

THE PLANT KINGDOM GREENHOUSE & NURSERY, INC.

620 FIDELER ROAD

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99712

907-45-PLANT (907-457-5268)

OPEN 10AM-7PM EVERYDAY OF THE SUMMER!

## **EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT OVERWINTERING HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS IN FAIRBANKS, ALASKA!!!**

At The Plant Kingdom we have fine-tuned our over wintering techniques for herbaceous perennials through experience with perennials in our display beds as well as with the many perennials in six inch pots that we winter above ground for sale as hardy perennials in the coming season. Although each winter season brings its own set of challenges, the following guidelines have worked well for us no matter what the weather forecasters predict or what Mother Nature delivers.

### **WATERING**

September and May are months that garden hoses may be put away and it seems too late or too early to take watering seriously. However, perennials need to go into the winter strong and unstressed and to assure these conditions, you may need to provide water if September weather is dry. A lot is happening underground as well as above ground during May in a perennial garden. In years of low snow melt and/or low precipitation in May, the water you provide may be crucial to a perennial's ability to keep pace with the long daylight and warm temperatures that push spring growth. Water late enough in the fall and early enough in the spring are especially critical to first-year perennials or plants that have been stressed by the environmental factors.

### **CUTTING BACK**

We cut back our herbaceous perennials to a height of 2"-4" in mid-September. This can be done later in September, but the sheer number of perennials we have and past experience with cutting back in freezing rain or after premature snowfall has encouraged us to err on the early side.

Reducing your perennial bed to a stubble not more than four inches high eliminates decaying foliage that may 1) harbor disease, 2) be attractive to voles, and 3) be slimy, wet, and unpleasant to remove in the spring. A neatly trimmed perennial bed is also much easier to cover with mulch than one that has plants of all different heights.

### **FERTILIZING**

In late September we sprinkle a granular fertilizer such as 8-32-16 over our perennial beds at a rate of 2-3 pounds per hundred square feet of bed. This late season application will start washing in o the soil with the spring snow melt and be available to perennials emerging from dormancy.

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## **MARKING BOUNDRIES OF PERENNIAL GARDENS**

The landscape looks much different once a few inches of snow have fallen and as snow accumulates, the boundaries of perennial gardens may be difficult to distinguish. We drive four foot tall wood stakes or lengths of rebar at intervals along perennial garden borders that are shared with driveways or paths so the gardens are not snowplowed or trafficked during the snow months of winter.

## **MULCHING**

In late September we cover our perennials with row cover. We use a white polypropylene fabric that is available in different weights, usually ranging from .5 ounces per square yard to 3 ounces. This fabric allows both water and light through to the plants underneath and, depending on the weight, offers freeze protection from two or three degrees up to ten degrees Fahrenheit. As the weight and freeze protection values increase, light transmission decreases slightly. For our perennials this winter we are using a 1.5-ounce per square yard fabric with a freeze protection of 6-8 degrees F.

For added protection you may choose to add a layer of straw or hay on top of the row cover. Removing this organic mulch in the spring before removing the row cover allows light to reach the perennials while still offering some freeze protection. Keeping the row cover between the perennials and the straw or hay mulch minimized the spread of weed and seeds from the mulch.

It is very effective to shovel snow onto perennial beds that are sheltered from snowfall such as beds under the eaves of a building or onto all perennial beds in years of low snowfall. Snow that has been tossed onto the plants, but not packed down, is an extremely effective insulator.

## **REMOVING MULCH IN THE SPRING**

Removing mulch too early in the spring may subject perennials to damage from late frosts; removing mulch too late keeps the soil under it colder later in the spring and slows plant growth. The timing of mulch removal is not an exact science and will be a function of how you read the spring weather. Fickle spring weather may call for uncovering perennials during the day and re-covering them at night for a few days. This situation is where the row crop cover has a great advantage because it allows light and water in so it can be left in place during this unpredictable time. It allows warming to occur during the sunlit hours but is still there for frost protection at night.