

# The Augusta Chronicle

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## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: Now is the time to divide perennials. Follow these steps.

**Campbell Vaughn** Columnist

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Gardeners have lots of fun with blooming perennials and bulbs every spring and summer. In the next few weeks, it would be a good time to consider dividing these flowing plants.

As these perennials grow, they multiply. Almost like a cell splitting, they go from one plant to a mass of four and then another mass of 16 and so on.

The plant looks like it is still a larger version of the original, but it is really a large clump of a singular plant. Dividing these clumps is a great way to get a whole bunch more plants to add to your beds and share with your gardening friends.

Most perennials such as daylilies, phlox, Black-eyed Susan, and cannas need to be divided every three to four years. To maintain vigor in iris, they can be divided as much as once a year.

Dividing and replanting allows the plant to root in before the ground gets too cold. The process will rejuvenate old plants, keeping them more vigorous and floriferous.

My nonscientific way of splitting perennial flowers is to dig these plant masses with a good sharp spade shovel, making sure you dig wide and get all the roots you can. Pick the plants up in a mass and drop/throw them on the ground to knock the dirt off and loosen the connected roots systems. Load them in a wheelbarrow and find a good spot to sit down and enjoy the process.

Plants like daylilies are the easiest to divide. One mass of daylilies can produce many individual plants, especially if the clump hasn't been separated in a long time.

I like to shear the leaves of the plant a couple of inches above the ligule. The ligule is the divider between the root system and the leaf of the plant. Removing these leaves helps to

keep the greenery from getting in the way when you get to splitting.

**Campbell Vaughn:** Armyworms are on the move, wreaking havoc on lawns. Here's how to beat them.

Knock as much dirt off as you can and massage the root mass until the spider looking root masses start to separate. Each of those roots will have one ligule where the leaf protrudes, and it equates to one new daylily.

Other perennials like hosta, coneflower, and shasta daisy are more fragile clump-forming perennials, but can also be divided like this by hand. These plants tend to be more fibrous root based, so find the ligule and massage the plant until you can separate the intertwined root system. For harder to split perennials like phlox, red hot poker and swamp sunflower, dig the plant mass out and use a hatchet or ax to split the root system up. A good chop with a tough spade shovel will also do the trick.

Irises are similar in the dividing method. They like to be divided a little more than other perennials, but it isn't always necessary. Irises have a more bulb like root system called rhizomes and can be broken apart to propagate. Discard the older dead rhizomes and focus on the newer vigorous ones. Take sharp scissors and cut the leaf blade in half at a slight angle. Give the irises some room to spread and plant them shallow just below the soil surface.

Never allow divisions to dry out. Keep a pail of water nearby to moisten divisions until they are planted. Plant the divided sections as soon as you can into the garden or containers. The planting depth is important, so do not plant too deep. This is one of the most problematic issues I see in perennial gardens. When planting daylilies, they do not need to be planted below the white on the ligule.

Make sure to firm the soil around the roots to eliminate air pockets and water well after planting. Mulch the plants with pine straw or pine bark.

With a little fertilizer and moisture, this hard work will pay off next spring and summer when you get to enjoy all those gorgeous blooms.

