

Prolonging the Bloom By Betty Hensley

Deadheading, as found in the Sunset Western Garden Book, means to remove spent flowers. As a gardener, you probably already deadhead at least to get rid of those tired, wilting blooms, but there are other reasons this task should be a part of your day to day gardening activity. So, the question is, "Why, how and when do I deadhead each plant?"

First, deadheading often makes your plants bloom longer. This is because removing spent flowers from some perennials keeps them from wasting their energy producing seed. After the main stems have finished flowering, if you cut them quite low, many plants will send up a second smaller batch of flowers.

Second, deadheading keeps some perennials that are notorious for reseeding, from spreading. If you don't try to prevent these new seedlings, they could possibly crowd out other plants.

Finally, deadheading, or the removal of spent flowers, improves the health and appearance of plants by channeling the plant's resources away from seed production and into vegetative growth.

Deadheading HOW TO:

With plants like daylilies, which have lots of flowers on one stem, pluck off individual flowers as they fade. After all of the flowers are off of the daylily stem, cut the stem off at the base. You can also remove branches or clusters of flowers, like asters, leaving buds or branches below the cut to send out more blooms.

Shasta daisies and many other perennials produce one flower per stem. Cut that stem to the ground after it blooms. When your Shasta daisies have finished blooming for the season, cut back all of the stems to within 4-5 inches of the plant base.

Some perennials, such as 'Moonbeam' coreopsis, produce so many flowers over the entire plant that you can't remove them individually. It is easier and just as effective to simply shear the entire plant within a few inches of the ground after the main flush of flowers is finished. Keeping your sheared/cut plants well watered, helps them recover and produce new growth.

Other flowering plants that benefit from deadheading are bleeding heart, phlox, delphinium, lupine, sage salvia, Shasta daisy, yarrow and coneflower. After collecting all of the debris from deadheading and trimming, consider turning them into compost. Not only is composting a good way to improve your soil, but it is a way to keep the nutrients from your landscape onsite. It can even be used as temporary mulch in the vegetable garden.

With our late rain and warm weather, the garden should be ready to sprout beautiful blooms. Happy gardening.

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