

PERENNIALS

What Are Annuals and Perennials?

Annuals complete their life cycle in one growing season. Seed germinates in the spring, the plant grows, flowers, produces seed and then dies.

Perennials live for more than one growing season. There are two types of perennials. Herbaceous perennials generally die to the ground at the end of the growing season but send up new shoots the following spring. Woody perennials, such as trees and shrubs, do not die back to the ground but get larger each year.

Using Perennials

Perennials provide a long sequence of bloom if plants are carefully selected. Very early bloom can be obtained by planting spring flowering bulbs with perennials. The peak perennial bloom comes in June and July with a scattering of bloom ending with the chrysanthemums in the fall.

Once planted, perennials come up every year for a number of years. Unfortunately, some do not last very many years. The life span of a particular planting of perennials depends on the soil type and the care the bed receives.

Preparing Perennial Beds

Perennials planted in poorly prepared soil may last only one year. A good perennial site has excellent drainage and protection from drying winds. Perennial bed preparation should begin the year before the bed is to be planted. Check the drainage and make improvements if needed by adding organic matter. Deep soil preparation is important for perennials because the plants will be in place for many years.

Planting Perennials

Select compact and dark green plants. Plants held in warm shopping areas have long, pale green growth and are not as suitable as seedlings or completely dormant plants. Named varieties are best because their ornamental characteristics are known. Plants grown from saved seed may, or may not, be different than the plant the seed was collected from. Many perennials do not produce true from seed. Seed saved from garden phlox produces plants with muddy pink flowers. Plants purchased from catalogs may arrive as small divisions or root cuttings. These have a better chance for survival if started in pots to be transplanted later.

Perennials vary in size so set plants in the garden at proper spacings. Over crowded plants are more subject to disease problems.

Do not leave plants sitting around after buying them. Plant them as soon as possible.

If grown in containers with individual compartments for each plant, remove plants by gently flexing the sides.

Tear off the tops of peat pots, or bury it completely at planting time. Any portion of a peat pot sticking out of the soil acts like a wick and dries out the rest of the pot. Roots have a hard time getting through the dry brittle pot.

Set plants at the same level they grew at in the flat or container.

Once planted, water the newly set plants.