

BONNIE COURTER
For The News-Review

Question: I've noticed that my daylilies are not producing as many flowers as in the past and seem overcrowded. Is spring a good time to divide them, and how do I go about that?

Answer: Daylilies are one of the many perennial plants that will benefit greatly from dividing, splitting them into multiple plants. Perennials are plants that grow back year after year, gracing our gardens with their beautiful blooms and unique foliage.

There are many reasons gardeners should consider dividing their plants:

- You can control the size of the plant if that variety tends to spread rapidly.

- The flowers are tending to be smaller in size.

- You've noticed a hole or dead space in the center of the plant.

- Plants have become overcrowded, competing for nutrients and water, and inviting disease because of restricted airflow.

- Rejuvenate the plant by stimulating new growth.

- You want an inexpensive and easy way to increase the number of plants in your garden.

- To share a favorite plant with a friend or family member.

The best time to divide perennials will vary depending on the plant species. Your daylilies can be safely divided in spring or late summer/early fall. A rule of thumb is to divide plants when not in bloom, so all the plant's energy can be directed toward root and leaf growth, not flowers.

Spring can be an optimal time of year since the weather is cool and there is usually enough moisture in the soil for root growth, thanks to spring rain showers. All that stored energy in the root system helps the divisions recover from being cut apart and replanted in a new spot.

Perennials divided in the spring have the entire growing season to recover before winter comes.

Now that you're ready to tackle that plant, be sure to do it on a cloudy, overcast day. Digging up and disturbing plants on a hot sunny day will dry the plants out.

Plants to be divided should be well watered a day or two before you plan to divide them. Prepare the area you will be transplanting them into,

making sure it has well-drained soil with good fertility and add some organic matter to improve soil texture and water retention. Dig a hole wide enough to give the roots room to spread and deep enough that the crown of the plant is even with the surface of the soil.

Next, cut back stems and foliage to 6 inches from the ground. Dig up the parent plant using a spade or fork, digging deep on all four sides of the

plant, being careful to include all the roots.

Then pry underneath, lifting the whole clump. Shake off any loose soil around the roots.

Depending on the type of root system, separate the plant into smaller divisions by one of these methods:

- Gently pull or tease the roots apart with your hands.

- Cut them with a sharp knife or spade.

- Put two forks in the center

of the clump, back to back, and pull the forks apart.

Each division should have three to five vigorous shoots along with a healthy supply of roots. Discard the center of the clump that has any dead space in it. Remember that these smaller divisions may not flower until the following year or so until they're more established in their new environment.

If you can't replant the

Divide & Conquer



GARY BACHMAN/MSU EXTENSION SERVICE

When dividing plants, separate at the growing points and trim about half the foliage to aid reduce water loss as the roots begin to regenerate.



PIXABAY

Daylilies are one of the many perennial plants that will benefit greatly from being split into multiple plants.

sections right away, keep them shaded and moist until you can get to them.

If dividing perennials that have rhizomes (stems that grow horizontally at or above ground level such as bearded irises), cut out and discard any rhizome sections damaged by disease or insects. Each division should retain a few inches of the rhizome and one fan of leaves that have been trimmed back by one half. Be sure and replant the iris sections with the top showing just above the soil level.

Here's a short list of some of the more common perennials that can be divided in the springtime: aster, astilbe, bleeding heart, coral bells, cornflower, daylily, hostas, ornamental grasses, perennial salvia, purple coneflower, Shasta daisy and yarrow. There are many that are better divided in the fall, between mid-September to mid-October. You can see a spreadsheet from the University of Minnesota Extension of 125 perennials, showing when and how often to divide them, at tinyurl.com/yefp2p25.

So get out your garden knife, shovel or fork and divide and conquer those overgrown perennials in your yard. It's well worth the effort.

Be sure and register for the Master Gardener's "Spring Into Gardening" classes from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. March 9 at the Phoenix Charter School. Register at OSU Extension Office.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.