

# Transplanting and Dividing Perennials

Mid-March to Mid-April is the Magic Month when it comes to moving and dividing things in your garden

- \*Most plants are just starting to wake from dormancy, so it is easier to see where active growth points are or will be.
- \*The soil is starting to warm, so roots are actively growing and will not sit in cold wet soil with more potential to rot.
- \*Bare-rooting a plant (taking no soil) is still a successful endeavor, much easier on your back.
- \*The air temperature is cool but the extreme cold is behind us- giving your transplants enough time to heal from the dig before the top growth needs water transported to it in warm weather.
- \*Plants can be cut back or have died back from winter and are easier to wrangle.
- \*Divisions or transplants do not need shading or constant watering, you just Set It and Forget It.
- \*It is more comfortable to work outside for us!



As the weather continues to improve into May, dividing and transplanting will result in more cases of transplant shock, where you have cut off all the microscopic hair roots and the plant cannot pull water to the soft, tender, thirsty new spring growth. I normally stop dividing plants by the end of April, and the rootball on transplants gets bigger and bigger as the weeks go on. By late June I try to not transplant anything until fall, unless it is an emergency.



If you do move something and the new growth is “flagging” (wilting), watering the roots will only get you so far, as it may not be able to transport the water. The best bet is misting the top several times a day and shading it with an umbrella until the roots have recovered and it is able to keep itself upright.



If you can plan ahead (let’s say you are moving at the end of June)--purchase an Anti-Transpirant spray, like Wilt-Pruf.



Basically, it is a pine tree extract that harmlessly coats the foliage with a transparent waxy layer that prevents moisture loss. Spray on the day before digging, and damage to the plant is pretty much eliminated if you are careful in the move. I usually have some on hand, you never know. I can be an impulsive digger.

# Rooting Hormones, Willow Tea, B-1, Starter Fertilizer?

## Do I need these?

The answer is- It Depends!

Rooting Hormone powder or liquids are really meant for taking cuttings. Some things will root without hormones- things like Forsythia, Boxleaf Lonicera, anything in the willow family (living woven fences are lovely), Redtwig Dogwoods, Hydrangeas... I like things you can just jam a stick in the ground in March and by July it's a resident.

But the majority of things you might make a 'stick cutting' from would need a dip into some rooting powder and a big dose of patience. There are books with guidance on the best way to propagate pretty much every plant under the sun, so it is worth doing a little research to make sure you have the right conditions for success.

Willow tea is a rooting liquid steeped from the willow plant, with a natural rooting hormone in it. Same thing- great for doing cuttings, and maybe an insurance policy on anything rare you are dividing. If you have it, use it! It can't hurt. Any willow can work so you don't have to have a weeping willow tree handy- you can use native Scoulers Willow, any Pussywillow, ornamentals like Alaska Blue Willow, or the pink Hakuro Nishiki--- anything named Salix. Cut up a twig, smash a bit with a hammer, put in a jar of water and let it sit. Willow water is ready to go in a day or two!



B-1 liquid is made by several companies as a starter. I personally have not found any recognizable difference in using these plain B-1 products, though formulas differ and some do contain an additional rooting hormone acid. SuperThrive is one that does have a rooting acid in it, and it DOES work. We use professionally for transplant shock, seed starting on hard-to-germinate items, stressed plants, and items dug up outside of the magic window.



Liquid Kelp is also a good initial- watering item, especially if the plants are not in shock and will have new roots soon to utilize the minerals. Kelp or Seaweed helps strengthen cells.

Starter Fertilizer--- if my soil has good fertility, I almost never use fertilizer in the planting hole, and if I do, I use an organic that has to do some breaking down before the plant can use it. I let the plant root out first before going crazy on the food. The only exception to this is with grass seed- I always use a starter fertilizer with that since grass is such a heavy feeder.

For most things I focus more on making sure the soil looks loose and inviting, the structure is more helpful to rooting out a transplant than having copious amounts of nutrients at the outset. Drainage around brand-new forming roots is very important, especially during the time of year we get atmospheric rivers every other week.



Perennials with clustered crowns are the easiest to split

Things like :

Daylilies

Rudbeckia

Daisy

Campanula

Hosta

Echinacea

Verbena

Oregano

Yarrow

Salvias like May Night

Siberian or Japanese Iris

Sedums



I just dig up a plant, and gently pry apart new individual plants. Shaking off soil makes it easier to work and will not hurt them.

The only exceptions I really pay attention to is peonies and oriental poppies, which move better in the fall. Bearded iris are best divided after flowering. While spring splits on these won't necessarily kill them, they tend to be set back and may not flower again for a couple of years.

Some things won't split as easily but using a Hori Hori, an old serrated kitchen knife, or a drywall saw you can section pieces off and get them rooted:

Rhubarb- edible or ornamental  
Columbine  
Hellebore  
Ornamental grasses  
Penstemon  
Bleeding Heart  
Lupine

Earlier is better on these, just at the moment you see new growth becoming active.

