



Uncanoonuc Mt. Perennials

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CUTTING BACK YOUR GARDEN

A lot of people are confused about how and when to prune their perennials. This tip sheet is intended to give some basic information and introduce some pruning concepts and techniques. It is especially geared to fall and spring clean-up of the garden.

THE TOOLS:

- ⊗ *Garden Pruners:* Totally indispensable (We love Felco #2's)
- ⊗ *Hedge Shears:* Long blades can make quick work of large groupings
- ⊗ *Weed Whacker:* Noisy but labor saving. Use the blade attachment for hard to cut plants like large grasses
- ⊗ *Poly Lawn Rake:* Great for spring clean-up when removing tree leaves from ground covers and for the foliage of some perennials, like Hayscented Fern

HERBACEOUS (NON-WOODY) PERENNIALS:

Most of the summer blooming plants in your perennials garden fit into this category - Daylilies, Coreopsis, Astilbes, Yarrows, Hostas - are just a few. They die back to the ground each fall. Their foliage can be clipped totally off either in the fall after hard frost or in the spring before the new growth starts to emerge.

- ⊗ *Sanitation for Disease Control* - To help reduce the incidence of common fungal diseases, the foliage of susceptible plants should be clipped and trashed - not composted - in the fall. We treat Peonies, Bearded Iris, Tall Phlox and Beebalm this way.
- ⊗ *Let Mother Nature Help* - Winter weather deteriorates the foliage of many plants reducing the bulk and weight of clippings tremendously. For example, the foliage of 'Silver Mound' Artemisia can be gathered by hand during an April clean-up. Winter practically melts it away. The same goes for Hostas.

SEMI-WOODY PERENNIALS:

Lavender, Russian Sage, Butterfly Bush, Lavender-Cotton, Sage and Nippon Daisies all fall into this category. We let them go into the winter untouched and then prune in April. The herbs are shaped (the good old bowl haircut) to mounds 6 - 12" high depending on the size of the plant. It keeps the plants from becoming leggy and unkempt with foliage only at the tips of the stems. The Russian Sage and Butterfly Bushes are pruned back to within 6" of the ground. They will produce a whole new framework of branches and blossom on this new wood. Nippon Daisies should be pruned into mounds 18 - 24" high. This will result in a stronger, self-supporting plant.

(see reverse for more information)

SPRING BLOOMERS:

Ground Phlox, Basket-of-Gold, Snow-in-Summer and Candytufts are some of the perennials that are best sheared back after their spring bloom. This encourages fresh, dense growth for the rest of the season and a lush bloom the following spring.

THE FALL AND WINTER GARDEN:

Consider spring pruning for perennials that have a dramatic effect in the fall and winter. Cold weather turns the glossy, paddle-like leaves of Heartleaf Bergenia from emerald to rich burgundy. A lot of the grasses are in their full glory in the fall and are attractive until after several snows break them down. The faded Sedums and the seedheads of the Black-eyed Susans are great through the fall and even later capped with snow.

SOME OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- ⊗ *Personal Style* - Some of us prefer a tidy look, others a more loose or natural effect. There are no rules in the garden. Feel free to be yourself - the Horticultural Police will not be coming around!
- ⊗ *The Birds* - Seed eaters like Juncos and Gold Finches enjoy the seeds of plants like Globe Centaurea, Coreopsis and Coneflowers. You may want to spring prune these with an eye to their feeding habits.
- ⊗ *Not everything gets cut back* - We only trim the edges of our Bearberry plantings to keep them in bounds. Hens and Chickens are never trimmed except to remove the faded flower stalks and their blown-out rosettes.
- ⊗ *Deadheading* - This term describes the removal of faded flowers and the stems that produced them. This is a season long chore that keeps plants neat and fresh looking - and in repeat bloomers, encourages more flowering. We are firm believers in its benefits. Remember not to deadhead any plants you want to self-sow.
- ⊗ *Pinching and Thinning* - These techniques can be used in different ways on different varieties to manipulate height, bloom time and more. An excellent book covering these and many basics of perennial maintenance is Tracy DiSabato-Aust's, *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*.

