



FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...

DIVIDE PERENNIALS AND PLANT BULBS IN SEPTEMBER

By Helen Pemberton, Palo Pinto County Master Gardener

Dividing perennials in the fall increases your garden stock and rejuvenates older plants. Most plants should be divided every three to five years. Dig and divide coneflowers, phlox, Shasta daisies, day lilies, coreopsis and spring/summer blooming bulbs in the early fall. This enables their roots to become established before winter.

Here are 10 easy steps for dividing perennials:

1. Lift the plant to be divided using a spade or shovel. Taking care not to damage the roots.
2. Shake off loose soil and remove dead leaves and stems.
3. Separate plants using your hands, a spade, fork or knife.
4. Discard the center of the clump if it is weak or woody.
5. Divide the vigorous plants into clumps of 3-5 shoots each. Bulbs separate into single bulbs.
6. Bearded Iris should retain a few inches of rhizome and one fan of leaves. Trim back fans halfway.
7. Enrich garden soil with fresh compost. Bulbs, Corms and Rhizomes will benefit from a light application of bone meal mixed into the soil before inserting plants.
8. Replant the divided sections to their original depth.
9. Label and water new plants thoroughly.
10. Apply winter mulch only after the soil temperature drops (after a few frosts).

Planting Bulbs For a brilliant display of flowers early in the spring, bulbs must be planted in the fall. But how many times have we Texans bought, planted, hoped and looked for Tulips and other hybrid Dutch bulbs only to be disappointed? The bulbs from Northern, wetter climates just don't survive. They might give us their one shot of beauty the first year, but many do not survive our hot, dry summers.

There are many beautiful bulbs (also corms and rhizomes) that are native or adapted to Texas. The adapted bulbs were brought here by settlers who came from places with similar climates...like Turkey, Spain, Argentina, South Africa and the Mediterranean. Ask your garden center for Grape Hyacinth, Byzantine Gladiolus, Gladiolus Communis, St. Joseph Amaryllis, old fashioned white iris (sometimes called Cemetery Iris), hardy daffodils called Stella, Lent Lily, and Ice Follies, Grand Primo Narcissus, Oxblood Lily, and Spider Lily. For some of the really old bulbs, you might have to ask friends who have old home places where these hardy plants have endured without human assistance for 100 years. Or, shop online. If you search "hardy bulbs for Texas", several good websites will appear.

Bulbs should be planted pointy side up and flat side down. As a rule, plant bulbs to a depth 3 times deeper than the width of the bulb. The exceptions are very large bulbs which should be planted with the top barely exposed. Iris rhizomes should be barely covered with soil.

If you have questions about dividing perennials or if you want to share old heritage bulbs with others, call the Palo Pinto County Extension Office at 940-659-1228.