

## Time to Tidy Up Perennial Beds

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Because of the crazy growing season and the weather ups and downs, plants in the perennial garden have bloomed much earlier than during a normal season.

Flowers that would normally be blooming towards the middle to the end of August are starting to bloom now. We are also seeing this in the natural areas and ditches as well.

This also means that some of the earlier blooming plants such as coneflowers are finished blooming and aren't looking all that great. Now is a good time to touch up the perennial garden if it's looking a bit weary.

First of all, any plants that haven't been deadheaded and need some cleaning-up should be addressed. Depending on the plant, you can either deadhead (remove dead flowers) individual flowers or cut the entire plant back to the ground or maybe just half to one-third back.

My coneflowers for instance are finished blooming and there are a few new blooms trying to make an appearance. By cutting all of the old bloom off, I rejuvenate the plant and allow that second flush of blooms to show through, giving me lasting color through at least August and maybe into the fall.



When coneflowers start to look bad or are finished blooming, it's time to deadhead

My catmint has finished its second round of blooms and is beginning to flop again. I always cut catmint back to the crown. The new plant takes about 10 days to two weeks to grow back. This always looks better than the sprawling catmint with the center open.

There is one plant in my perennial garden that I have stopped deadheading and it's because of the bees and other pollinators. I have found that lamb's ear or *Stachys* is a fantastic plant for pollinators.

Granted it doesn't always look its best after blooming; in fact, it's pretty straggly and not quite pretty at all! However, I watched a few years ago and the blooms still continue up the flower stem and the bees can't stay away.

So in this case, I am sacrificing looks for the health of our pollinators.

If you have perennials that have been ravaged by diseases or insects and the foliage is a lost cause, you can cut these plants back to the crown or to the ground. Again, depending on the plant, they may come back and give you a second flush of flowers and last until winter.

Yarrow is a good example of a plant that will come back and bloom again later in the season. Some varieties of *Penstemon*, on the other hand are really slow to recover and may not show any flower color.

However, the foliage looks a lot better when it regrows so it won't be detracting from the overall aesthetics of the garden.

Don't fertilize perennials at this time. You don't need to encourage new growth this late in the season as it won't be long until they being shifting their energies into storing sugars for the winter.



Catmint cut back to crown after blooming will rebloom