

DIVIDING PERENNIALS

Timing & Technique Tips



While many perennials can be divided in either early spring or early fall, some are very picky. In the following list, the optimal time to divide each perennial is denoted by (S) for spring and (F) for early fall. A single asterisk indicates that division should take place after the plant flowers. Two asterisks mean that protective gloves should be worn when dividing the plant, since its sap may irritate skin.

DIVIDE THESE PLANTS BY HAND

Blanket flowers	(Gaillardia spp.) S/F	Lamb's ears	(Stachys byzantina) S/F
Bleeding hearts	(Dicentra spp.) S*	Moss pink	(Phlox subulata) F
Bugleweed	(Ajuga reptans) S/F	Primroses	(Primula spp.) S*
Columbines	(Aquilegia spp.) S/F	Pulmonarias	(Pulmonaria spp.) S*/F
Coral bells	(Heuchera spp.) S/F	Pussytoes	(Antennaria dioica) S/F
Cranesbills	(Geranium spp.) S/F	Sea thrift	(Armeria maritima) S/F
Creeping Jenny	(Lysimachia nummularia) S/F	Speedwell	(Veronica spicata) S/F
Deadnettle	(Lamium maculatum) S/F	Spurge (Euphorbia myrsinites)	S/F**
Epimediums	(Epimedium spp.) S*/F	Stonecrop	(Sedum spectabile) S/F
Foam flower	(Tiarella cordifolia) S/F	Sweet woodruff (Galium odoratum)	F
Forget-me-not	(Myosotis sylvatica) S*/F	Violets, pansies (Viola spp.)	S/F
Hellebores	(Helleborus spp.) S*/F	Wormwood	(Artemisia ludoviciana) S/F
Jacob's ladder	(Polemonium caeruleum) S/F	Yarrow	(Achillea millefolium) S/F
Lady's mantle	(Alchemilla mollis) S/F		

DIVIDE THESE PLANTS WITH A SPADE OR PITCHFORK

African lilies	(Agapanthus cvs.) S/F	Japanese painted fern (Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum')	S/F
Anemone	(Anemone × hybrida) S	Jerusalem sage	(Phlomis russeliana) S/F
Asters	(Aster spp.) S	Lemon balm	(Melissa officinalis)
Bee balm	(Monarda didyma) S/F	Ligularia	(Ligularia dentata) S/F
Bellflowers	(Campanula spp.) S/F	Masterwort	(Astrantia major) S/F
Big bluestem grass (Andropogon gerardii)	S/F	Monkshood	(Aconitum napellus) S
Black-eyed Susans (Rudbeckia spp.)	S/F	Penstemons	(Penstemon spp.) S/F
Blood grass	(Imperata cylindrica) S/F	Perennial sage	(Salvia × superba) S*/F
Cardinal flower	(Lobelia cardinalis) S/F	Pinks	(Dianthus plumarius) S/F
Catmint	(Nepeta × faassenii) S/F	Poppies	(Papaver spp.) F
Coneflower	(Echinacea purpurea) S/F	Red hot pokers	(Knifophia spp.) S/F
Daisy	(Leucanthemum × superbum) S/F	Sedge	(Carex morrowii) S/F
Daylilies	(Hemerocallis spp.) S/F	Siberian iris	(Iris sibirica) F
Forest grass	(Habenochloa macra) S/F	Silver grasses	(Miscanthus spp.) S/F
Fountain grass	(Pennisetum alopecuroides) S/F	Snakeroot	(Cimicifuga racemosa) S/F
Garden phlox	(Phlox paniculata) S/F	Switch grass	(Panicum virgatum) S/F
Gaura	(Gaura lindheimeri) S/F	Tickseed	(Coreopsis verticillata) S/F
Goldenrods	(Solidago spp.) S/F	Turtlehead	(Chelone glabra) S/F
Gunnera	(Gunnera manicata) S/F	Yarrow	(Achillea filipendulina) S/F
Hostas	(Hosta spp.) S/F		

SLICE APART WOODY CROWNS WITH A HANDSAW

Amsonias	(Amsonia spp.) S/F	Joe Pye weed	(Eupatorium maculatum) S/F
Astilbes	(Astilbe spp.) S/F	Lilyturf	(Liriope spicata) S/F
Bear's breeches	(Acanthus spinosus) S/F	Male fern	(Dryopteris filix-mas) S/F
Doll's eyes	(Actaea pachypoda) S	Meadowsweets	(Filipendula spp.) S/F
Foxtail lilies	(Eremurus spp.) F	Peonies	(Paeonia cvs.) F
Gayfeather	(Liatris spicata) S/F	Solomon's seal	(Polygonatum odoratum) S/F
Goatsbeard	(Aruncus dioicus) S/F	Wild indigo	(Baptisia australis) S*/F

CUT UP RHIZOMES AND TUBERS WITH A KNIFE

Arum	(<i>Arum italicum</i>) F	Irises	(<i>Iris</i> spp.) F
Bergenia	(<i>Bergenia cordifolia</i>) S/F	Lady fern	(<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>) S/F
Caladiums	(<i>Caladium</i> spp.) S	Lily-of-the-valley	(<i>Convallaria majalis</i>) S/F
Calla lily	(<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>) S	Rhubarb	(<i>Rheum palmatum</i>) S
Canna lily	(<i>Canna</i> spp.) S	Rodgersia	(<i>Rodgersia pinnata</i>) S/F
Corydalis	(<i>Corydalis lutea</i>) S/F	Spurge	(<i>Euphorbia griffithii</i>) S/F**
Dahlias	(<i>Dahlia</i> cvs.) S	Wild ginger	(<i>Asarum europaeum</i>) S
Elephant ears	(<i>Alocasia</i> spp.) S		

THESE PERENNIALS ARE BEST NOT DIVIDED

Alyssums	(<i>Alyssum</i> spp.)	Rose campion	(<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>)
Candytuft	(<i>Iberis sempervirens</i>)	Rosemary	(<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>)
Carnation	(<i>Dianthus caryophyllus</i>)	Russian sage	(<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>)
Delphinium	(<i>Delphinium</i> × <i>elatum</i>)	Sea hollies	(<i>Eryngium</i> spp.)
Euphorbia	(<i>Euphorbia characias</i> ssp. <i>wulfenii</i>)	Silvermound	(<i>Artemisia schmidtiana</i>)
Foxgloves	(<i>Digitalis</i> spp.)	Sweet pea	(<i>Lathyrus latifolius</i>)
Garden sage	(<i>Salvia officinalis</i>)	Trillium	(<i>Trillium grandiflorum</i>)
Geraniums	(<i>Pelargonium</i> spp.)		
Lavender cotton	(<i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i>)		
Lavenders	(<i>Lavandula</i> spp.)		

Dividing Technique Based On Roots



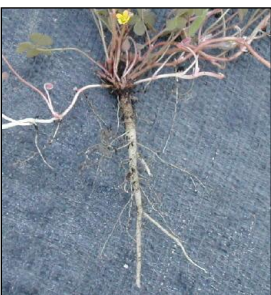
WOODY ROOTS

Woody perennials often form roots when stems rest on the ground or are buried by gradually accumulating mulch. Make a new plant by simply cutting between the rooted stem and the mother plant. Plants that have woody roots include candytufts (*Iberis* spp. and cvs.), euonymus (*Euonymus* spp. and cvs.), lavenders (*Lavandula* spp. and cvs.), sages (*Salvia* spp. and cvs.).

UNDERGROUND RUNNING ROOTS

Underground running roots can develop suckers as they grow beyond the shade of the mother clump. These suckers can be cut away from the main plant, or you can dig up the main plant and cut away any piece with an eye or sucker already forming.

Plants with underground running roots include hardy geraniums (*Geranium* spp.), Japanese anemones (*Anemone* × *hybrida* cvs.), ostrich fern (*Matteuccia pennsylvanica*), plume poppies (*Macleaya* spp. and cvs.).



TAPROOTS

Plants that have taproots can be divided by using a sharp knife to slice down the length of the root. Every piece that has at least one eye, some of the taproot, and a few side roots is a viable division.

Plants that have taproots include balloon flowers (*Platycodon grandiflorus* and cvs.), butterfly weeds (*Asclepias tuberosa* and cvs.), cushion sparges (*Euphorbia polychroma* and cvs.), and Oriental poppies (*Papaver orientale* and cvs.).



SURFACE ROOTS

Some perennials have roots that run on or just below the surface of the soil. They form new crowns and roots when they reach open spaces or make contact with the soil. If you cut between any of the stems as you would cut a piece of sod from a lawn, you will have a division with its own stems and roots.

Plants with surface roots include bee balms (*Monarda* spp. and cvs.), black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia* spp. and cvs.), creeping sedums (*Sedum* spp. and cvs.), and creeping speedwells (*Veronica* spp. and cvs.).

OFFSETS

To divide a plant whose roots form offsets (small plants growing at the base of a larger one), snap the connection between any of the sections to obtain a piece with ample roots and three or more growing points (or "eyes"). Some denser clumps may have to be cut apart.

Plants that form offsets include asters (*Aster* spp. and cvs.), coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea* and cvs.), hostas (*Hosta* spp. and cvs.), and tickseeds (*Coreopsis* spp.) and cvs.).

