

## Pinch and Prune Basics



Pruning, deadheading, pinching stems or buds, or cutting back leggy plants to shape, form and trim. It is species-specific and based on common sense and experience—don't worry about hurting your plants by experimenting.

**Primary Tools:** by-pass pruners, pruning scissors, hand-held shears; avoid anvil-type pruners that can crush stems

### Objectives

- To extend bloom period or promote repeated blooms; by removing spent blooms it often encourages the plant to rebloom in its attempt to complete the life cycle
- Encourage lush new growth (refreshes it)
- Regenerate or extend the life of plants (particularly woody perennials)
- Stagger plant heights of bloom times
- Reduce plant height
- Keep plants in own space
- Increase flower size or numbers
- Prevention or control of pests and disease
- Enhance appearance
- Remove unsightly or insignificant flowers
- Clean-up the garden

**Deadheading**—removal of old or spent flowers is beneficial to most herbaceous ornamentals. Seed production can drain a plant's energy and cause foliage to deteriorate. Deadheading can promote vegetative and root growth rather than seed production.

- Can prolong bloom period
- Can initiate a second, smaller bloom
- Improve overall appearance
- Persuade biennials to behave like perennials
- Prevent self-seeding (species are true to type, cultivars may not be)

Examples:

Daylilies – snap old flowers off

Hosta- remove entire flower stem

Lady's Mantle – twist & pull out old flowering stem

Stachys (Lambs Ear) – deadhead before flower opens to avoid foliage from deteriorating

**Cutting Back** – refers to pruning a plant to renew its appearance or encourage a new flush of growth or flowering or control its height or flowering time. Pinching can accomplish the same objective. If you travel for several weeks, you can cut certain plants by 1/3 to delay bloom time by a few weeks.

Examples:

Spring flowering --Dianthus, Candy Tuft, Moss Phlox, Catmint – cut by ½ after spring flowering  
Summer flowering– Geranium, Amsonia, Lamium, Baptisia australis, Euphorbia, Achillea ‘Moonshine’  
Aster—1/2 in early summer to stagger blooms  
Sedum – will have more, smaller flowers and less height  
Mums—pinching, but can do fine without  
Joe Pye Weed—cut back to 12” early June to reduce height

Regenerative pruning before seed sets for Hollyhock and Foxglove

\*\*\*\*\*

**Pinching**—allows for experimentation and usually involves removing only the growing tips. Generally do early in the growing season because it will delay bloom time.

Examples:

Sedum, Shasta Daisy, Joe Pye Weed, Aster, Artemisia

\*\*\*\*\*

**Thinning**—can prevent disease, sturdier stems, increase size of flowers. Often helps to increase air circulation to help prevent powdery mildew.

Examples:

Aster, delphinium, Mondarda, Phlox, Bugleweed, Lamb’s Ear, Lady’s Mantle

\*\*\*\*\*

**Disbudding**—side buds removed so that plant’s terminal bud produces larger flowers on a longer stem. Removing the terminal bud will cause the side buds to produce smaller but more flowers; it can also eliminate the need for staking.

Examples:

Mums, Carnations, Pinks, Dahlias, Peonies

\*\*\*\*\*

**Deadleafing** – removal of individual dead leaves.

Examples:

-Elijah Blue grass in spring  
-Lady’s Mantle in summer  
-Hellebores (Lenten Rose) in spring

\*\*\*\*\*