

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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FALL REARRANGING IN THE LANDSCAPE

Life is full of changing and rearranging, and if you are like me it can be unwelcome, but just what is needed. Sometimes there are just better places for things at different times as we grow and develop. In some small way I think this applies to plants and landscapes too.

Often a plant outgrows its space, the color just isn't right, or the area just plain needs something different. In some cases the sun exposure may have changed because your trees are getting larger and plants must be moved to be given enough sunlight. Regardless of the reason, fall is a good time to transplant and rearrange perennial plants in a landscape that needs a facelift.

Transplanting is best done in early autumn, since this allows enough time for the plants to re-establish root systems before winter.

What to do:

Make sure to prepare the area you will be transplanting to by removing weeds and amending the soil if necessary.

Begin the process by pruning the tops of the plants to be moved. This helps reduce the amount of plant area the roots must support. Typically you can remove one third to one half of the plant with a selective pruning.

Dig and lift large plants with a pitch fork or spade. A tarp which can be used to place the transplant on will be very useful in this process.

Start at least one foot from the outside of the clump and work around the plant by loosening and then lifting the root ball. Be careful around the root ball to avoid causing serious damage. The size of the root ball needed depends on the size of the plant. Small plants require a smaller root ball.

Once the plant is out, the clump can be divided if necessary by using a sharp spade or knife. Place the tool in the middle of the clump and pull it apart from opposite directions. Tubers need to be cut with a knife while open centered plants are best divided with a sharp spade. Three to five bud eyes or shoots are adequate for a division, but smaller divisions like this may delay blooming and establishment. Larger divisions work best in the fall.

Remove any dead or damaged plant and root parts from the transplant and then reset the plants at their original depth. Planting depth is very important on some plants that grow from bulbs, tubers, or fleshy roots like peonies, iris, and daffodils. Planting too deep often results in a failure to bloom. Dig an adequate size hole for the root system, spread the roots out evenly in the hole and reset the plant. Avoid compacting the soil, but rather water the newly set plant in well and let the soil melt in around the roots. Small divisions may need protection from sun and wind for the first few days.

After the transplant has been in the ground for about two to three weeks, feed the plant with a liquid fertilizer. Granular fertilizers at this vulnerable time could burn the roots if they come in direct contact.

Finally, apply a 2-inch layer of organic mulch to help the soil hold moisture around the roots and insulate the soil, which will allow time for establishment before winter.