

Garden/ Yard Tips

Mowing Lawns

In new lawns, begin mowing when grass is at least 3 inches high. Before that, seedlings are not well rooted and you may pull out young plants. After the initial mowing, mow to the height recommended for your grass variety. In mature lawns, you may be blaming yellow lawn patches on insects or fungus when your mower or mowing technique may be the culprit. Like most chores, mowing can be done correctly or incorrectly.

Frequency of Mowing

Cutting a lawn too often, particularly with the blade set low exposes the lower portions of grass leaves to bright sun, burning them. If this happens repeatedly, grass reacts by developing shallow roots. Shallow-rooted lawns are particularly prone to disease and weed problems. In addition, poor rooting does not provide enough nutrients to the grass leaves. A lawn with shallow roots may eventually die out. Mowing infrequently often means taking off too much grass at one time. There is a direct relationship between root depth and lawn height. Long roots are to the lawn's advantage. They not only reach out for more lawn nutrients, but they also help the grass resist drought. If you let grass grow too long and then lop off more than half of it, the roots go into shock. Eventually the lawn may develop a thin, spotty, or burned look. For best results, never remove more than one-third of the height of the grass.

Planting and Growing Annuals

Annual plants - such as pansies, marigolds, impatiens, and zinnias - live and die in a year or less. If annuals get through this period, grow, flower, and produce seeds, their disappearance is a natural phenomenon, not a problem. You have wisely satisfied their requirements for amount of sunlight, ample water, effective drainage, and soil of at least average quality. If you want flowers in your garden on a continual basis throughout the season, plant annuals. Healthy annuals may bloom for several months, one flower following another, from the moment of first bud to the first severe cold spell. Gardeners living in an area with no frost or occasional frost can plant a series of annuals to provide flowers almost all year long.

Annuals do have their disadvantages. You might not have abundant flower production unless you prepare soil beforehand, preferably a month in advance. This gives added ingredients - such as compost, manure, or fertilizers - a chance to blend and nurture the soil. The roots of most annuals tend not to reach out as much as other plants, so they generally must draw on the nutrients they find where they are placed. If required nutrients and minerals aren't present, an annual might continue blooming for a time after purchase, drawing on nutrients already within the leaves. Flowers will become smaller and smaller, however, and finally cease altogether. As a result of their relatively limited root systems, annuals are susceptible to transplant shock. If you are planning on bouquets of summer annuals, do not wait for summer weather to put in the plants. Summer may seem prime for planting, but it is often too hot for newly transplanted annuals. The summer sun encourages top growth that the annuals' meager root systems can't support. The result may be stunted plants and minimal flowering. Solve the problem by planting summerflowering annuals when spring weather is still a bit on the cool side but not cold enough to risk frost damage.

Planting and Growing Perennials

Perennials - such as daylilies, herbaceous peonies, irises, and asters - bloom for a limited time per year, but they make up for it by having a longer life. Unlike shrubs, which are woody plants, perennials are non-woody, or soft-stemmed plants. Perennials usually bloom once a season. This can be for a week or a month. Some perennials completely die back and disappear after flowering, then emerge the following year. Resting perennials often get chopped up when enthusiastic gardeners think they have empty space and begin planting something new. Avoid this problem by marking perennial plant sites with small-labeled stakes. Or, if you live in a warm area, buy perennials that stay green the entire year for a leafy backdrop in winter. You may see the phrase "Perennial treated as an annual" on plant labels, or in books. The phrase refers to perennials, such as wax begonia, snapdragon, and coleus, which may not survive cold winters. Gardeners who live in areas where winters are harsh should treat these plants as an annual and plan to replace it each year.

Division

Some perennials, such as chrysanthemums, require division every few years, when the plant grows into a crowded unattractive clump. Other signs that you need to divide perennials include extra-tall growth, weak stems, and few blooms. Divide perennials in the spring. Expose the root ball and divide its segments to create separate plants. Transplant the newly formed perennials to a site where they do not have to compete for light and nutrients. To increase the number of flowers, pinch plants back after transplanting. Do this every few weeks until the plants become bushy and full of new shoots.

Transplant shock

To ease transplant shock in divided or new perennials, work when the weather is cool, in early mornings or evenings. Try not to damage roots. Each root is valuable in water acquisition. After transplanting, nip back about one-third of the old growth. Water well, using a dilute solution of liquid plant food. Despite the best of care, you may still see some symptoms of transplant shock, including leaf drop, flower drop, and wilting.