

Deadheading Flowers

Deadheading keeps gardens neat and blooming. It's a form of good plant housekeeping.

You can get by without it, but your garden will give you extra "ooh"s and "ah"s if you prune, pinch and deadhead a bit.

Basically, deadheading means the removal of flowers that have already put on their show. But should you cut back all perennial flowers? Are there some flowers that pop again nicely after a good shearing? Is there a reason NOT to remove a spent flower? Yes and maybe can answer each of those questions.

Plants respond to pruning to perpetuate their species. With many plants you get re-bloom when you deadhead, since basically, the goal of the plant is to grow, set seed and die so if you take the spent flowers away and prevent it from setting seed, it will set new flowers and keep trying to produce seed before it "dies".

[Salvia](#) is one to cut back after the first round of bloom. Shear all the spent flowers off for a great second show.

With some plants, like hardy [geranium](#) or [coreopsis](#), it might seem a daunting task to remove all the small flowers. In that case, shearing the plants with a long bladed hedge shear works really well. With other plants, scissors or pruners are the way to go.

Carefully choose places to cut when deadheading larger flowers.

For perennials that have leaves on the flower stem, cut just above a leaf node. That way, the cut becomes hidden by the leaf, but for flowers with a leafless stem, like [daylilies](#), cut them down to the base of the plant and remove the entire stem.

Many gardeners find the seed-head free look most attractive. But besides appearance and forcing re-bloom, there's another reason to remove spent flowers. It's actually the same reason some gardeners leave on seed heads. When some plants are allowed to set seed, you get baby plants.

There are perennials that are famously great self-seeders. [Columbine](#), for one, loves to roam and spread its pretty seedlings to places in the garden far away from the parent plant. Globe Thistle is another one that likes big families.

Having baby plants about can help you fill in areas of your garden or allow you to share plants with other gardeners. Each gardener should decide for herself whether to deadhead or not to deadhead.

If you want to encourage your plants to self-seed, you won't be able to use any pre-emergent

herbicides in your garden. They block germination of all seeds; both weed seeds and perennial flower seeds.

Some plants have very decorative seed pods, Pasque Flower for instance and plants like Liatris are great for attracting gold finches with their seeds.

If cutting your plants back and seed heads isn't for you, there are plants that don't need to be spruced up after blooming.

Some perennials like Columbine and Baptisia are self cleaning. Another low maintenance way to go would be to plant fall bloomers - when they are done blooming just cut them to the ground and you've done your fall clean up. All gardens are different, and they should be. If you love birds perching on your Echinacea and snacking, leave on the seed heads. Neat can be over-rated.