

By Kylee Baumle

I love to prune. I enjoy it in all its forms: pinching, pruning, deadheading, and in the most basic way, snapping off. There's just something satisfying about cleaning up a plant and making it look neater. But in many cases, it's not just about a plant's appearance.

All plants are different in their requirements, because of their growth habit or the texture of their stems. Reasons for cutting on a plant can vary, too.

Certain plants have specific times when you should prune them, like spring bloomers. Lilacs and forsythia begin to work on forming the flower buds for the next year, shortly after they're done blooming. If you wait too long to prune these, you stand a chance of cutting off next year's bloom. In other words, don't wait until fall to do it.

There are other plants, some fall bloomers, that benefit from regular pinching back until mid-summer. These include chrysanthemums, asters and the tall sedums.

If you pinch or cut off the top third of the plant each time it forms a new growth tip until July 4th (or thereabouts), come fall you'll have a thicker plant with more blooms. And in the case of the sedums, you'll not have that splitting and flopping thing going on either.

Roses are just finishing up their first flush of flowers right now and in the case of hybrid teas, grandifloras, and floribundas, you'll want to prune away the bare flower heads. I make sure there is a leaf cluster of at least five leaves just below where I make my cut.

And here's a pruning tip that may be different from what you've been taught: Cut the stem straight across, not at an angle. The thought now is that there's less damage to the cane and less surface area to be susceptible to insects or disease.

If you're cutting flowers to put in a vase, however, recut the end of the flower stem you've just cut off, this time at an angle (under running water) to increase the area that absorbs water.

Daylilies have started blooming now and unless you are doing your own hybridizing, you'll want to remove those spent blooms. If you do nothing, they'll dry up and fall off on their own, but if they've been pollinated (and most will be), seed pods will begin to form.

You'll want the plant to expend its energy on growing a bigger plant and in the case of a rebloomer, making more flowers, so just snap off those budding pods at the end of the stems.

And that brings us to good old-fashioned deadheading, which is simply cutting off dead flowers. So many plants, annuals and perennials included, respond to deadheading by blooming again. A plant has one thing in mind, to reproduce. A normal life cycle consists of blooming, forming a seed pod, and then living out its life until fall frost.

But if you cut off the spent blooms before seeds form, it sends a signal to the plant to bloom again. (Must reproduce!) With many plants, they'll continue to bloom as long as you continue to deadhead. Some won't, of course, but a few that respond well to this are delphiniums, Salvia, yarrow, Coreopsis, hardy geraniums, Dianthus, Veronica and marigolds.

Like I said, this is an activity I love to do; it's cathartic for me. But, it's also good for the plants and extends the bloom period in the garden.

Read Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.