



YOUR OWN PERENNIAL PRIMER

The plants that let you invest in your landscape, long term

They're hot. They come in more colors, shapes and seasons than you can imagine. And the best part? They come back year after year.

Perennials include everything from the classic delphiniums of your grandmother's garden to funky new breeds of heuchera and the unfurling fronds of ferns in the shade. Whatever look you want to create—from cottage garden to Mediterranean scape, poolside retreat, slope-side color, privacy fence or an enchanted forest—perennials can help you out.

In years past, we might have talked of having just a perennial garden. But today, there are no rules. You can mix all kinds of plant material together. Think of perennials as the base of that garden—components that you can rely on to be there year after year.



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made handout on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.

1

Starting from Square One?

If you're starting with nothing in your garden, here's a helpful tip for avoiding that feeling of overwhelming choices. Make your first mission one of just gathering a core group of plants to serve as the structure of your garden. You may want to look for perennials that have a particularly long bloom time. Don't worry about filling in all the space or adding all the right colors just yet. Once you have these core plants, you can go back and figure out your "filler" plants—ones that'll round out the space, fill in missing bits of color or provide more texture to your display. Your filler plants can be any type of plant, not just perennials. For instance, spring-blooming bulbs (which you plant in the fall) provide a great first explosion of color in the spring.

2

How to Choose Perennials

Think of it as looking for a good match. The color and character of the plant is up to your own whimsy. But there are a few necessities that must match your gardening environment.

1 Determine what type of light the plant will have in your garden. Full sun (i.e., more than 6 hours a day of sun), shade or partial shade? Make sure you choose plants that fit into the appropriate category.

2 What USDA Hardiness Zone do you live in? (See the chart.) Perennials don't all survive the same winter conditions. Some may do fine at -35F, while others only like winters that get down to 15F. Most labels on perennials will tell you the Hardiness Zones a specific plant does best in. Make sure you match your own Zone with plants that are hardy there. We should note, however, that these Zones are for guidance; if you can create a sheltered environment or "microclimate," you may be able to grow perennials

USDA Hardiness Zones

Zone	Average Minimum Temperature
1	below -50F
2a	-50 to -45F
2b	-45 to -40F
3a	-40 to -35F
3b	-35 to -30F
4a	-30 to -25F
4b	-25 to -20F
5a	-20 to -15F
5b	-15 to -10F
6a	-10 to -5F
6b	-5 to 0F
7a	0 to 5F
7b	5 to 10F
8a	10 to 15F
8b	15 to 20F
9a	20 to 25F
9b	25 to 30F
10a	30 to 35F
10b	35 to 40F
11	above 40F

For an detailed map of the USDA Hardiness Zones, visit www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html.

that are outside your Zone. Of course, there are no rules against buying perennials that aren't hardy in your area—they may still give you great color for that one season; just don't expect them to come back the next year.

3 Moisture requirements. This is less crucial than the light or Hardiness Zones, but you will want to take note of the soil/moisture conditions a perennial requires. Think about how much additional watering you want/will be allowed to do in your garden, as well as your climate and whether or not your soil is extra soggy or if it's sandy and dries up fast. Here, too, you have some control over the situation. For instance, putting a layer of mulch over the top of the soil will help retain moisture in the ground so it doesn't dry out as fast.

4 Now you can go out and have fun choosing perennials based on their colors, the months during which they bloom, how tall they grow and what sort of ambiance they'll bring to your outdoor living space. Keep the first three steps in mind, and you'll be well on your way to a successful garden of perennials.

3

When Do You Buy?

The beauty of perennials is that you don't have to nab your plant purchases the minute spring arrives. You can plant from spring through fall in most climates (year round in the milder regions). So keep an eye out for perennials throughout your gardening season. And don't be afraid to buy a green plant that isn't in bloom yet.

4

Planting Your Perennials

- Make sure to leave enough space between each plant because it will far exceed the size it was when you bought it! Most plant labels will tell you how far apart to plant a certain perennial and how tall/wide it will grow at maturity. Remember, your perennial will increase in size each year as its roots or tubers take up more space and send up more shoots. (Every few years, you may want to divide your perennials so they don't overcrowd each other.)
- Water all your plants, in their pots, before planting.
- Arrange how you want your plants to be before you start digging. Then begin planting from the back of the garden to the front.
- After you tap plants out of the container, you can gently pull the roots into a downward position. If the roots are extremely tangled and pot-bound, you can use pruners to cut and untangle the roots.
- Plant your perennial at the same depth that it was growing at when it was in the container. Then, fill in the remaining side areas with compost or soil so that there are no air pockets.

- Try to keep the soil as loose and airy as possible; avoid stepping on it too much and compacting it.
- After you've planted your garden, water thoroughly. You'll want to pay extra special attention to keeping it well watered for the first few weeks so that plants can establish their roots.



5

Maintaining Your Perennials

- Plan on fertilizing your perennials three times each year: once in early May, again in early June, and then in early August.
- Watering needs will vary depending on rainfall and the type of plants you have. But keep an extra eye on things in the fall even when the weather is cool. A good rule of thumb is that they'll need at least an inch of water per week.
- Once cold weather hits, the leaves of your perennials will begin to fall and the stems will turn brown—this means the plants are getting ready to go dormant (sleep) for the winter. Once this happens, you can cut back the plants right down to the clump of leaves at the base. You can do this in the fall or you can wait till spring. (Just make sure you're only cutting back your herbaceous perennials, not your evergreens!) In the spring, you'll see tiny green shoots emerging from the base of the clump.
- In the late fall, after you've cut back your plants, you can also apply a layer of compost, about 3 to 6 in. deep, over your garden. (Leaves that you've shredded twice with your lawnmower make good compost for this.)
- As mentioned before, perennials will gain size with each ensuing year. Every few years, you'll probably need to divide plants—that simply means you use a shovel or other tool and manually separate the root ball into two or three sections. You can replant the separated section. ✂

BY JENNIFER DUFFIELD WHITE

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