



Trowel Talk!

September 2018

Perennial picks for great divisions



Splitting daylilies with two forks

Photo: Kelly Noel

Early fall is an excellent time to divide many perennials but often new gardeners hesitate. What if those twenty year old peonies never bloom again? Maybe that prized hosta will die. Fear not. Dividing perennials is really quite simple if you follow some basic guidelines.

Know when and which plants to divide. Many plants can be divided in either spring or fall but here is a suggestion. If the plants bloom in spring, such as peonies and iris, divide them in the fall. If you divide a peony in spring, it may not bloom that year. Personal experience has shown that warm season ornamental grasses such as *Miscanthus* need an extended period of warm soil for root development and may

die over the winter if divided in fall. Cool season grasses such as feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis*) which develop early in the spring can be divided now. Shrub-like perennials such as Russian sage (*Perovskia*) or lavender are best not divided at all.

Does your plant really need to be divided? Clumps that have an empty center, flop over or bloom less could all be rejuvenated by division. Some perennials may have outgrown their allotted space while others are just begging to be shared with your neighbour.

Decide where you are going to put the divisions and ensure the soil is well prepared. For rich soil add compost. It is best to plant the division immediately, but if that's not possible, keep the roots moist and shaded.

It's important to understand the different root systems. Those with fibrous roots such as bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*) and lungwort (*Pulmonaria*) are easily dug and pulled apart with your hands. Some roots such as those of *Astilbe* are very tough and matted. To split them I use an old pruning saw. Daylilies have many small tuberous roots. Dividing them can be physically challenging. First dig up the entire plant. Then push two spading forks back to back down through the center of the plant. By using the handles as levers and pushing them away from each other, separate the clump. This tends to damage fewer tubers than breaking up the plant into pieces with a spade, although I have often used this latter method

with good effect.



Dividing salvia with a pruning saw

Photo: Nancy Seppala

Iris roots are rhizomes or fleshy stems which grow beneath the ground. They can be easily lifted and gently pulled apart. Discard those that are withered, have brown leaves or show signs of iris borer. Each rhizome needs a fan of foliage cut to within about 10 centimetres of the root. Plant the rhizome only slightly below the soil and ensure the attached fibrous roots are well buried. Peonies can also be dug, their tubers rinsed, teased apart and replanted at the same level that they were previously growing.

By dividing your plants carefully, giving them a good new home and watering them well until they are established, you will rapidly enlarge your gardens and have many new plants to share and enjoy.



An iris division

Photo: Monique Paré

Nancy Seppala
Master Gardener

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September To Do

- Divide and move perennials.
- Tag dahlias, cannas, etc. with size and colour information, so you don't forget which they are when lifting and storing them later.
- Take note of areas that may need fall colour, for when you go shopping in the spring.
- Start cleaning, pruning, and re-potting plants that are going indoors for the winter.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

By now, the vegetable garden is probably slowing down, and empty spaces are showing as crops finish producing and are pulled up. Consider planting something there to act as a green manure or cover crop. Cover crops are crops planted not to harvest, but to keep down weeds and protect and enrich the soil. It is known as green manure when the crop is then turned under to decompose and add organic matter and nutrients to the soil several weeks before the area is used for other crops. The turning under does mean extra work for the gardener, but this should be considered against the benefit to soil tilth, weed control, and nutrients added. You should also mow the cover crops down if they are getting too tall or are about to set seed.

Deciding which cover crop(s) to plant will depend on your soil, climate, and desired work level. Tender crops that will die over winter take less effort tilling under in spring, but provide less soil protection. Some tolerate difficult conditions (drought or poor drainage, acidic soil) better than others. Most common choices to plant are either legumes such as clovers, soy, or alfalfa, and grains such as oats, buckwheat, or winter rye. Legumes will help fix nitrogen to enrich the soil, and grain crops are generally fast-growing and dense. A mixture of types can be planted in an area to maximize the benefits.

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener*

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034—Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

CARP MARKET: Saturday, September 29th, 8:00 am-1:00 pm.

MAIN MARKET: Saturday, September 22nd, 9:00am-1:00 pm

OTTAWA FARMERS' MARKET (Lansdowne Park):

Sunday, September 23rd, 9:00 am-1:00 pm

RICHMOND FAIR: September 14th, 9:00 am-6:00 pm,

September 15th, 9:00 am–5:00 pm

September 16th, 10:00 am –5:00 pm

RIVERSIDE SOUTH MARKET (Riverview Park & Ride):

Sundays, September 23rd, October 14th, 10:00 am-2:00 pm

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tuesday, September 18th – 7:30 pm

Care of Indoor Orchids: Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Pretty Street Community Centre, 2 Pretty St., Stittsville

Hosted by Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society, no guest fee

Saturday, September 29th – 10:00 a.m.

Preserving the Harvest: Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

190 Gore St. E., Perth

The Table Community Food Centre. Registration is requested. See:

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/preserving-the-harvest-tickets-49948662795> for details

Tuesday, October 2nd – 7:30 p.m.

Native Plants for City Gardeners: Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener

The Old Town Hall, 821 March Rd in Kanata

Kanata March Horticultural Society – guests \$5

Wednesday, October 3rd - 7:30 pm

Winter Gardens In and Out: Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Greely Garden Club – guest fee \$3

Tuesday, October 9th - 7:00 pm

That's Soil, Not Dirt: Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Old Fire Hall, 260 Sunnyside Ave

Old Ottawa South Garden Club, guest fee \$7

Tuesday, October 9th -7:30 pm

How to Prepare your Gardens for Winter: Mary Reid, Master Gardener

St Paul's United Church, 25 Gore Street W, Perth

Perth and District Horticultural Society, guest fee \$5

Monday, October 15th – 7:00 pm

Kitchen Gardens through the Ages: Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Russell Meadows Retirement Community, 475 Church Street, Russell

Russell Horticultural Society

Friends of the Farm Lecture Series

\$12 FCEF members, \$15 non-members for each lecture

Building 72 east off the Prince of Wales roundabout. Free parking.

Tuesday, October 16th -7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Bulbs for Year Round Enjoyment Mary Reid, Master Gardener

Tuesday, November 6th - 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

History of English Country House Gardens Heather Clemenson, Master Gardener

Tuesday, November 6th -7:30 pm

Purple Carrots, Honey Bees and Magic Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Kanata March Horticultural Society – guests \$5



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>