

## Perennial Gardens

Perennial flower gardening adds a bright spot to your neighborhood as well as your landscape and spreads the joy of gardening to visitors and neighbors.

Perennial flowers are one of the most common elements included in garden and landscape designs. Because perennial plants grow and thrive season after season, often getting larger and stronger with bigger blooms every year, perennial flowers are the perfect plants to add to any lawn or garden.

The easiest way to explain the difference between annuals and perennials is that annuals complete their life cycle in a single growing season, while perennials return to give us pleasure year after year. Perennial flowers also have an often-overlooked benefit. Because perennial plants bloom year after year, there is less expense involved in planting a perennial garden than an annual flowerbed.

Different perennials bloom at different times during the growing season. Who can resist the optimism of the [crocus](#) as they peek through the last snows of winter, the allure of [tulips](#) waving “hello” in the spring breeze, the elegance of brightly colored [iris](#), and the heady fragrance of the [lilac](#)? All of them are perennial plants that help us achieve a constant stream of blooms in our gardens.



As one perennial finishes blooming, other plants pick up the torch and so on during the summer months. Many perennials, like those in the [aster](#) family, begin bloom in late summer that can last throughout the autumn. Some perennials bloom from late spring to fall, adding beautiful continuity and balance to your perennial garden.

### Keep Perennial Plants in Their Comfort Zone

The zone that you live in has a big impact on the plants you select for your perennial garden. Certain flower perennials do better in cold zones, while some flowers don't survive at all in colder regions. For success with your perennial garden, be sure to choose perennials that are hardy for your region.

While many annuals are started in nurseries, hardy perennials are grown frequently on [perennial farms](#). The difference between a nursery and a perennial farm is that a nursery typically grows plants indoors under controlled conditions. Perennial farms grow hardy perennials outdoors and generally are precise in indicating how long a particular species of plant has been grown at the farm. In this way, perennial farms prove that the hardy perennials they grow for sale will survive local conditions year-round.

When shopping for hardy perennials at either a local nursery or a perennial farm, most plants for sale will be hardy in your area. However, when choosing hardy perennials online or by catalog, it's necessary first to know what hardiness zone you live in. The term hardy is often used erroneously to mean winter hardy only. Actually, hardiness is a plant's ability to survive year-round. Frequently, plants that are winter-hardy in one zone, will not survive summer conditions in another zone.

Aside from variations in temperature, formulating zones for hardy perennials includes other variables such as snow depth and rainfall. Hardiness zones indicate probabilities of plant survival under broad conditions. Extremes in weather, differences in local topography, and gardening practices such as mulching can also have an impact on whether or not a plant will be hardy to your location.

Variables considered by the USDA in drawing its plant hardiness zone map include day length, radiation, temperature, frost, heat, rainfall, and pH. Find detailed explanations of these factors and download the [USDA plant hardiness zone map](#). If you live outside the US, you may be able to find a zone map for your area at [hardiness zones outside the USA](#).

A perennial garden plan may incorporate plants that are hardy one zone away if they are afforded protection during extremes in temperature. Flowering perennials that aren't winter hardy plants can be grown outside of their zone if stored over winter in a sufficiently warm place. Of course, it's easier to bring these plants in from out of the cold if they are grown in a container, but many hardy perennials can be

lifted and stored in various ways. Examples of such plants are hardy mums, geraniums, and dahlias.

However, many types of hardy perennials need a period of dormancy to thrive, so take care to give your plants the specific type of care they need to survive in the warmer than normal conditions they may become accustomed to during storage.

## Finding and Planting Perennial Plants

Using transplants gets you started much faster than growing perennials from seeds does. Of course, the initial cost associated with perennial flowers is often higher. This is generally because perennial transplants are often sold after they are well established. Depending on the variety of perennial plant and its size, costs vary. Look at your perennial transplant purchases as an investment in landscaping and an expenditure that you won't need to repeat year after year.

When buying perennial plants from a garden center, you can save money by purchasing smaller [perennial seedlings](#) instead of the more established varieties in larger containers. Younger, smaller plants are usually as healthy as their older companions, although they may require a little more patience as you wait for them to reach maturity.

Nearly all [bulbs](#) are perennials. Each bulb is a self-contained growth factory. In some cases, all you need do to make a bulb bloom is add water! Bulbs can be purchased singly, in packets of just one cultivar or a mixture of several varieties. Planting bulbs is an excellent, inexpensive way for the [beginning gardener](#) to begin a gardening hobby.

Another, very satisfying way to obtain more perennial plants is by dividing existing plants already growing in your garden or by acquiring them from a generous neighbor or friend. Actually, sharing your perennials is beneficial since regular division of perennial plants encourages healthier growth.

It is possible to germinate and grow [perennial seeds](#); however, it is typically more difficult than starting annual seeds. In addition to requiring a mound of patience, some perennial seeds also involve very specific care. Perennial seeds are also notorious for not being "true." That is, they often don't grow in the same fashion as their "mother" plant. When you start your garden with perennial flower transplants, you'll know exactly what to expect.

Most plants for perennial flower gardening can be planted from right after the first frost until autumn. Dig holes double the size of the transplant container. Remove the plant and loosen any tangled roots. Set your perennial in the hole at the same level it occupied in the container. You may need to backfill a little with your planting medium or soil. Use a water breaker to gently water your perennial plants while firming the soil around their roots.

After planting your perennial flowers, protect perennial garden beds with mulch. Mulch conserves water, maintains even soil temperature, and helps control weeds. Shredded pine bark (for acidic soils) or hardwood mulch (for alkaline soils) are both good commercial mulches. Some people use dried grass clippings for perennial flower gardening, but be on the watch out for weed seeds if you do.

## Planting Perennial Flowers

[Design perennial flower gardens](#) as a backdrop into which you can also plant annuals. Locating perennial flowerbeds against a background rather than in the middle of your lawn is usually more aesthetically pleasing. Plants set against walls, fences, or shrubbery rows break tall vertical vistas into harmonious horizontal eye-candy.

An amazing profusion of perennial plants exists with varieties that can be grown under nearly every condition. Perennials are available for [shade](#), full sun and semi-shade in either acidic or alkaline soils.

## Soil for your perennial flowers

Soil for perennial flower gardening is vitally important. Most perennials like well-drained, loamy soil tilled to at least one foot in depth. Add soil amendments such as peat moss and organic fertilizer when you cultivate. Prepare beds several weeks before actual planting a perennial flower gardening site to give soil

amendments time to start working.

Successful perennial flower gardening involves several important factors. Color, height, bloom time, foliage texture, and soil pH each play significant roles. Correct soil pH helps your beautiful transplants maintain their vibrancy. Test your soil from kits found at almost all garden centers or nurseries. If your nursery person can't give you plant pH information, look it up on any major Internet search engine. Just type in the name of your plants – either scientific or common names work equally well – and “pH.” Recommended pH levels can be found for almost all perennial gardening plants.

## Perennial Flowering Herbs & Edible Flowers

Many of the perennial flowers that delighted us all summer can add the warmth of spice and flavor to our kitchens all winter. We are all familiar with perennial herbs like rosemary and chives, but did you know that flowers like scented [geraniums](#), [hibiscus](#), and bee balm are perennial herbs with flavorful flowers? Aside from presenting colorful blooms and wonderful fragrance, the flowers from many perennial herbs can be harvested and steeped for a cup of winter tea to chase the chill of winter away. [Herb gardening](#) is a great hobby. If you lack garden space, you can have a great collection of [homegrown herbs in your kitchen](#).

The easiest way to transport your perennial herbs indoors for the winter is to grow them in pots, but you may find that adding too many different sizes and types of pots makes your summer herb garden look unorganized and messy. In addition, potted plants frequently need extra watering since the plants can't draw moisture from the garden soil.

The solution is to plant perennial herbs in containers that you can sink into the ground. Sinking pots provides many benefits for both the herbs and the gardener. Your plants will be able to draw water and nutrients from your garden soil and the pot acts as a weed barrier. For invasive plants like many in the mint family, sinking pots keeps them in check. In the fall, pots can easily be dug, rinsed, and moved indoors for the winter.

Tender perennial herbs, like rosemary and [hibiscus](#) need to come indoors to avoid a harsh winter. However, just as setting plants outdoors in the spring, you'll have more success at maintaining growth and bloom if you acclimatize your perennial herbs before making a permanent move to your kitchen. Start by bringing your plants inside for an hour or two each day, increasing the time each day for a week or two to help them to adjust to the changes in temperature and light.

Make winter easier to live with by moving some perennial herbs into your kitchen and make a mental note to sink some perennial pots next spring to simplify your summer perennial herb gardening next season.

Find detailed information about perennials sown throughout Gardening Guides. Learn [all about bulbs](#), [perennial seeds](#), and take a trip to a [perennial farm](#). Check out our [perennial garden plans](#) and learn about [shade-loving perennials](#).

Learn how to grow some of our favorite perennial flowers:

- [Bluestone Perennials](#)
- [Daffodils](#)
- [Daisies](#)
- [Dianthus](#)
- [Geraniums](#)
- [Gladiolas](#)
- [Hibiscus](#)
- [Hostas](#)
- [Japanese Iris](#)
- [Roses](#)
- [Tulips](#)
- [Violets](#)