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## Fall Care for Herbaceous Perennials

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Herbaceous perennial plants form the backbone of traditional flower gardens, providing dependable, low maintenance seasonal color in an ever changing tapestry. With little care, you can enjoy color that comes back every year. For the healthiest garden next spring, fall maintenance is essential.

First, control any weeds in the perennial garden that may have gotten out of hand during the busy summer months. You can pull them, and optionally add pre-emergent herbicide. Once we receive a good frost, cut perennial plants back to about 9-12 inches from the ground. Do not cut back plants with evergreen leaves, such as hellebores. Excellent sources of mulches include leaves, evergreen needles, straw, or other organic material up to three inches as a protective layer. This will moderate ground temperatures during periods of freezing and thawing, preventing frost heave and premature growth spurts during warmer periods.

Fall is a good time to divide or move perennial plants. If a plant has become overgrown, or is not thriving in a particular place because of poor soil conditions or too much light or shade, it is time to remedy the situation. A digging fork is an ideal tool for digging perennial roots without slicing them off. Rock the fork, loosening the soil all around the plant, then gently lift the plant out of the ground.

Study the and look for development of new roots beside the old ones, which can be separated by gently pulling them apart. Other plants can be divided with a sturdy knife or even slicing them with a sharp shovel, so each part has a substantial portion of root. Prepare a hole in the new location, stir in a little compost, add the new plant, and place it the same depth as before in damp soil, then backfill and water in to settle the soil around the roots.

As the plants start to go dormant, check the soil for moisture. Continue watering the garden if it

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is dry. If perennials are adequately hydrated entering the cold season, they will likely emerge in better condition in the spring.

*Mike Bauer is the Horticulturist for Moose Valley Farms, a full-service garden center located in Naples at mile marker 495. Please feel free to call us at 267-5108 or stop in if you have any questions. For more information on perennials, attend Moose Valley's Find out Fridays series on Friday, August 29, at 10 am for a presentation perennials for fall color. Information: 267-5108.*

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