news/divide-and-conquer-plants-keep-them-healthy-and-productive>