

PERENNIALS IN THE GARDEN

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Perennials offer an infinitely rich array of color, form, fragrance and texture. Perennials are plants that live for two or more years. Most provide seasonal color for one to three weeks. Many plant shapes and forms as well as leaf size, shape and color are available to add subtleties and character to a garden. There are perennials suitable for almost every area, however large or small and whatever the theme or style.

With thoughtful selection, perennials can be used to create borders with a prolonged season of interest. They can be used as a mixed border with shrubs, or with spring bulbs and long-flowering annuals to extend the flowering season. Designing perennials into a garden enriches a landscape. But equally important is the selection of adapted species and the type of care they receive. Consider the following basic cultural practices for perennials, then use the table to select adapted perennials for Southern Nevada gardens.

Soil Preparation—Compost should be added to the flowerbed every year. For a new bed incorporate 3 to 4 inches of compost, fertilizer and soil sulfur into the soil. Then cover the surface with a 3- to-4-inch layer of mulch. For every 100 square feet, spread 1/2 to 1 pound of fertilizer, such as ammonium phosphate (16-20-0), and 5 to 7 pounds of soil sulfur over the organic matter. Spade or rototill all these materials thoroughly into the soil 8 to 10 inches deep. Level and moisten. With the soil properly prepared it is time to plant. If the soil pH is unknown, a soil test from a nursery or lab is helpful.

Planting from Seed—Raising plants from seed is a simple and inexpensive means of growing a large number of plants. You will find directions on the back of the seed packet. You can sow in rows or broadcast the seed. After planting from seed, sprinkle a light layer of mulch over the area and firm the soil with the back of a rake. Soak the seed bed with a fine misting sprayer. Keep the seeds moist until they germinate, then water as needed. Small plants need special attention until they establish a root system in the bed. Remember, it may take a year or two before blooms appear.

Transplanting from Containers—Container-grown perennials may be planted at any time of the year. However, the heat of summer should be avoided. The best seasons for planting are fall and spring. Fall planting allows plants to establish quickly before the onset of cold weather. The soil is still warm; with moisture, roots grow well. To plant container-grown varieties, first water the plants well to ensure that the soil is moist. Allow to drain thoroughly. Next slide the plant out of the pot, taking care not to damage the roots or disturb the root ball. If the plant is root bound, straighten the roots and cut them back, if needed. Perennials should be planted with the crown at ground level. The top of the root ball should be planted level with the surrounding soil.

Perennials in Containers—The fastest way to establish a perennial garden is to buy nursery-grown plants. Plants grown in containers need more care than those in open ground, since they have limited supplies of nutrients and water. During the growing season keep the soil moist, but not waterlogged. In periods of hot, dry weather, plants will need daily watering. Lift and divide the plants when they become root bound about every two years, (depending on the variety) and plant in new soil-less media. If the container is to be reused, wash it well before replanting with 1 part household bleach or vinegar to 9 parts water.

Dividing Perennials—Perennials grow, and become crowded, producing fewer blooms and then begin to decline. This is the time to divide and rejuvenate the planting. Most plants should be divided during the dormant period—late fall or early spring. Division of freshly rooted perennials is best left until the end of their dormant season. In early spring, new buds will have begun to sprout, thus giving a good indication of the most vigorous and therefore most suitable material for planting.

Lift the plant to be divided gently with a fork, being careful not to damage the roots. Shake off any loose soil and remove dead leaves or stems to reveal the next season's buds. Discard any old, diseased, dried out or damaged sections of the clump.

Watering—Newly planted perennials, even if they are low-water using natives, require moist soil. Any prolonged dry period will prevent roots from developing deeply and uniformly. Growth and performance can be permanently affected without proper soil moisture.

Apply water slowly in a basin around the plant's root ball. Always water the areas thoroughly after planting. Sprinkling the soil, especially if it is windy, wastes water, increases evaporation, often causes crusting and does not ensure an even application. Regularly check the soil moisture around the root ball about 2 to 3 inches below the soil surfaces, especially the first few weeks.

The amount of water applied depends on soil type, exposure and the time of year. If planted on slopes, water in intervals. This helps prevent soil erosion. Do this by watering 5 to 10 minutes and allowing the water to soak in. Repeat in 1 to 2 hours with another watering until the moisture has soaked below the root zone. After plants adjust to planting and show growth, gradually space out the watering.

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Plant	Height	Planting Period	Sun	Shade	Method of Propagation	Remarks
Asparagus Fern <i>Asparagus sprengeri</i>	2 ft. or more	Spring	Sun	Partial shade	Plant division	Valued for their foliage. Easy to grow.
Black-eyed Susan <i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	3-4 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Division, transplants, or seeds	Tough. Easy to grow. Showy flowers are good for cuttings.
Candytuft <i>Iberis</i>	8 in. to 1 ft.	Spring or fall	Morning sun	Partial shade	Seeds or transplants	Prune lightly after bloom for new growth.
Chrysanthemum <i>Chrysanthemum morifolium</i>	6 in. to 3 ft., depending on variety	Spring or fall	Sun	Partial shade	Top cuttings or plant divisions	Excellent cut flowers. Very attractive fall-blooming flowers.
Columbine <i>Aquilegia spp.</i>	2 to 3 ft.	Spring or fall	No	Shade	Seeds or transplants	Plant will self sow. Attractive foliage.
Coral Bells <i>Heuchera sanguinea</i>	1 ft.	Spring or fall	No	Partial shade	Seeds or transplants	Long-lasting flowers. Attracts hummingbirds.
Coreopsis <i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>	1 to 2 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Seeds or transplants	Established plants can thrive on little water.
Delphinium <i>Delphinium elatum</i>	1 to 2 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	Partial shade	Seeds or transplants	Effective for borders. Good cut flower.
Dianthus <i>Dianthus plumarius</i>	10 to 20 in.	Spring or fall	Morning sun	Partial shade	Top cuttings, seeds or transplants	Often called Sweet William. Blooms for a long period if spent flowers are kept cut
Dusty Miller <i>Senecio cineraria</i>	1 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Transplants or division	Noted for their striking silvery-gray foliage.
Euphorbia Rigida <i>Euphorbia biglandulosa</i>	1 to 2 ft.	Late February through April	Sun	No	Transplants or seeds	Flowers are chartreuse yellow fading to pinkish. Showy plant in garden.
Four O'clock <i>Mirabilis jalapa</i>	2 to 3 ft.	Spring	Sun	No	Transplants or seeds	This plant has tuberous roots. Flowers open in afternoon.
Foxglove <i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	2 to 8 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Transplants or seeds	Grows tall. Plant in back of flower bed.
Gaillardia <i>Gaillardia grandiflora</i>	2 to 3 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Transplants or seeds	This plant thrives in sun and heat. Easy to grow.
Gazania <i>Gazania spp.</i>	6 in.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Transplants or seeds	There are two types--climbing or trailing. Good ground cover.
Geranium <i>Pelargonium spp.</i>	8 to 12 in.	Spring	Sun Some varieties	Shade Some varieties	Transplants or from stem cuttings	Various varieties of form and color.
Heliotrope <i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	2-3 ft.	Spring	Sun	Partial shade	Division or seeds	Will grow in poor, dry soil.
Lily of the Valley <i>Convallaria majalis</i>	6 in. to 1 ft.	Spring or fall	No	Partial shade or Shade only	Division or seeds	Produces small, fragrant, drooping, waxy white, bell-shaped flowers.
Lisianthus <i>Eustoma grandiflorum</i>	1 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Seeds or transplants	Needs good drainage. Keep faded blossoms cut off.

PERENNIALS IN THE GARDEN continued

Plant	Height	Planting Period	Sun	Shade	Method of Propagation	Remarks
Marguerite <i>Chrysanthemum frutescens</i>	1 to 3 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Division or transplants	Produces an abundance of daisy-like flowers.
Michaelmas Daisy <i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	3 to 4 ft.	Spring	Sun	No	Seeds or transplants	An invasive plant. Blooms profusely in late summer.
Penstemon (Beard Tongue) <i>Penstemon spp.</i>	1 to 2 ft.	Spring	No	Sun	Seeds or transplants	Needs well-drained soil. Easy to grow from seed.
Phlox <i>Phlox paniculata</i>	6 in. to 3 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	Light shade	Seeds or transplants	Use as a ground cover. Clusters of flowers.
Physostegia (False Dragonhead) <i>Physostegia virginiana</i>	2 to 4 ft.	Spring	Sun	Partial shade	Seeds or transplants	Spiky form, useful on borders. Good for arrangements. Cut to ground after blooming period.
Pincushion Flower <i>Scabiosa caucasica</i>	2 to 3 ft.	Spring	Sun	Partial shade	Seeds or transplants	This plant has long-lasting cut flowers.
Primrose <i>Primula spp.</i>	6 in. to 1 ft.	Spring	No	Partial shade	Division, seeds, or transplants	Mulch in summer to retain moisture. Plant will self sow. Short-lived. Most grow as annual.
Sedum <i>Sedum spp.</i>	2 to 6 in.	Spring	Sun Depending on variety	Partial shade, depending on variety	Rooting stems and transplants	Most varieties are hardy. Can get out of bounds.
Shasta Daisy <i>Chrysanthemum maximum</i>	2 to 3 ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Easy to grow from seed or transplants	Hardy and sturdy. Good in borders and for cut arrangements.
Spurge (Euphorbia) <i>rigida</i>	1 to 1½ ft.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Seeds and transplants	Displays good colors. Very attractive.
Verbena (Peruvian) <i>Verbena spp.</i>	6 to 8 in.	Spring or fall	Sun	No	Stems, divisions, seeds, and transplants	Spreads rapidly. Keep flower clusters cut back for continuous blooms.
Violet <i>Viola-odorata</i>	1 to 6 in.	Spring or fall	No	Shade	Transplants are easiest	Purple mass color for edgings. Fertilize in early spring.
Yarrow <i>Yarrow spp.</i>	1 to 2 ft.	Spring	Sun	No	Division, seeds, or transplants	Good for dried arrangements or as cut flowers.

**For more information:
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