



# *Bucks Country Gardens*

## **The Basics About Perennials**

Perennials are long-lived and easy-to-care plants that grace the garden for years with bloom and texture. Listed below are a few basic recommendations when starting your perennial garden, and how to maintain its everlasting beauty.

### **PLANTING**

Prepare the soil before planting – perennials are in their locations for a number of years and will benefit from good drainage and organic soil. Peat moss, manures, compost, sand, aged leaves, and other organic matter can improve drainage. Till the soil to a depth of 12-18 inches, depending on the ultimate size of your perennial plants.

Perennials generally grow quickly so resist the urge to plant them too close together. Follow spacing suggestions on the care tag. During the first year of the garden you may want to fill in the spaces with annuals. Proper spacing will also cut down on disease and insect problems. Refer to any of the literature at Bucks Country Gardens information center and book display for garden designs and color/plant schemes in the garden.

### **FERTILIZING**

Perennials benefit from two high phosphorus feedings a year (such as 5-10-10 or 0-20-0)- in early spring as the leaves begin to grow, and once again, about 6 weeks later. Do not fertilize late in the season as cold weather approaches; the late feeding may cause active growth that may result in serious damage due to the cold weather shock. A slow-release fertilizer (≥Bulb-tone≤ or similar that contains bone meal) works very well for perennials; high nitrogen fertilizers tend to cause too leggy and soft plants.

### **INSECTS AND DISEASES**

By nature, most perennials are resistant to problems that can plague less-vigorous plants, but they can have an occasional problem. Water plants during the first half of the day (this allows the foliage to dry by night-fall and will decrease overall fungal problems. Inspect the undersides of the leaves for insects- many of these pesky critters like to stay out of the sun. Check for new growth for green waxy aphids that feed on the plant juices from tender shoots. An all-purpose garden spray will take care of most of your pest problems.

### **DEADHEADING**

This term refers to the removal of spent flowers from the perennial plants. You will be amazed by how much more bloom time you will get from some of these plants when the old flowers are removed before they have a chance to set seed. With a sharp knife or pruners simply cut to a point just above a leaf.

### **PRUNING**

When the frosts have blackened foliage in the fall, cut plants back to near ground level; clean up all dead stems and foliage. This will help keep plants healthy and reduce the number of places insects can overwinter.

## **WINTERIZING**

Light mulch applied after the ground is thoroughly frozen (usually in December) will benefit your perennial garden. This is especially true during the first year when root systems have not yet completely established themselves. One suggestion of light mulch may be cut branches from Christmas trees or other evergreens layered two deep on top of the plants. Commercial mulches may compact over the young root system and cut off the air supply, or hold too much moisture. Remove these layers in the spring when the crocus begins to bloom. The purpose of this light mulching is to keep the ground frozen for as long as possible to avoid the late winter freezing and thawing that can  $\geq$ heave $\leq$  the plants out of the ground and damage the root system.

Enjoy your perennials, they make great cut flowers, and many, such as yarrow and statice, are prized as dried flowers. Their unusual shapes and colors lend dramatic interest to floral arrangements and landscapes alike! They are a delight to the eye and provide dependable beauty year after year.