

# VALE'S GREENHOUSE



*Quality Plants For The Chinook Zone*

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## PLANNING A PERENNIAL GARDEN

Are you fed up with planting annuals every year and have you decided this is not for you and what you really want is perennials that you only have to buy once, stick them in and forget about them?

Unfortunately for those of you with purple thumbs instead of green ones, it doesn't quite work that way.

Annuals are ones you have to put in each year like marigolds and petunias. The beauty of these is that you can change your colour scheme each year if you want to and the plants will bloom all summer from June until fall frost without stopping.



Perennials will live for many years, but few of them will do it with no help from you and none of them bloom all summer. Each has its own season of bloom lasting anywhere from two to six weeks, seldom longer, so you see it is necessary to plan very carefully to get a succession of bloom over the summer with a balanced mixture of plants harmonizing with each other for height, texture and color.

The plants will live in one spot for many years so it pays to prepare the ground thoroughly first, deep digging and manuring the ground and making sure it is free of perennial weeds.

Some perennials will need dividing after a few years, some will need staking up against summer winds, and all will benefit from a winter mulching of leaves and garden debris. So you see, they are a lot of work.

To plan which plants you want to produce a continuous but ever-changing display of colour all summer, make a chart with four columns showing, the four blooming periods (early spring, early summer, mid-summer, and late summer). For this area, omit the early fall column which would contain things like Michaelmas daisies and garden mums because they will just be coming into flower when the frost cuts them down.

Divide your four columns of blooming seasons with lines across the page to show tall plants, medium height plants and low growing plants (this sheet can be accompanied by a Perennial Planning Chart avail-

able in the Perennial Information Display), but you can make your own quite easily.

Next fill in on your chart a blend of colours you want to see in each blooming period and try to find hardy plants to fit the puzzle. In this area it is not as easy as it sounds, but if you have a copy of the Alberta Horticulture Guide and also a copy of Gardening Under the Arch (the book written by members of the Millarville Horticulture Club) it will help to steer you straight.

Most perennials will be at their best in their second or third year. Very few will provide much in the way of bloom or size the first season. Some like peonies take years to establish themselves into the lush, big bushes you remember seeing in your grandmother's garden. One way to make a new perennial bed attractive while you are waiting for the plants to develop is to put a few annuals in between the plants to give a bit of colour in the meantime.

A good, well-planned perennial bed should be at least six feet from front to back to allow proper height variance and as long as you like. For just a few trouble-free perennials by themselves try peonies or day lilies which both like to remain undisturbed for years and don't need much help from you.



