



## Deadheading is worth the effort

Plan to spend an hour or so on the next cool day engaging in an activity that will refresh your landscape and reward you with a second display of blooms from some of your favorite perennials.

The suggestion to deadhead is usually met with groans. You've spent the better part of spring cleaning up garden debris, planting, watering, fertilizing and weeding. What more can your landscape want?

The time spent deadheading is well worth it. By removing spent flowers and foliage, you not only have a head start on fall clean-up, but you reduce the chance of disease and attack by pests that find shelter in decomposing plant material.

If you have plants that spread by reseeding, you'll find it much easier to cut off some dead flowers before the seeds ripen and scatter about the garden than it is to pull all of those unwanted seedlings next spring.

For most gardeners, the best perk of deadheading is that many deadheaded perennials actually bloom again. With the promise of additional flowers, it gets harder to find an excuse not to deadhead.

Deadheading is a simple technique. Take your cues from the plant itself. If new foliage or flower buds appear to be growing in the axil (the space between the leaf and the stem of the plant) and the overall form of the plant is still relatively dense and compact, simply clip the faded blossoms as close as possible to the point where their stems are attached to the plant. If unopened flower buds are lower on the plant, deadhead all the way back to this new flower.



For those plants that have become unsightly, either through leggy growth or discolored foliage, aggressive shearing can revitalize their garden presence. This technique is particularly effective with some older cultivars of perennial geraniums and usually result not only in fresh new foliage growth on more compact plants, but also another flash of color.

We all love plants with long seasons of bloom, and many perennials can be encouraged to flower repeatedly or at least a second time through judicious deadheading.

Although these bonus floral displays are usually smaller and a little less dramatic than the plant's first show, the second color flush often comes at summer's end – a time when most of us could use a boost of color in our borders.

Columbines, many campanulas, Centaurea, delphinium, dianthus and foxglove are spring beauties that reliably re-bloom if deadheaded.



Summer bloomers that rebloom if deadheaded include coreopsis, coneflowers, quite a few daylily varieties, nepeta, phlox, salvias and veronicas. Second flushes produced by each of these perennials complement fall-blooming plants with unexpected form and color contrast.

Roses respond beautifully to regular deadheading. If the flowers are held in a cluster on your rose, nip individual flowers as they decline, and when the entire head is spent, cut the stem back to the first leaf structure with five leaflets.

Deadhead to maintain a tidy, well-tended garden and to remove decomposing plant material that may harbor insects or disease. Some perennials will only bloom once, but removing faded flowers will increase the overall health of the plant and make the garden look more manicured.

Deadhead plants to ensure lavish bloom in subsequent years. Some of the garden's loveliest and most dramatic flowers are grown from bulbs and rhizomes (underground storage that hold the nutrients required to produce flowers year and year). Generally, deadheading these plants shortly after they bloom is beneficial for several reasons.

First, removing the spent blossoms improves the overall health of the plant. Second, it's important to remember that all flowers are essentially seed-making machines and allowing seeds to form and reach maturity depletes the nutritional resource of the bulb or rhizome – nutrients that are better used to form more and larger flowers for next year. Lastly, the spent heads of most bulb- and rhizome-produced flowers have minimal visual interest so you'll be improving the overall look of your garden by removing these past-their-prime flowers.

The specifics of deadheading vary plant to plant. The old flowers of lilies should be removed promptly, but care should be taken to make the deadheading cut just below the lowest flower. It's wise to leave as much foliage as possible to enable the plant to build up those nutrient reserves.

Only when the stem and foliage begin to deteriorate should the plant's foliage be removed. Follow the same procedure for most spring-flowering bulbs, leaving the foliage for at least six weeks or until it yellows.



It's especially important to deadhead German bearded iris. Nasty iris borers enter the plant through the leaves so removing lagging foliage and mushy flowers eliminates a welcoming environment for infestation. Siberian iris are not as susceptible to borers and their foliage remains attractive all summer. Deadhead these plants to promote increased flower production next year.

Hard as it might be to get motivated to spend some time deadheading in the garden this summer, you'll be glad you did when you are rewarded with a second flush of bloom, healthier plants and a tidier landscape.



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