

## Spring Care of Perennials

Perennial flowers have become popular in recent years as they offer the homeowner a wide range of flower forms and colors, as well as, require less maintenance than annuals. Most perennials grow and flower for several years. In the fall, the tops of herbaceous perennials (leaves, stems, and flowers) die down to the ground while the root system persists through the winter.

Most flowering perennials are not heavy feeders, and once established, may not need fertilizing every year. However, a soil test or visual symptoms will help determine the needs of the plants. Weak plants with light green to yellowish foliage will probably benefit from a nitrogen containing fertilizer. Fertilizer should be applied as growth begins in the spring. Perennials that tend to need more fertilizer than the average perennial include astilbe, chrysanthemum, delphinium, lupines and summer phlox.

Many perennials will need dividing after three to four years. The best time to divide most perennials is in the spring when new shoots are 2 to 3 inches tall, or in the fall when the foliage starts to die back. Plants divided during an active growth period in the summer are slower to become reestablished. Some perennials can be divided following their flowering period even during the summer, examples include daylily and bearded iris. Division is normally done by digging and dividing the clump into several smaller clumps. An alternative for vigorous clumps is to slice off a section with a sharp spade while leaving the main clump in the ground.

*Lynn Loughary is the Horticulture Agent for Wyandotte County, K-State Research and Extension. She can be reached by calling 913-299-9300 ext 104, or by email*

*lloughar@ksu.edu*