



garden spot

Divide plants and multiply benefits



MARTY FIGLEY

It's still not too late to divide some of the plants in your garden and by doing this job now, they will have time to establish themselves before really cold weather arrives. The plants will benefit from division; they will be rejuvenated and healthier, and excessive growth will be checked.

Don't divide the plants if the weather is extremely cold or wet. Those plants with fibrous roots, mat- and clump-forming rock garden plants, and clump-forming (stachys, chives) herbs and those with rhizomes (i.e. French tarragon) can be divided now. Wait until spring to divide irises, peonies, and poppies and other fleshy-rooted perennials.

If you have noticed fewer blooms, or if a plant has become woody and it

looks as though it is dying in the center, or if it looks crowded, divide it.

Always discard diseased, damaged and old woody root parts and divide the remaining portion of the plant into several smaller ones.

Before putting the divided plants into the bed, clean up any weeds and improve the soil by adding compost or fertilizer as required. After firming the new plants into their desired location, water well and then wait for next year's growth for improved performance.

Use a fork to dig around the plants, being careful not to damage the roots, and set them aside. Cut through the woody crown with a spade or knife to separate the roots, then divide the plants into several sections by gently pulling them away from the main plant. Each section should have new shoots. Cut the old top growth away and replant the new sections.

Here are several tricks that may help. If a plant has matted-fibrous roots, such as Hemerocallis, use two forks back to back, placing them in the center of the

plant and with a downward motion, prying them apart. Plants such as asters or Rudbeckia can be divided by separating single stems that grow at the edges of the crown and will have their own root system.

Replant the divisions as soon as possible so that they don't dry out. If, however, you won't be able to replant within two hours, dip the plants quickly in water and put them in a sealed plastic bag in a shady area.

Keep the soil evenly moist for the next several weeks as the new plants establish themselves. After the soil freezes, mulch these new divisions to prevent the roots from heaving during our cold winter weather.

Now while you're out in the brisk air, cut the perennials down leaving six inches of stem at the base. This will trap the snow and help to insulate the plant roots. Remove the remaining stems next spring.

Beautiful grasses and other plants with interesting shapes or seedheads can be left to provide winter interest,

and then cut down when warm weather again arrives. Leave the foliage on the plants that aren't fully hardy and remove it also, in the spring.

Multi-stemmed shrubs can also be divided now by pushing a sharp spade down to sever the roots, which allows you to choose just how much needs to be divided. Another method is to dig the complete shrub and saw the roots apart before replanting. Study the shrubs carefully before cutting, so as to get the best-looking divisions.

TIMELY GARDEN TIPS

■ If squirrels are a bother, try Squirrel Away. Call (800) 229-5454 for a free sample; it's available at many local stores.

■ Add frost-blackened annuals to the compost pile.

■ Spray an anti-desiccant on broad-leaved plants and evergreens.

■ Clean out dead, diseased or broken branches from trees and shrubs.

■ Give evergreens and foundations plantings a good drink before the ground freezes.

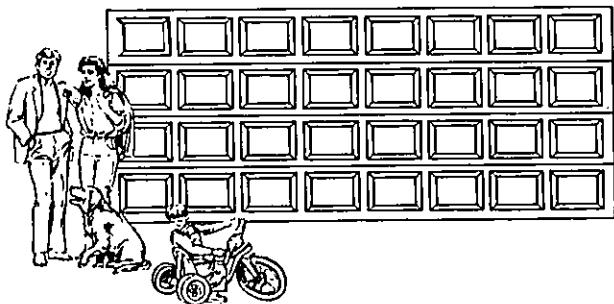
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