

flowers

Perennials: Divide and conquer for best results

Dividing is a technique used to control the size of perennials, rejuvenate and propagate the plants.

Most perennials tend to grow larger every year, usually by spreading and making a larger clump every year. The most vigorous growers can expand until they choke out other plants.

In addition, expanding clumps begin to compete with themselves. Those on the outer edge thrive in fresh soil, but those in the center suffer. The result can be a healthy circle of plants around a dying center.

As a general rule, fall-blooming perennials are divided in early spring to give them a growing season to re-establish themselves. Perennials which bloom in spring and summer normally are divided in the fall.

However, in areas with extreme winters where temperatures may fall to between 10 and 20 degrees below zero, early spring dividing is recommended to protect newly planted divisions from the severe winter weather.

Gardeners planning to divide must first decide which plants they want to save, which they will dig out and dispose of, and which they want to replant in a different location.

Expanding clumps begin to compete with themselves. Those on the outer edge thrive in fresh soil, but those in the center suffer.

The bed should be well watered a few days before dividing to make the digging and separating easier. The perennials should be pruned severely, to six inches from the ground, so you can see what you're doing.

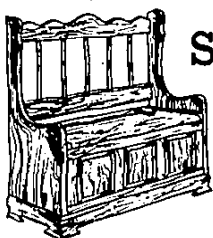
The entire clump should be dug out as completely as possible. If the center has died out, the living portion should be divided into smaller clumps.

To divide a stubborn clump, insert two spading forks into it back to back, then press the handles toward each other. The leverage at the tines should pry the clump apart.

Holes left by the clump should be enriched with organic matter and a fertilizer with no nitrogen. One or more of the divisions can be replanted in the hole. Replant the rest elsewhere.

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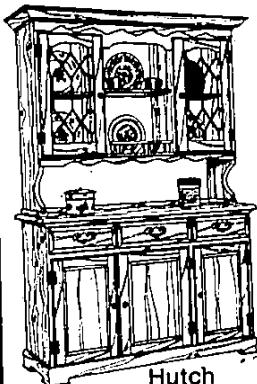
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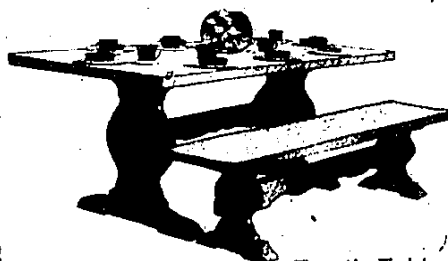
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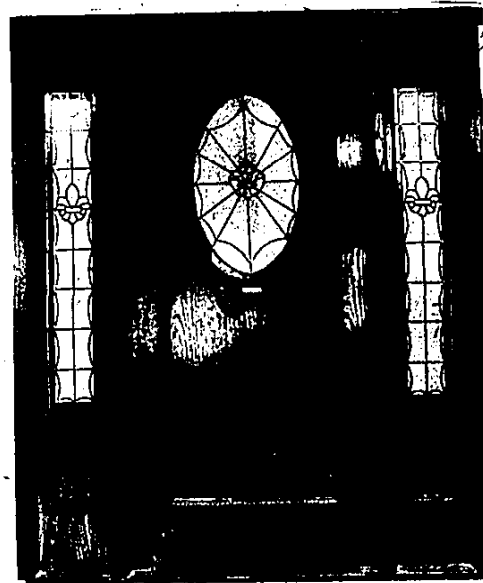
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