



Herbaceous Perennials

Contemporary use of herbaceous perennials is naturalistic with informal combinations and grouping of plants. These are relatively easy to recreate if a few simple principles are followed.

The 'random' planting method

This involves using four different groups of plants, which are set out in an area in a random manner. The following guidelines can be used for laying out the plants before planting. Once all the plants are set out, final adjustments can be made before planting.

Group 1: Structural herbaceous perennials and small shrubs

These plants form the structure to the bed. You should:

- Place in the bed first.
- Plant approximately 60cm from adjacent perennials.
- Keep in at least 1 metre from the edge. Do not plant on edge.

Group 2: Companion planting

These plants are intended to support the structure plants and are normally slightly smaller and may contrast in colour.

You should:

- Lay out after the structure plants.
- Plant 40cm from adjacent perennials.
- Distribute in groups and drifts of 3–7 plants throughout the bed.

Group 3: Ground cover

These are normally low growing and spreading plants. These are used to quickly cover up the spaces between plants and smother weed growth. You should:

- Plant 40cm from adjacent perennials.
- Distribute around the edge and inside the scheme in drifts flowing around other plants.

Group 4: Scatter plants – annuals and pioneers/infill

These are annuals which are seeded directly into the bed and used to fill spaces until the ground cover and companion plants become established. This step is optional. If using, you should:

- Distribute individually over entire planting, filling in the gaps across the scheme.
- Seed annuals in the remaining gaps, broadcasting by hand.

[FACT SHEET]

Bed preparation and planting

Grass sites:

1. Mark out planting area.
2. Treat with systemic herbicide (glyphosate).
3. When grass has died off, cultivate by tractor mounted rotovator or pedestrian operated rotovator depending on the size of the proposed area.
4. Incorporate organic matter at this stage if soil is poor.
5. Break down soil to a medium tilth and rake level.
6. Lay out plants.
7. Plant using trowel or spade.
8. Irrigate if soil is dry.

For other sites, such as bedding or shrub beds:

1. Remove all plant material.
2. Treat with systemic herbicide (glyphosate) to kill off perennial weeds.
3. Follow steps 3-8 as described above.

Maintenance

Mulching

- A light mulch spread after planting will help reduce competition from weeds.
- Care must be taken that this does not prevent the 'scatter' plants from germinating.
- Consider applying mulch after the 'scatter' plants have germinated.

Weeding

- Weed control is critical in the first year to allow plants to establish.
- Hand weeding or spot herbicide applications are preferable.
- Only hoe if 'scatter' plants have not been sown.

Deadheading

- Regular deadheading is not required in the random planting method.
- Seed heads are encouraged to extend the season.
- Taller species may require limited cutting back if they begin to topple or are being rocked by strong winds.

End of season

- Cut back to ground level any plant which will not provide any interest during the winter months.
- Remove any dead foliage and litter.
- Remove any perennial or annual weeds.

Start of season

- Replace dead plants and fill in any large gaps.
- Remove weeds.
- Apply light mulch, taking care not to smother self-seeding plants.

Future maintenance

- Once the beds have become established it might be necessary to carry out a few extra maintenance tasks:
 - Lift and divide any plants which are dominating the site.
 - Replant plants which are dying back.

