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Deadheading gives plants new life

K-State horticulture expert lists plants that benefit from a little pinching

MANHATTAN, Kan. – It may feel a bit gloomy to pick off fading flowers from the yard's plants.

But Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham said you're actually setting plants up for success by pinching off spent flowers, a process called deadheading.

“Some plants will bloom more profusely if the old, spent flowers are removed,” Upham said. “Annuals, especially, focus their energy on seed production to insure that the species survives. If you remove the old flowers, the energy normally used to produce seed is now available to produce more flowers.”

Normally, gardeners can deadhead flowers by simply pinching them off with a thumb and finger, but some tougher stems may require scissors or pruning shears.

Upham said some perennials also benefit from deadheading, which essentially extends the blooming season by encouraging an additional burst of flowers. But in the case of perennials, he said, “some gardeners actually enjoy the look of spent flowers, such as sedum or purple coneflower. And the seed produced can be a good food source for birds.”

Some of the plants that increase blooms in response to deadheading include:

- Hard geraniums.
- Coreopsis.
- Petunias.
- Marigolds.
- Snapdragons.
- Begonias.
- Roses.
- Campanulas.
- Blanket flowers.
- Delphiniums.
- Zinnias.
- Sweet peas.
- Salvia.
- Scabiosa.
- Annual heliotrope.
- Geraniums (Pelargonium).
- Yarrow.

Other plants that do not need to be deadheaded include sedum (Autumn Joy), melampodium, impatiens, most flowering vines, Lythrum, periwinkle (Catharanthus) and wishbone flower (Torenia).

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

K-State Research and Extension local offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

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Story by:
Pat Melgares
785-532-1160
melgares@ksu.edu

For more information:
Ward Upham
785-532-6173
wupham@ksu.edu