



# MASTER GARDENER

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

## Year-Round Gardening

### **Deadheading**

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The purpose of a flower is reproduction. In general, once a flower has been pollinated, blooms and dies, it forms seeds for the next generation. If you want to have beautiful flowers in your garden or containers right through to the first frost, however, you should interrupt this natural process by deadheading your flowering plants.

Deadheading is a gardening term for the process of removing faded or dead flowers and seed heads from plants, thereby redirecting the plant's energy from seed production into extended flowering. When dead blooms are left clinging to flowering plants, they sap the nutrition and strength from the core of the plants and rob them of the energy to produce new and colorful blooms.



*Photo courtesy of Debra Othitis*

The best time to deadhead a flower is when its appearance begins to decline.

The frequency of deadheading a particular plant depends on the life span of its blooms ranging from a day to several weeks. Weather also greatly affects a flower's longevity as torrential rains and unseasonably hot weather can take their toll on blooms.

To promote more flowers, pinch off or cut back the stem to right above a pair of leaves, a dormant bud on the stem, or a leaf axil (a small green bump). For leafless stems, such as spring-flowering bulbs, hostas, irises and daylilies, prune them close to the ground. Roses should be deadheaded right above a stem with five leaflets. In all cases, it's important to get a clean cut to prevent leaving an open ragged wound for diseases or pests to enter the plant.

One of the most popular summertime annuals is the petunia. They are colorful, with a lovely fragrance and are amazingly easy to grow in the garden or in containers. Once a petunia bloom starts to wilt, remove the faded flower, including the portion below each flower where the seed will develop. Although it may not be practical to deadhead masses of petunias in the garden, it's a must for flowering annuals in containers. Other annuals that respond well to deadheading are marigolds, verbena, nicotiana, impatiens, zinnias and salvia. These will all give you a repeat show about two weeks after a pruning in midsummer.

Perennials that benefit from deadheading include geranium, yarrow, campanula, Jupiter's beard, tickseed, delphinium, blanket flower, and bee balm to name a few. Extending their flowering season may not be as important to you as letting some perennials set seed heads for winter interest or food for birds and wildlife. Also, perennials that are great self-seeders should not be deadheaded if you want them to reseed for the following year. These include rudbeckia, hollyhocks, foxgloves, lobelia and forget-me-nots.

Although thought by some to be a tedious task, deadheading will reward you by keeping your plants blooming and looking their best for the entire season.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. The Help Desk is open at 17 N. Spruce St. Hours are 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. Call 520-7684 or email [CSUmq2@elpasoco.com](mailto:CSUmq2@elpasoco.com).