Caring for Perennials
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First year: mulch, water well and often, special attention and care
Later years: remulch or compost, fertilize, infrequent water if any, prune/divide as needed
Time required: on "average", 60 minutes per 100 sq.ft. per month
• varies with season: spring 90 minutes, summer 60 minutes, fall 30 minutes
• varies with intensity, type, sustainability of planting

Seasonal activities/needs:
• spring: clear away dead plant matter, weed and edge, fertilize, mulch/topdress compost, divide, labels
• early summer: stake, check for pests, deadhead early bloomers if needed, cut back if needed, keep new transplants watered, re-fertilize if synthetic, keep up with weeds, re-edge if needed, control spreaders
• later summer: cut back if needed, check for pests, keep new transplants well-watered, re-fertilize(synthetic)
• early fall: divide some (bearded iris, daylilies) and others not done earlier, plant bulbs, soil test and lime if needed, cut back if poor foliage or diseased, re-fertilize (synthetic), check labels
• late fall: remove plant matter which wont be attractive overwinter (many daylilies), evergreen boughs over heathers and low evergreens, mulch roses and tender or first-year perennials

Mulching
1) right after planting--conserves moisture, prevents soil crusting (clay), weed control (?), organic matter
• types: organic best (bark, smaller chips or double ground), generally softwood, also peat moss, compost, cocoa hulls, other local
• depth: 2 inches, keep off spreaders (yarrow), minimal weed control
• weed control: at least 6 inches, keep away from base of plants, especially peonies, or 2 inches with thick newspaper (whole sections not sheets) below (not plastic or similar, prevents spread)
• repeat summer mulch beginning of each summer (plants emerged)
2) overwintering--moderate soil temperatures, as above if organic
• types: often same as summer mulch, also wintering blankets, minimal from thin fabrics
• winter blankets: semi-rigid foam, thick felts, "sandwich"--white plastic (top), any plastic bottom (if pots, none for beds) and minimum one foot packed weed free straw (key if directly on beds) between
• timing: late as possible to apply before snow (Thanksgiving?), early as possible to remove (April Fools?)
• roses: cones, mound soil/straw one foot or more around base, blankets for beds

Staking
• need varies with cultivar (dwarf), culture (light, nutrition, water), care (pruning)
• posts: wood (1-2 seasons, rots), bamboo (less sturdy), metal (rebar, cap tops)
• use garden twine, not wire or string--latter cuts stems, former lasts season
• other: wire cages (rigid or flexible wide mesh), frames (climbing, arching), nets (beds)

Labels
• types: wood (1 year or less, writing fades), plastic (1-2 years, UV cracks), metal (3-10 years), engraved (over 10 years), longer lasting generally more expensive
• markers: varies with label, #2pencil best; "permanent" black marker (1 yr), colored markers (1 month)
• needs vary: show garden, focus or design or plants, even need to know if few or common?
Pruning

ideal, most survive well without any

1) "deadhead" spent flowers

- unless for reseeding as wildflowers (dame's rocket), cottage gardens, short-lived (hollyhock, foxglove), attractive (astilbe, meadowsweet, Siberian iris, Rudbeckia, Sedum), for birds (coneflower, Joe-pye weed, bee balm, rudbeckia)
- may prevent undesirable self-sowing (some bellflowers, geranium, coneflowers, milkweed)
- prolong bloom or rebloom later (yarrow, columbines, bellflowers, delphinium, daylily, bee balm, phlox, salvia, speedwell)
- to side shoot or shear for some (most); to ground/basal for others (carpet bugle, bleeding heart, some geranium, heuchera, hosta)

2) cut back during growth

- keep in their own space (yarrow, wormwood, geranium, bee balm, catmint, creeping phlox)
- aesthetics for early bloomers (columbines, dianthus, dame's rocket, candytuft, beard iris, peonies, oriental poppy, creeping phlox, lungwort)
- aesthetics for summer bloomers (wormwood, tickseed, some geranium, daylilies, lavender, garden phlox, salvia, goldenrod)
- height control for late bloomers (yarrow, aster, boltonia, coneflowers, joe-pye weed, helen's flower, hibiscus, lobelia, bee balm, garden phlox, obedient plant, balloon flower, rudbeckia, sedum, goldenrod, spiderwort, speedwell)

3) deleaf unattractive foliage as browns, dies (columbines, bergenia, black snakeroot, dicentra, foxglove, heuchera, hosta, lungwort)

Fertility

- soil test yearly if possible
- acidity (pH) 5.5-6.5, important to make nutrients available
- low analysis (eg 5-3-4) best, low fertility needs in general, too little is better than too much
- organic often is slow release so only add early spring, adds soil microbes and health so better roots
- synthetic lasts 3 weeks avg, so add early spring, early summer, later summer/early fall
- late fertility ok for perennials vs. woodies
- add year 2 and after, sufficient usually at planting for first year

Dividing

- When? hollow centers, stems thin and topple, flowers small, bottom foliage scant and poor
  - maybe 1-3 years: yarrow, New York aster, astilbe, bellflower, tickseed, Helen's flower, coralbells, bearded iris, shasta daisy, lobelia, bee balm, phlox, obedient plant, speedwell
  - maybe 4-10 years: bergenia, bleeding heart, joe-pye weed, daylily, blazing star, sundrops, rudbeckia, goldenrod, foamflower
  - generally over 10 years: columbine, false indigo, black snakeroott, gas plant, baby's breath, hellebore, hosta, peony
- How, ideally? lift plant, wash/shake soil off, select divisions (minimum 3-5 growing points/bud/eyes), pull or cut apart, replant
  - cutting apart: garden forks back:back, square tip spade, knife, saw, combination
- How, lazy method? divide off chunk with square tip spade in ground

4/07