

Deadheading

Dictionary.com says deadheading is the pulling of dead or dying blossoms off a flower. Why would you want to abuse your flowers in this fashion?

When perennials and biennials are deadheaded, the developing seed pods are removed and the plant can sometimes be tricked into sending forth another flush of bloom. Since the plant is no longer using its energy to produce seeds, a stronger root system and lush growth ensue. Some plants, if allowed to self-seed, become thugs in your garden. You can "nip it in the bud" by judicious deadheading. An extended flowering season results from deadheading annuals. Keeping your plants under control promotes a good flow of air through your garden, helping to keep molds and mildews under control.

When do you deadhead?

You can deadhead your flowers from spring to killing frost. The age of your plant will influence how much deadheading you will need to perform. The older the plant, the more the bloom, the more the deadheading. Cool moist weather will extend the blooming period. Sweltering heat and pelting rain will decrease them. You will have to be in tune with all these elements to keep on top of deadheading chores.

How do you deadhead?

The growth habit of the plant dictates the deadheading technique. What is true for one plant, isn't necessarily true for another. Three general categories can be made based on plant growth habits: individual stems, clustered flowers, and spikes.

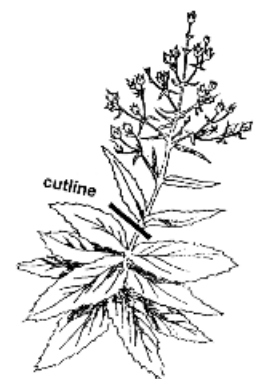
Category 1: Individual Stems

With individual stems, the center flower opens and finishes first, followed by buds or side shoots that originate low on the central flower stalk. Clip off the faded flower stalks just above a budded secondary stem.



Category 2: A Cluster of Pods Per Stem

Clustered flowers are close together on the stem or off on side stalks of a single stem. Remove the whole stem when all the flowers in the cluster are spent, or nearly so. The cut can be made just above the first sizable, good-looking set of leaves below the flower.



Category 3: Spikes

Flowers are lined up in a spike or on very short stems, in an elongated cluster called a raceme. When there are more seed pods than flowers, cut it.

References

DiSabato-Aust, Tracy. *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*, Planting & Pruning Techniques. Oregon: Timber Press, 1998.

Macunovich, Janet. *Caring for Perennials, What to Do and When to Do It*. Massachusetts: Storey Books, 1997.

