



▶ DIVISION IN THE GARDEN.....1

▶ SALVIA 'MYSTIC SPIRES BLUE'.....1



▶ FALL ANNUAL COLOR OPTIONS.....2

▶ Can I Eat This? SWEET POTATO VINE.....2



South Plains horticulture

Division in the Garden

As you are preparing to put the garden to bed for the winter, it is always a best practice to assess the overall health of your plants, aesthetics, and make plans for the next gardening year. While completing your assessment, do you notice perennial plants with a hole or dead space in the middle and all the growth is on the perimeter of the clump? Smaller than usual flowers or leaves? Sparse foliage at the plant base? Or just a plant that has become too big for its space? Do you need to add perennials to fill in your landscape or attract more pollinators to the garden? Would you like to share plants with a friend or loved one? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, it’s time to divide your perennials!

Perennials need division every so often to encourage vigor and continued performance. The general rule for when a perennial should be divided is opposite its flowering time.

For example, a plant that flowers in the spring can be divided in the fall. Late October to early November is a good time to start dividing many types of perennials on the South Plains. Make sure temperatures are above freezing to allow for root establishment but the heat of the summer has broken. Water perennials well two days in advance of division.

Start by digging a trench around the outside of the perennial clump and then gently lift the entire clump from the ground, saving as many roots as possible. Using a sharp, clean knife or spade begin cutting the clump up into smaller clumps about the size of your fist or a gallon sized perennial. Each section should have at least three healthy buds or shoots. Discard the older unproductive and weak spindly portions and only keep the more vigorous sections. Remove any diseased parts and make a clean cut to any damaged roots. Be sure to sanitize your blades afterward! If you choose to plant your “new” perennials in your garden or landscape, prepare the new planting area by digging wide, shallow holes to accommodate the roots. Place the plant sections in their holes by spreading the roots out over the ground and cover them with compost and existing soil.

Easy to Divide Perennials:

- 'May Night' Salvia
- 'Autumn Joy' Sedum
- Dianthus
- Daylilly
- Red Hot Poker
- Columbine
- Hosta
- Iris
- Yarrow

The crown of the plant should be at the same depth as it was before dividing it. Planting too deep may delay or completely hinder flowering of some species. Water the plants and keep the soil moist for several weeks to encourage new root growth. If you choose to share, pot the “new” plants in a gallon container, label accordingly, and water graciously.



Plant of the Month: *Salvia 'Mystic Spires Improved'*

Salvia ‘Mystic Spires Improved’ is just that, a new and improved variety of Salvia ‘Mystic Spires’ that is the newest addition to the Texas Superstar plant series. To be designated a Texas Superstar, a plant must not only be beautiful but also perform well across the state and be easy to propagate to ensure availability throughout Texas. Salvia ‘Mystic Spires Improved’ grows to a compact 18-30 inches, prefers full sun, and flowers more freely throughout the growing season than other salvias. It also attracts a number of pollinators, *shown left*. It seemed to be a Monarch Butterfly favorite!

Can I Eat This? Sweet Potato Vine



This time of year, gardeners are often surprised when yanking out their spring/summer annual sweet potato vines (*Ipomoea batatas*) to find large sweet potato tubers! Of course, the next thought that crosses is “Can I eat this?”. The answer may surprise you!

Ornamental sweet potato vines are a true sweet potato but are bred for their highly decorative and striking leaves. Varieties like ‘Blackie’ with dark purple almost black leaves, ‘Margarita’ with chartreuse or lime green leaves and ‘Tricolor’ with it’s pink, white and green leaves make a wonderful annual groundcover and are lovely when allowed to drape out of planter pots, retaining walls, or raised beds.



They tend to do well in sun or shade but may require more frequent waterings in our hot summer sun. Their vigorous growing habit is sure to win you over!

Keeping in mind that almost all commercially grown ornamental plants have been introduced to chemicals at some point in the growing cycle, these tubers are actually edible. I have heard remarks from “tasty” to “bland and lacking”, so you may not want to give them a prestigious spot on your Thanksgiving table. Please remember to **never eat ANY** green potato tuber raw.

FALL ANNUALS So Many Possibilities



- Viola
- Panola
- Pansy
- Trailing Pansy
- Cabbage
- Kale
- Swiss Chard
- Snap Dragon
- Cyclamen
- Aster
- Chrysanthemum (*perennial*)
- Purple Fountain Grass

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

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