



Columbia Nursery

Dividing Perennials: A Guide for Gardeners

Columbia Nursery – Northwest Montana

Why Divide Perennials?

Perennials provide vibrant color and long-lasting beauty in the garden. Herbaceous perennials—plants with soft stems that die back each winter—return each spring. Common examples include Peonies, Daylilies, and Pinks.

Dividing perennials is an essential part of keeping them healthy and productive. Benefits of division include:

- Controlling size and spread (e.g., Bee Balm, Yarrow)
- Rejuvenating older plants to improve performance (e.g., Siberian Iris)
- Multiplying plants for new garden areas or to share with friends

When to Divide Perennials

The general rule of thumb is:

- Spring and Early Summer Bloomers: Divide in fall
- Late Summer and Fall Bloomers: Divide in spring

Timing Tips:

- Most perennials need at least 3 years of growth before dividing.
- Spring Division: Mid-April through May (as soon as the soil is workable)
- Fall Division: Mid-August through late October
- Dormant Plants: Some plants like Oriental Poppies and Bleeding Hearts can be divided when their foliage turns yellow in midsummer.

How to Divide Perennials

Perennials have different root systems. Your division method will depend on the root type:

Fibrous Roots

Examples: Daylily, Hosta, Vinca

- Use a serrated knife to cut the clump into sections.
- Each division should have a healthy crown (above-ground portion) and roots.
- For groundcovers, slice and lift sections intact.



Columbia Nursery

Tubers & Rhizomes

Examples: Peonies (tubers), Irises (rhizomes)

- Cut into sections ensuring each piece has growth points or “eyes.”
- Rhizomes must include part of the crown for successful replanting.

Bulbs & Corms

Examples: Daffodils, Tulips

- Dig up bulbs in early fall.
- Store in a cool, dry place until soil cools to 50°F for replanting.
- Use whole bulbs—never cut bulbs into pieces.
- Add bone meal to planting holes for healthy spring growth.

Best Practices for Dividing Perennials

- Choose a cool, overcast day—preferably damp or lightly raining.
- Avoid dividing on hot, sunny days.
- Have new planting areas ready before you start.
- Use a digging fork instead of a shovel to avoid damaging roots.
- Keep divisions moist and shaded during the process (damp burlap or a bucket of water works well).
- Remove weeds from the root mass before transplanting.
- Plant divisions as soon as possible.

Aftercare:

- Add a little bone meal to the bottom of transplant holes.
- Do not fertilize fall plantings—wait until spring with a balanced fertilizer like 16-16-16.
- Keep soil evenly moist, especially in dry fall weather.

Need Help?

Visit Columbia Nursery for advice, tools, and planting supplies. Our staff is happy to help you succeed with dividing perennials and growing a thriving garden!