

# Seed

## BORDERS FROM SEED



An attractive garden border can be created quickly, cheaply and fairly easily by raising perennial plants from seed that will flower in their first year of planting. Plants that can be grown in this way include early-summer-flowering poppies, lupins, delphiniums, *Agastache* and *Malva* followed by *Nepeta* and *Salvia* and finishing with a vibrant mix of *Helenium*, *Echinacea*, *Penstemon*, *Lobelia cardinalis*, *Verbena bonariensis* and *Anthemis*. Try to choose plants of comparable vigour and keep plant heights within a given range to prevent odd extremes.

**SOWING:** Sow seed indoors in February and grow seedlings on a sunny windowsill or greenhouse. They will be ready to plant out in May. Alternatively, you could buy young plug plants, but the choice will be more limited. This method

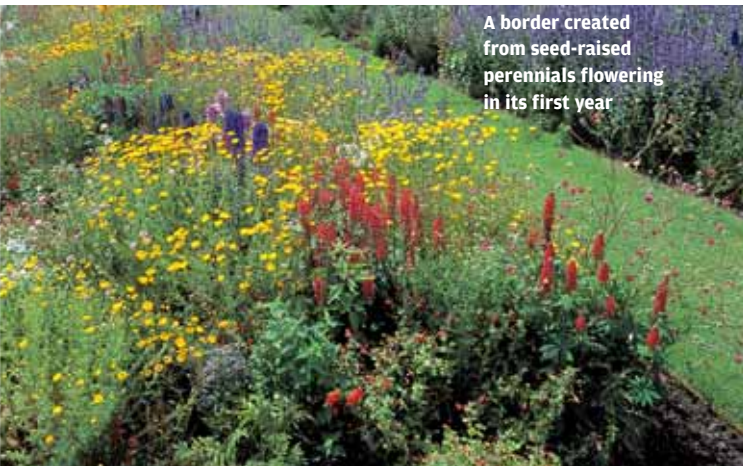
of border planting suits informal schemes, so try to distribute the young plants fairly randomly for maximum diversity of form and colour over the coming months.

Cut back lupins and delphiniums to encourage a second flush of blooms.

**MANAGEMENT:** Because the plants grow so densely, only minimal staking and weeding is required, but remember to water in dry weather. There is little disturbance due to the low-maintenance management, so wildlife will love the protection and cover of the dense growth and the wide range of flowers and seedheads provide plenty of food.

In subsequent years, remove any diseased or poorly-performing plants, thin out those that are too vigorous and fill in any gaps with new introductions.

A border created from seed-raised perennials flowering in its first year



# Tools

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Spade
- Fork
- Rake
- Stakes
- String
- Fertiliser
- Compost
- Secateurs/loppers
- Watering can
- Mulch
- Perennial plants

For more information:  
[www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)  
[www.plantforlife.info](http://www.plantforlife.info)

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# THE EASY GUIDE TO PLANNING A HERBACEOUS BORDER



Photography: Tim Sandall/*The Garden*, Jane Sebire, Neil Hepworth, Helen Bostock

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## INTRODUCTION

A herbaceous border is a collection of perennial herbaceous plants arranged closely together to create a dramatic effect through colour, shape or large scale. A good border design can take a lot of time to plan on paper and in practice - and involves a lot of plants in order to look lush and exotic, but once established it should provide an eye-catching spectacle in your garden for months on end.

## PREPARING A NEW BORDER

- The best time to create a new border is spring or early autumn.
- Decide whether you want a traditional formal border along one - or both sides of the garden or an island bed which can be viewed from all sides. Don't be too ambitious - it's better to create a smaller border that is packed with different colours and textures than a large expanse that is only sparsely planted.
- Mark out the area with stakes and string. To make an impact, herbaceous borders need to be at least 1.2m wide.
- Dig the area over. Remove all weeds, including any with deep roots, and all large stones.
- Sprinkle a balanced fertiliser over the area such as bonemeal, dig in plenty of compost or well-rotted manure and leave the ground to settle for a fortnight.
- Rake over the ground to make it as level as possible.
- Remove the lower branches of any trees to allow light, rain and air through to your new plantings.
- Planting is best carried out from autumn until spring when the soil is dry enough to work but before conditions become too dry as plants may fail to root even if you water night and day. Container-grown plants can be planted at any time of the year, weather permitting, but tender perennials should only be planted out once all danger of frost has passed.



## PLANNING YOUR PLANTING SCHEME

- Consider the soil and aspect and find out what will grow best in your garden - see *The Easy Guide to Sun & Shade* and *The Easy Guide to Managing Your Soil* for more information on suitable plants for your conditions.
- Consider the colour scheme you want to achieve - pastel lilacs and pinks; hot reds and golds; cool blues and whites; modern blacks, limes and oranges. Work to ensure the balance is neither too bland nor too chaotic.
- Visit shows and gardens for ideas that appeal and jot them down in a notebook. Notice what grows well in local gardens in your neighbourhood.
- Plan your scheme on paper, starting with small groups of plants that work well together and build them up until you have filled your border with several combinations. Use groups of plants in large blocks of odd numbers for greater impact, repeated along the border to help provide continuity of colour and form. Avoid planting singly, except for specimen trees, grasses or shrubs.
- If your garden is small, keep your choice of plants to a few species and repeat them. However, you don't have to include only low-growing plants - larger plants will have greater impact in a small space.
- Use your borders to the full by including spring and autumn bulbs in between herbaceous plants and beneath deciduous trees and shrubs, and plant climbers up fences or walls. Choose plants with more than one season of interest such as autumn foliage, unusual bark, seedheads or berries and ensure your plantings are chosen to give a succession of interest.
- Try to include plants that enliven all the senses - textural foliage such as downy *Stachys* or spiky *Yucca* and *Acanthus*; decorative stems or bark such as cornus or climbing hydrangea; fragrant flowers or foliage including lavender or geranium; bamboos and grasses for movement and sound; and a few attractive edibles such as chives, fruit trees and strawberries.
- Vary the height and overall shapes of your chosen plants, ensuring taller growers are placed at the back and ground-covering plants at the front - in island beds place tall plants in the centre. To lead your eye along the border, use architectural plants or splashes of red. Ensure you have a good mix of foliage colours and include a mixture of evergreen and deciduous shrubs.



Arrange your plants first before planting out

## PLANTING & CARING FOR YOUR BORDER

- When the soil is ready, position your plants in their pots on the soil first to ensure you are happy with the effect and have enough room - or plants.
  - Position large shrubs, trees and architectural plants first, then surround with groups of herbaceous perennials followed by low-growing plants and bulbs.
  - Leave about 30cm between plants to give them room to reach their full potential, flower well and continue to perform in future years.
  - When you are happy with your scheme, dig planting holes and firm in your plants.
  - Water in well and mulch with fine bark or cocoa shells.
  - Continue to water in dry spells and hand weed as necessary.
  - As plants start to grow, support taller ones with stakes if necessary but you may find that close spacing means the plants largely support each other.
  - Deadhead regularly to prolong flowering, unless you specifically want the seedheads.
  - Grow a selection of plants in containers that can be used to fill any gaps that appear.
- MAINTENANCE:**
- Thin more vigorous plants to maintain a balance through the growing season.
  - Remove any plants that are diseased, not flowering well - or simply in the wrong place, and fill any gaps with new ones.
  - Remove the lower branches of trees and shrubs to allow light through to the plantings below and keep weeds in check.
  - In winter provide a top dressing of well-rotted compost or manure to nourish the soil.

