

Fertilizing newly planted perennials

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Proper preparation of planting beds using well-rotted compost, commercial organic matter or leaf mold will ensure good success when establishing a new planting. Preparing soil by loosening compaction and working 3 to 4 inches of organic matter into the top 12 inches of soil will provide your plants lasting nutrients for several seasons. If your soil test indicates you need added nutrient, you can incorporate it at the time you prepare the bed.

Most perennial growing recommendations note that between 1 to 4 pounds of nitrogen can come from a 1-inch layer of organic matter like compost, so don't over-do the supplemental fertilizer application. In all cases, slow release products are better for your plants and the environment. Apply a slow-release fertilizer according to the manufacturer's recommendations as a "sidedressing" at planting time.

Whether renovating whole beds or only a few plants at a time, you can refresh the planting area by amending with compost to the depth the new plant will be planted. If plants are to be removed and divided, simply lift the entire plant out and set aside while spading in 3 to 4 inches of compost over the area that is to be renovated. Replant divided sections or a new plant into the area, keeping in mind that the soil will "settle" as the organic matter decomposes.



A mulch of composted leaf mold will benefit this bed of newly planted daylilies, providing nutrients, moisture retention and weed control.



Sidedressing this newly planted perennial with just a few tablespoons of slow-release fertilizer will get it off to a great start.

A tight squeeze

New plants that have been purchased are sometimes container-bound with tightly growing roots. Media around the plants can become extremely dry in the center of the root mass and watering over the top sometimes will not remedy the situation. A healthy soak in a bucket or wheelbarrow will allow the dried out area to re-moisten and allow you to untangle the roots so they will establish more quickly in your garden bed. Do not be concerned about breaking a few roots.

Perennial growers commonly agree that when it comes to fertilizing perennials, "Less is more" is the best rule of thumb. As you continue to grow perennials and observe their response year-to-year from your treatments, you can adapt to each plant's specific needs.

Find out about other educational resources and classes at www.migarden.msu.edu and at Finneran's blog, www.stuckongardening.com. You can contact the MSU Master Gardener Lawn and Garden Hotline at 888-678-3464 with your questions.

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