

Flowering Perennials for Georgia  
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Plants are classed according to their growth cycle as annuals, biennials or perennials. Annuals are short-lived usually one season, biennials normally do not bloom until the second year and perennials live from year to year, with varying bloom times. In this article I will try and cover some basics for care and maintenance of your perennial plants.

After you have selected a perennial that is suited to our climate and the area that you intend to plant, you must prepare the bed. It is much easier to and much less disruptive to improve the soil and correct drainage problems before planting. Beds should be tilled to a depth of 8 – 10 inches if possible, due to the deep-rooted nature of most perennials. Most perennials prefer a soil that is high in organic matter as long as the soil is adequately drained. Sandy soils can be amended with compost or coarse bark to improve water holding capacity and add organic matter. Finally, a soil test will help you determine the soil pH. A pH of 6.0-6.5 is optimal for most perennials.

Just because perennials last for several years, does not mean that they are maintenance free. Perennial beds often require more work than annual beds to look their best. Drought tolerance varies among perennials, but most require more water than is provided by rainfall. Infrequent and deep watering is recommended for perennials just as it is in turf. Mulching will also help conserve water in the bed as well as prevent weed problems and add to the overall appearance of the garden.

Fertilization is essential to the continued growth of perennials. An application of 1.5 lbs. of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet in early spring, and then once or twice during the growing season should help maintain healthy plants. Again, soil sampling will show if certain nutrients are lacking help avoid nutritional problems.

Finally, people are always asking, “when should I divide my perennials”. In general perennials can be divided in fall or early spring. The best time to divide your perennials is during the recommended planting time for that particular variety or species. When dividing perennials be sure that each section has from 3-5 shoots. This will ensure good growth once transplanted.

These are a few things to consider when putting in or maintaining a perennial garden. I hope this information is useful. For more information call, stop by or check out ‘Flowering Perennials for Georgia Gardens’ on the web at <http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubs/pdf/B944.pdf>.