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Your Indoor Outdoor guide to gardening **OCTOBER**

DIVIDING PERENNIALS

Autumn is time to divide dormant perennials, as well as those that have finished flowering. Dividing perennials produces new plants and helps promote less competition in the area for nutrients, moisture and light. Division revitalizes existing plants while controlling growth.

When to divide the clumps largely depends on the species. Check most familiar garden varieties for signs of needing to be transplanted every three years. Check for dieback in the center of such species as Shasta daisies, phlox, coral bells, Rudbeckia and Echinacea. Divide spring and summer bloomers like daylily, Astilbe, red hot poker, tickseed, Dianthus, Iris and yarrow in the fall after flowering as needed. Divide plants that enjoy dense growth, such as Hostas and Hellebores, only when they are extremely overcrowded. Peonies only need division when they fail to flower; they can thrive in the same spot for decades. Ornamental grasses require frequent division.

Prepare the new bed space with organic matter and any soil amendments your soil test recommends. Avoid high nitrogen fertilizer to promote root growth.

Prior to division, thoroughly water plants a few days ahead and plan for a cloudy day to minimize plant stress. Since new plants grow back from the roots every year, it is important to give them the best possible start.

Once the beds are prepared and plants are well watered, it is time to dig them up. This allows you to closely examine the whole root system. Gently pull the plant into smaller sections by hand. If the plant does not separate readily, cut through with a sharp, sterile knife. Keep two to four stems or buds together per division. Cut the stems back on plants in active growth to about four inches. Plant immediately, or cover the roots with wet newspaper and plant as soon as possible. Plant divisions at the same depth as the parent plants. Allow for enough space between plants for development of a healthy root system. Keep them well watered and mulched to insulate roots and retain moisture. If you are separating plants and returning them to the same bed, remove the entire clump and cover the roots with wet newspaper. Amend the soil, then replant divisions.

LAWNS

- Rake or vacuum leaves from lawn. Leaves left on lawn, especially maple or sycamore leaves, can smother the lawn.
- Test soil with a soil test kit. Soil test kits are available from your county Cooperative Extension office.
- If test results indicate a need for lime, top-dress at this time.
- Aerate lawn.
- New lawns can be established by dormant seeding in mid-October and covering with hydromulch (a virgin wood-fiber, free of weed seeds.)
- New lawns from sod can be established up to mid-October. The new sod must be watered until winter weather sets in.

- This is the best time to control perennial lawn weeds like dandelions and broadleaf plantain. You must correctly identify the weed you want to control. Some weeds, such as ground ivy and violets, will be difficult to control in any case.

BULBS

- Continue planting bulbs; include lilies.
- Plant or move peonies.
- Hyacinths and some other bulbs have oils which can cause skin irritation in sensitive people. Wear gloves when handling bulbs.
- Begin forcing bulbs for indoor display. Some to try: paperwhites, lily-of-the-valley, hyacinth.

HOUSEPLANTS

- Bring any remaining houseplants in prior to frost. Rinse leaves and soak pots in water for 15-20 minutes to remove most pests.
- Reduce watering and stop fertilizing to allow plants to go dormant.
- Pot spring flowering bulbs with tips exposed to force bloom. Moisten soil and put in refrigerator for 10 to 13 weeks. Transfer to a cool and sunny area and allow 3-4 weeks for blooms to appear.
- Pot up parsley, sage, thyme and chives for a winter kitchen garden.

PERENNIALS, BIENNIALS & ANNUALS

- Continue fall planting, especially of pansies.
- Divide plants that have open centers. Do not divide fall flowering plants until next spring. Examples of plants to divide now: bugle weed, snow-in-summer, bleeding hearts, daylilies, Hostas, peonies, Phlox, and yarrow.
- If dividing peonies, include at least three buds in each division and set plants one inch or less below the soil. Expect it to take three years before each division will rebloom.
- Establish a wildflower garden. Seeds will germinate next spring, and grow vigorously then. Provide water at the time of sowing if conditions are dry, but do not fertilize. Combine wildflowers with native grasses for a more natural effect.
- If you are subject to allergies in the fall, see if pampas grass or fountain grass is nearby.

ROSES

- Control aphids with water, horticultural oil, or insecticidal soap sprays.

TREES & SHRUBS

- October and November are the best months to plant most trees and shrubs.
- Keep plants well watered until the ground freezes.
- Lilacs can be transplanted now.
- After stress caused by drought and other problems, you will probably notice early fall color and leaf drop on many deciduous trees. This is especially common for ash, apple, elm, oak and hackberry. If you noticed this before the end of August on a tree, the plant may have trouble surviving through the winter. To check on potential survival, look at the buds. If buds are fat and soft, and the insides of the twigs are a fresh green color, then the plant has a good chance of survival.
- Needled evergreens: pines, spruces, and hemlocks, with poor growth may benefit from an application of fertilizer between mid-October and mid-March. If fertilizing hemlocks avoid using nitrogen in the mix where hemlock wooly adelgids are a problem.
- Remove damaged and dead wood from trees.

- Again, rake or shred large fallen leaves, especially maple, to prevent smothering grass. Smaller leaves like honeylocust can be left.
- Pick seedpods from golden-rain trees to dry and use for winter arrangements.