

# Perennial Care & Maintenance

Perennials include all those flowering plants that bloom year after year (with care) such as chrysanthemums, marguerites, or daylilies. Some perennials grow, bloom, and then die back to ground level each year, while others are evergreen and produce new foliage even when they are not blooming. Whatever their growth habits, perennials require some grooming during the year to keep them healthy and looking good. Some may need dividing or transplanting when they begin to look crowded.

## **SHEARING:**

Shear or cut dead flowers from flowering perennials, when the bloom season is nearly over. Use hedge shears or grass clippers to cut off faded blooms and not more than one inch of the foliage. Leave as much leaf surface as possible since plants may not sprout new growth from bare twigs.

## **CUTTING BACK:**

Cut back or remove woody or dying parts of plants (like geraniums or chrysanthemums). On some plants the flower stalks can be cut back to a main stem or to ground level right after blooming. Plants that produce new shoots from underground like asparagus fern can be cut back to ground level. For geraniums, cut woody stalks back to a bud or sideshoot.

## **TIPS CUTTING:**

Tip cut to produce new sturdy young plants from old plants (like sedum). Many perennials quickly form new roots if you break off healthy shoots and plant the broken end. Before planting, dip the end of this stem into rootone to give the plant a good start. Some perennials that root easily are chrysanthemums, geranium and sedum.

## **CHEMICAL FERTILIZER:**

Many different fertilizers are available in dry, liquid, and tablet form. Those containing all the needed food elements are called complete fertilizers. Others contain a high percentage of only one element such as nitrogen, phosphorus or potassium. Before purchasing a fertilizer, check to see how much of these main elements it contains. Somewhere on the package you will find three numbers such as 10-10-5. The first number refers to the percentage of nitrogen, the second phosphorus and the last potassium. If one of the numbers is zero, then that particular element is not included in the mixture.

Sometimes you may find your plants do not always require all three elements. Some plants require more nitrogen than others while the same may hold true of phosphorus.

## **ORGANIC FERTILIZER:**

Organic fertilizers are made of various materials such as cottonseed meal, blood meal or bone meal. Most organic fertilizers are rather slow in giving up their nutrients since bacterial action is required before nutrients can be released.

Some people think that manure and compost are fertilizers. Both may contain tiny amounts of usable nutrients (manure is typically 1-1-1), but they are best used as soil amendments to improve texture and promote growth of soil bacteria. The bacteria in turn help your plants to take nourishment from the soil.

## **USING FERTILIZER:**

Labels on packaged fertilizer give instructions for their use. Look for the amounts suggested for an area of square feet or for the amount to be mixed in a gallon of water. Fertilizer comes in dry or liquid form. To help the dry fertilizer be as effective as possible, you may want to dig it into the soil around the root zone. Whether you use the liquid or dry form, the fertilizer must be watered into the soil thoroughly or it will do no good.

## **DISEASES AND INSECTS:**

You can control diseases and insects in your garden by preventing problems before they take hold. Both organic and chemical solutions are available. Above all please read and follow the advice on all fungicide and pesticide labels. Mildew, rust, and crown rot can be helped by using multipurpose fungicides such as Daconil 2787®, Sulfur Plant Fungicides and Liquid Copper products. Aphids, spider mites, leaf miners, white fly and slugs respond to such products as Insecticidal Soaps, Hot Pepper Wax®, Systemic Granules or Rotenone.