Designing Perennial Gardens

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Flower Garden Design Tips

• Keep These Flower Garden Design Tips In Mind When You're Planning A New Garden Bed Or Thinking About Adding To Your Existing Plantings
The Trend Today Is To Plant A "Mixed Border"
You Do Not Need To Segregate Perennials In Their Own Flowerbed
Arrange Small Trees And Shrubs With Flowers
Perennials Play An Important Function In Landscape Design
Perennials Provide A Broad Variety Of Color, Form And Flower Types Unavailable In Annual Flowers
Most Perennials Have Relatively Short Bloom Periods
A Well-Designed Perennial Bed, Planted With A Variety Of Plant Species, Can Provide Continuous Bloom From Spring Through Fall
PERENNIAL FLOWER BED DESIGN
Why Design At All?

Designing A Perennial Flower Garden And Seeing It Develop Before Your Eyes Is Very Rewarding
Plans Take Time, Knowledge And Experience To Prepare
Impatient Gardeners Often Overlook The Planning Stage
The Eye Needs A Sense Of Order
This Makes A Haphazard Collection Of Plant Materials
Too Many Sizes, Shapes, Colors And Textures Create Confusion
The Most Spectacular Gardens All Begin With Carefully Thought-Out Designs With Strong Lines And Structure
Step By Step Design
Step #1 Determine The Point(S) Of Viewing.
Place Beds Where They Are Readily Seen And Admired
Locate Them In High Visibility Areas
The Front Yard
Near Windows
Three Types Of Perennial Gardens

- The Border
- The Island Bed
- The Naturalized Area
A Border Bounds A Lawn, Walkway, Driveway Or Wall
Keep a pleasing relationship between the depth of the border and the size of the yard.
Keep It Under One-Quarter Of The Total Width Of Your Yard
An Island Bed Is Surrounded By An Open Expanse
It Is Accessible From All Sides, Making It Easier To Maintain
It Allows More Sunlight And Encourages Better Air Circulation
This Type Of Display Can Break Up Large, Open Areas
You Do Not Need To Segregate Perennials In The Garden
Naturalize Perennials In Dry Meadows Or Along Streams
Use Wildflowers And Shrubs In Natural Locations
Make Them A Part Of The Natural Landscape
Some Can Be Naturalized In Grasses Or Ground Covers
Many Are Used As Ground Covers
Step #2 Consider Existing Conditions
Consider Soil Type, Drainage, Wind, Pests, Ph And Light
Consider The Space Limitations Of The Site
Match Soil Type, Light Levels And Site Climate To The Plants
Location Takes Into Account The Amount Of Sun Or Shade
Location Takes Into Account The Amount Of Water Required
Consider Plant Characteristics And The Garden Character
Preparing the Perennial Planting Bed

- Soil test
- Loosen soil 6-8” deep
- Add organic matter
- Work in fertilizer or amendments based on soil test
- Crown or slope bed to provide drainage and improve display
Double Digging

Preparing and Amending Soil for an Annual or Perennial Bed

A. Dig first trench; pile soil alongside trench or into wheelbarrow
B. Break up bottom of trench with fork and work in some compost
C. Dig second trench; placing soil into first trench
D. Continue in this manner; fill last trench with soil from first trench
Deadheading is removing flowers after they start to fade and **BEFORE** seeds mature. It encourages more blooms.
Dividing Perennials

- Helps keep bed from looking overcrowded
- Invigorates older plants that may be dying out in the center
- Makes new friends—because you can give away or trade plants
Herbaceous Plants

Dividing Perennials

- Divide spring blooming perennials in fall
- Divide summer and fall blooming perennials in spring
• Dividing clumps such as daylilies . . .
Hosta
Step #3: Using Graph Paper, Sketch The Garden Layout
Decide On Style - Either Informal Or Formal.
Informal Follows The Terrain With Curved, Flowing Lines
It Creates Balance Without Being Symmetrical And Highlights Existing And Future Plant Specimens
Formal Uses Straight Lines To Outline The Shape Of The Bed
It Uses Symmetry To Match The Sides Of The Garden
The Rectangular Shape Repeat
Other Architectural Elements
These Include The House, Pool, Lawn Or Patio
Most Style Decisions Are A Matter Of Personal Preference
Here Are A Few Points To Consider:
Informal Design

If Your Property Has No Outstanding Natural Features And Is Relatively Flat, Use Either Style
Informal Design Is Best

If Your Yard Is Irregularly Shaped With Slopes, Hills, Rock Outcroppings Or Mature Trees
Consider the style of the house and select the style of garden that will complement it best.
Step #4: Flower Bed Size
Gardeners Often Skimp On The Width Of Their Beds
Make Your Flower Beds Wide Enough To Begin With
This Allows You To Add Shrubs And Trees
Flower Borders May Be Of Any Width
In A Small Yard The Bed May Be Only 2 Or 3 Feet Wide
In Spacious Gardens, Borders May Be 6-8 Feet Wide
Wider Beds - At Least Five To Six Feet Wide - Are More Attractive And Give More Planting Opportunities For Creating A Lush, Layered Look
Use Stepping Stones To Work Deep Borders
This Gives Access To The Flowers Without Compacting The Soil
Locate The Front Edge Back Enough For Easy Lawn Mowing
Limit Plant Height To 2/3 The Width Of The Border
Use Plants Less Than 4 Feet In
A Border 6 Feet Wide
Every Garden Bed Needs Sense Of Definition
Do Not Underestimate The Power Of The Line That Sets The Bed Apart From The Rest Of The Garden
Straight Lines Work Well, But Curved Lines Are Preferable
Design Gentle Curves Not Wiggly Lines

- Smooth Sweeping Curves Or Even Clean Straight Lines Makes A More Elegant Flower Garden Design Than A Wavy Pattern Snaking Around The Garden
Plant In Groups

• Masses Of Blooms In A Well-Planned Garden Comes From Clumps Made Up Of Drifts Of Three, Five, Seven, Or More Of The Same Plant
A Garden Without Design Looks Jumbled
Plant All Except The Largest Stand-Alone Plants In Odd-Numbered Groupings Of Three Or More
Check How Tall Plants Will Get
Divide Plants Into Edgers For The Front Of The Beds
Fillers For The Middle Of The Beds
Backdrop Plants
Plant Taller Perennials Toward The Back Of Your Beds

Occasionally Break The Design Rule By Letting Taller Plants Drift Into The Middle
Place Some Tall Airy And See-Through Plants Near The Front
Use Ornamental Grasses Or Ammi
Give Individual Plants Enough Space
Place Plants As Far Apart As Each Plant's Ultimate Spread
Step #5: Select Plants
When Selecting Plants, Make A List Of Your Favorites
Are Smaller, Compact Plants Appropriate?
Should Taller Plants With Spreading Habits Be Included?
Choose First By Location
Second By Period Of Bloom
Third By Height And Width
Fourth By Color
Create Unity In Your Flower Garden Design
Try Limiting Colors To Those That Harmonize Well
Put Plants Into Groups Of Three
Repeat Them Among Single Specimens Of Other Plants
Unify Plantings With A Strong Backdrop Such As An Evergreen Hedge Or Wall
Use Repetition
Repeating Plants, Colors And Textures Adds Continuity
If You Have Flower Borders That Face Each Other, Repeat At Least One Grouping Of Plants On Each Side
Stagger the groupings so they are not right across from each other.
Consider Balance
Symmetry Is A Formal Approach To Garden Layout
For Example, Plant The Same Shrub On Each Side
You Can Do This Asymmetrically
The Crabapple On One Side Balances The Visual Weight Of A Tall, Upright Evergreen On The Other Side
Don't Forget Your Focal Point
Appealing Garden Designs Include Eye Catching Accents
A Bench, Arbor, Gate, Art Or Statuary Are Good Focal Points
Larger Gardens Have More Than One Focal Point
In A Small Garden, Mark The Entrance With Special Accents
A Gate Through An Arbor Is A Timeless Classic
Herbaceous Border Excitement Lies In The Design Flexibility
The Contemporary Border Follows Few Rigid Rules
It Allows Fullest Expression Of The Gardener's Taste
It Considers Form, Placement, And Selection Of Plants
For An All-Season, Mixed Border, Select The Right Plants
Choose Key Plants For Line, Mass, Color, And Dependability
Line Is The Silhouette Or Outline Of A Plant
Mass Is Its Shape Or Denseness
Dependability Keeps It Attractive Without Problems
Check Handouts, Garden Books And Catalogs As References
Use Borders In Front Of Shrubbery, Fences Or Buildings
Tall Flowers May Serve A Dual Purpose
Use Hollyhocks or Delphiniums in the border and as backgrounds.
Medium Height Flowers Are Backgrounds For Short Borders
Generally, Avoid A Ruler-Straight Front Edge Unless The Garden Is Very Formal
Gentle Sweeping Curves Laid Out With A Garden Hose Work Best Even Along A Fence
Taper the border as it recedes from the main viewing point to enhance the illusion of distance.
The Deeper The Curve, The Slower The Eye Moves
This Gives Greater Visual Enjoyment
Borders Outlined With Bricks Or Flat Stones Set Flush With The Soil Are Better Than A Steeply Cut Lawn Edge That Must Be Trimmed After Mowing
Organizing Plant Selection Is Simplified If Two Main Mass Forms Are Considered: Drifts And Clumps
Drifts Are Groupings Of A Plant That Flow Through The Border
Clumps Are Circular Groupings Of A Variety, Or A Single Large Plant Such As A Peony
Vary the length of drifts, the diameter of clumps and their heights for best effect.
• Keep Dimensions In Proportion To The Size Of The Border
Use Large Enough Groups For Masses Of Color Or Texture
Random Collections Of Different Small- To Medium-Sized Plants Give A Disorganized, Checkerboard Appearance
Flower Groups Should Have Irregular Shapes
Blend Masses Of Color And Texture Into Pleasing Patterns
Use Dwarf Flowers As Edgings Along The Front Of The Bed
Break Up The Skyline By Letting Tall Plants Extend Into The Medium Height Groups
Use A Few Recessed Clumps Or Drifts To Lead The Eye Back Into The Border
This Gives A More Natural Effect Than A Step Profile
Vary Heights, But Keep Taller Plants Behind Shorter Ones
• The Distance Between Plants In A Flower Border Depends On The Form Of The Individual Plants And The Desired Landscape Effect
Allow Adequate Space Between Plants
Many Gardeners Crowd Their Plants Too Much
If That Happens, Dig And Divide The Plants To Use Elsewhere
Perennial Design Are Not One Time, Install And Forget Plantings- They Are Living Works Of Art That Create Changing Dynamic Beauty In The World Most Important Garden, The One In Your Own Backyard