

## Deadheading

Whether you're a beginner or avid gardener, deadheading is an important term to know. The horticultural practice does wonders for your plants by encouraging growth and improving overall appearance. In addition to deadheading, pruning and pinching are also forms of maintenance that are beneficial to your plants, but there are some key distinctions between these three methods. To ensure you're doing each correctly, we spoke to gardening experts who explain what deadheading is, and how it's different from pruning and pinching.

**What Is Deadheading?** Deadheading is the process of removing dead or faded flower buds and seed heads from plants. "Deadheading spent flowers stops plants from trying to produce seed, so the plant's energy can be redirected to producing more flowers and healthy leaf and root growth," says Peggy Anne Montgomery, horticulturist with FlowerBulbs.com.

**Benefits of Deadheading:** One of the most obvious benefits of deadheading is that removing dead or discolored flower heads will immediately improve the appearance of your plants. Additionally, cutting the spent blooms will encourage the plant to focus on flower production, says Jennifer Morgenthaler, a clinical instructor of agriculture at Missouri State University. This means your plant will be encouraged to produce stunning blooms all season long.

**How to Deadhead Flowers:** Deadhead your plants as their blooms die or fade, says Kip McConnell of Southern Living Plant Collection. To do so, locate the spent flower and follow its stem all the way down, then cut just above the first set of full, healthy leaves. This can be done for all the expired flowers at once or regularly throughout the season as each flower fades.

**Flowers That Benefit from Deadheading:** Plants with a plethora of flowers will respond well to deadheading. Some common varieties to deadhead include:

Cosmos  
Marigolds  
Petunias  
Roses  
Salvia

Snapdragons  
Sweet peas  
Bee balms  
Zinnias

**Flowers You Should Never Deadhead:** Not all flowers should be deadheaded. Generally, you should avoid deadheading biennials or plants that self-seed. "Biennial plants take two years to complete their life cycle. They will produce foliage in their first year and bloom the second year," says Montgomery, "People who love biennials often let the plants go to seed so they can keep the cycle of new blooms going." Some examples of plants you shouldn't deadhead include:

Foxglove  
Hollyhock  
Sweet William  
Columbine

Poppies  
Peonies  
Lobelia  
Forget-me-nots

**What Is Pruning?** Pruning is a form of regular plant maintenance where foliage and branches are removed. It's commonly performed on larger flowering plants, like shrubs. "Pruning can be done to shape the plant into a desired style, to clean the plant by removing diseased or damaged branches and foliage, or to encourage new growth," says McConnell. When and how you prune plants depends on the specific variety you're growing.

**What Is Pinching?** Pinching is a type of pruning that's typically done on young plants. "It means to literally pinch off the top growth of a plant to encourage it to produce more side branches or to grow fuller," says Montgomery. To pinch, remove the main stem of the plant just above the first set of leaves. This method is beneficial for many flowering plants, including zinnias, dahlias, and cosmos.

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