

Q and A: Deadheading

by Lynne Brosch

Q: Should all flowering plants be deadheaded?

A: Deadheading, which means removing the dead flowers from your perennials and annuals is often a way to promote continuing or returning bloom. Flowers should be pinched off at the stem as soon as they fade. Many annuals will be able to bloom over the entire summer months with constant deadheading. For perennials, the bloom time is usually shorter but there may be a chance of extending bloom by removing the dead blossoms. The idea with the removal of the flowers is to trick the plant into thinking that it has not completed its cycle of flower to pollination to seed and done. Pansies, dahlias, geraniums, marigolds, snapdragons, and zinnias benefit from deadheading whereas impatiens drop their withered blooms on their own.

There are some perennials where the seed heads are so attractive that you may want to leave them for structure interest and late season attractiveness when all the flowers are gone. Some of these seed heads can provide food for birds as well, such as purple coneflower and sedum. With roses you should stop cutting flowers by late August and September so that the plant can realize its growing cycle has ended and it will prepare itself for winter. If you want to save seeds from a plant to start new plants then of course you must wait for the seed heads and not remove the flowers. Blanket flower, yarrow and salvia should be deadheaded to encourage more bloom. Also if you want to limit the area covered by your flowers you will want to prevent the seeds from forming and dropping to spread your plants.

Deadheading a large garden of bloom can be very time consuming so you may want to choose to do only your most colorful pots.

For a more complete list of which plants benefit from deadheading check out this website: <http://www.provenwinners.com/learn/care/deadhead-or-not-deadhead>

Resources:

<http://extension.missouri.edu/extensioninfont/article.asp?id=1355>

http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/Deadheading2.html

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/ptlk/1072.html>