

Growing Perennial & Annual Flowers

Start Any Project by Improving Soil With Organic Matter

- Most plants prefer a rich, well-drained soil that is light and easy to work, yet able to retain moisture and nutrients. Adding organic matter will improve its texture and porosity while adding valuable nutrients.
- The best time to improve your soil is before planting. After plants are established, drainage and aeration problems cannot be corrected without removing the plants.
- For best results, use ground and aged pine bark. Pine bark will break down over 4 to 5 years, releasing the soil structure-building humus more slowly than other materials. Other acceptable materials include municipal (or homemade) compost, well-rotted manure, or peat moss.
- One, 3-cubic foot bag of aged pine bark will cover 8 to 10 square feet at a depth of 4 to 6 inches.
- Planting beds can be worked any time of the year, as long as the soil is not frozen or excessively wet. Soil should be dug to a depth of at least 10 to 12 inches. Spread a 4 to 6-inch layer of organic matter on the soil and work it in with a spade or roto-tiller. When finished, the bed will be slightly higher than the surrounding soil. This is normal and will settle with time.

Planting

- Loosen the planting hole at least twice as wide as the root ball to encourage root growth, but no deeper. Remember that amending the entire bed before planting will yield the best results.
- Remove the plant from the plastic container. Gallon and 4.5 inch pots can be returned to Finke gardens for re-use.
- Use a knife or pruners to cut any circling roots, and loosen the root ball with your hands to encourage the roots to spread out into the soil.
- Place the plant in the hole and make sure the top of the soil mass is at the same depth it was in the pot. Iris, peonies and most any plant grown from a tuber, corm or bulb are especially sensitive to proper planting depth. Planting too deep may interfere with flowering, or result in slow death of the plant.
- Backfill the hole with the soil that was dug out initially.

Mulching

- Applying mulch around your plantings will conserve moisture and moderate soil temperatures.
- Spread a 2-inch deep layer of shredded wood mulch around the plant. Cover the disturbed soil area with mulch, but keep it a few inches away from the crown.
- Top-dress the mulch each year to maintain a depth of 2 inches.



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Fertilizing

- After planting either annuals or perennials, use a water soluble, high-phosphorus fertilizer to encourage root growth. We recommend “Blooming and Rooting,” mixing 1 tablespoon per gallon of water in a watering can and applying to each plant.
- ANNUAL FLOWERS require a constant supply of plant nutrients all summer long, so we recommend the use of a water soluble balanced fertilizer once a week. This insures that the fast-growing annuals will establish their best roots and foliage for continuous blooms. Heavy feeders like geraniums and gerbera daisies often quit flowering in mid-June because they have “run out” of nitrogen. The use of slow release fertilizer Osmocote is added insurance that the flowers will have a regular supply of nutrients.
- PERENNIAL FLOWERS should be fertilized in the spring with balanced slow release fertilizer like ProRich. Keep the fertilizer away from the crown or center of the plant.
- You may want to discuss your specific plant nutrition needs with a Finke Gardens staff member for fertilizer recommendations.

Watering

- Check the soil moisture level at the root zone of the container soil. Push the mulch away and use your finger to probe at least three inches into the soil, two or three times each week.
- Moist soil is ideal. If the Soil is muddy, do not add any water! If the soil is dry, go get the hose. Experiment with this step until you have a sense of correct soil moisture.
- Remember there will be variation in soil moisture throughout the planting bed. The high end of a slope might dry out faster. It might stay wetter for a longer time at the lower end. If it is wet, wait a day or two to check again. If it Starting to dry out, water the bed thoroughly.
- If a plant needs water, use a hose with a gentle spray nozzle. Soak thoroughly.
- Do not rely on automatic irrigation systems. Coverage is typically uneven and one plant may be drowning while the one next to it may be bone dry.

The Flower Garden in Fall

- When temperatures start to drop in the fall, the water needs of plants will decrease, so plan to cut back on watering. This will also help the plant start to harden off for good winter survival.
- Avoid fertilizing plantings past the first of August as another way to encourage hardening off.
- Plan to leave the perennial foliage debris stand for the winter; it collects snow for additional insulation and adds to the beauty of the winter scene.
- Remove frost-killed annuals to help reduce the chance of disease and insect pests from over-wintering. Some annuals like Dianthus, Victoria salvia and snapdragons will occasionally over-winter in protected locations, so you might leave them to test your luck.



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