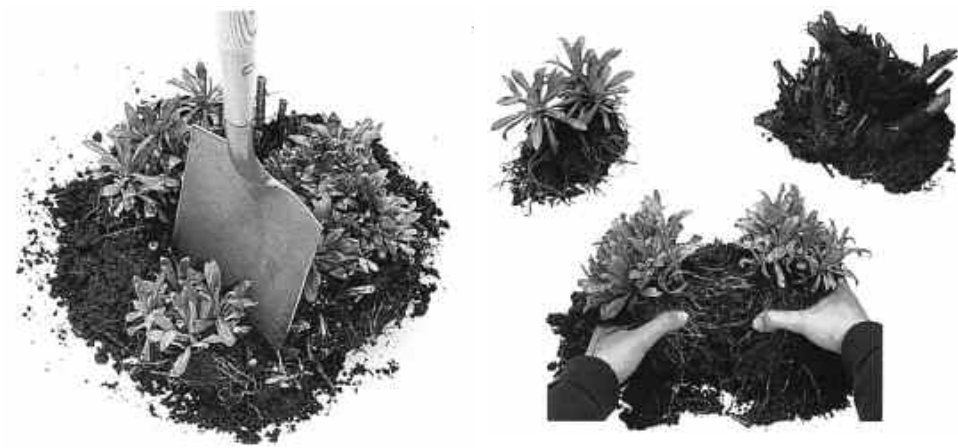


CHORES



Shovel strategy: Damage as few roots as possible and lift up the root clump.

From *Perennials* (Dorling Kindersley Publishing)

Divide and multiply: Many fall bloomers have shallow roots that are easy to separate.

Divide and conquer those perennials

By RICK ROSEN
Staff Writer
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Many gardeners are reluctant to divide perennials, fearing that they will damage the plant or that the task is too difficult.

But division of fall-blooming plants is usually fairly easy. Plus, division rejuvenates your plants.

And, despite the name, division multiplies the number of plants, at no cost.

Time is winding down for dividing fall-blooming perennials such as chrysanthemums, fall asters, daisies and Mexican mint marigold. You want to do it before hot weather arrives, to give the plants time to re-establish roots.

With spring-blooming perennials, you have a longer window of opportunity: from late fall through winter, when plants are dormant.

When does a plant need to be divided? Thinning out herbaceous perennials through division every three to five years keeps them healthy and vigorous. If the plant grows less vigorously than it used to, produces smaller flowers or doesn't flower at all, it may need the lift that division provides.

And lift is what you do. The basic drill is to

dig around the plant, taking care to damage as few roots as possible; lift up the clump; shake off the soil around the roots; pull apart.

Many fall bloomers, such as mums and asters, have shallow, fibrous root systems that are easily separated. Each part you separate, as long as it includes some roots, can be planted and will grow into a new plant.

Other types of plants have fleshier roots, and you may have to expend more labor.

For plants such as old daylilies, a good method is to place two garden forks back to back. Thrust the forks into the middle of the clump and split apart. These more manageable clumps can then be subdivided.

Some additional tips:
 ■ Keep only the healthy-looking pieces.
 ■ If you lack the time, don't divide all your perennials at once. Rotate the task and do some each year, or as needed.
 ■ Fast-growing plants need more frequent division than slow growers.

■ Don't let divided plants get too hot; give them a bit of shade until established. Also, make sure they have plenty of water.
 ■ Before replanting the divided sections, improve the soil by adding organic matter.

■ Give away divided plants that you don't have room for.

Root cuttings in soil, not water

I am rooting plant cuttings in water. Should I change the water daily?

M.M., Austin

You shouldn't be using water. All cuttings should be placed in organic potting soil for rooting. Cuttings rooted in water have a hard time adjusting to soil later.

I have fescue growing in the shade under large oak trees and a large area of Bermuda grass in the sun. Can I use Milorganite to fertilize the fescue?

C.L., Fort Worth

Corn gluten meal is the only natural nontoxic "weed and feed" product. It's also a great organic fertilizer, so the price is a good deal. Milorganite is a good organic fertilizer, but it doesn't provide pre-emergent weed control.

I need advice for my gardener, who doesn't have a mulching mower. If he leaves grass clippings on top of the lawn, will it be a problem or a blessing?

B.S., Fort Worth

Grass clippings should be left on the yard if possible. If he mows at least once a week and uses organic fertilizers, the clippings will be no problem. If they clump after a rainy period or because of missed mowings, just scatter them with a rake.

The raspberries in my garden have not started to grow, so is it OK to apply corn gluten meal?

R.B., Frisco

Yes, corn gluten meal's pre-emergent control prevents only small seeds from growing. It acts as a fertilizer for perennials such as raspberries.

I have a live oak that is about 7 to 10 years old. It is 4 or 5 inches in diameter at the base. Recently, I noticed multiple holes in the trunk that average 1/4 inch in diameter and 1/4 inch in depth. I don't see insects, there is no discoloration or sawdust and there does not seem to be sap coming from the holes. What's wrong, and can it be

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
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repaired?

K.B., Argyle

It sounds as if a bird called a sapsucker has been working on the tree. When a tree is in stress, the sugars in the sap concentrate to help fight infirmities and to help repair injuries. The sapsucker, which is a member of the woodpecker family, can detect that.

These birds like the sweet sap and bore holes in tidy rows so that sap flows down and is easy to suck up. Butterflies, other birds and squirrels also are attracted to the oozing sap.

To solve the problem, splash hydrogen peroxide on the wounds, and then smear on Tree Trunk Goop (mix 1 part each of compost, soft rock phosphate and natural diatomaceous earth, then slowly add water and stir until a paste forms). Follow my Sick Tree Treatment to improve the overall health of the tree. (See Resources.)

To help keep these birds from damaging other trees, use only organic fertilizers, make sure the soil is aerated rather than compacted, avoid physical damage to trunks and limbs, and maintain adequate soil moisture.

RESOURCES

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts

RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.

MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214



BO CARLSSON/Special Contributor

Notice rows of small holes on a tree? A sapsucker could be the culprit.

THIS WEEK

TUESDAY

HEALTHY LIVING

HEALTHY VIRTUES: Explore the healing power of laughter in our monthly series.

WEDNESDAY

TASTE

PIZZA PANEL: Our wine experts choose the best wines for pizza.

FRIDAY

HOME

SPRING GARDEN ISSUE: Got plant fever? We have some suggestions before you go shopping.

TELL US

PLANTPALOOZA: Monday is the deadline if you wish to get on our list of spring plant sales produced by local garden clubs and public gardens. Please get the details to us by 10 a.m. Monday. Fax to 214-977-8321 or e-mail home@dallasnews.com. Questions? 214-977-8407.

ON DALLASNEWS.COM

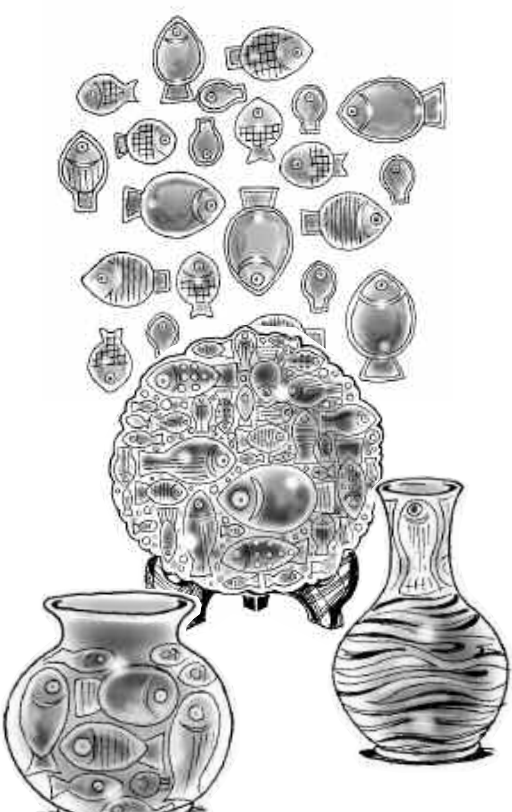
YOUR GUIDE TO HAM: Just in time for Easter, find the details on buying the one you need for the gathering of family and friends. Dallasnews.com/food

Shopping the Town

Special Advertising Feature



Antique Land is in full bloom



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Our global artist has created ceramic fish in aqua, blue and green to ignite your decorative spirit. Only your imagination limits their use. This is a sensational spring market find. *Rutherford's*, 5417 Lovers Lane, 214-357-0888.

To advertise contact your *Dallas Morning News* account representative or Denise Sanders at 214-977-2044.



Antique Land manager Jean Allred says the upscale mall in the northeast quadrant of U.S. Hwy. 75 and Plano Parkway "now feels complete." This spring, Antique Land has over 250 dealers, many of them new — 35 of which are from Unlimited in Addison, (which closed in February.) Antique Land has long-time area dealers such as Billie Rhodes (Dallas Books and Paper, children's books) and Trudy Miller (sterling flatware) and Tom Keener (crystal, china and more). *Antique Land* is open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Fri.-Sat, and 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sun. 800 N. Central Expressway, Plano, 972-509-7878.

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Outstanding collection of designer signed vintage costume jewelry. The best of the best featuring Chanel, Haskell, KJL and many others. It's a new feature for Forestwood Mall in conjunction with The Designers Group. Visit *Forestwood Antique Mall*, 5333 Forest Lane, Dallas. Open 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday. 972-661-0001.



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