

THE GRAPEVINE

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DEADHEADING FLOWERS

Some plants will bloom more profusely if the old, spent flowers are removed, a process called deadheading. Annuals especially, focus their energy on seed production to insure that the species survives. If you remove old flowers, the energy normally used to produce seed is now available to produce more flowers. Perennials can also benefit by lengthening the blooming season. However, some gardeners enjoy the look of spent flowers of perennials such as sedum or purple coneflower. Also, the seed produced can be a good food source for birds. Not all plants need to be deadheaded, including sedum 'Autumn Joy', melampodium, impatiens, most flowering vines, Lythrum, periwinkle (*Catharanthus*), and wishbone flower (*Torenia*). Those that do increase bloom in response to deadheading include hardy geraniums, coreopsis, petunias, marigolds, snapdragons, begonias, roses, campanulas, blanket flowers, delphiniums, zinnias, sweet peas, salvia, scabiosa, annual heliotrope, geraniums (*Pelargonium*), and yarrow. Deadheading is easily accomplished by removing spent flowers. With some plants, pinching between a thumb and finger can do this, but tough, wiry stems will require a scissors or pruning shears.

Rose Rosette

Rose rosette is a serious problem in Kansas on wild roses (*Rosa multiflora*) in pastures and hedges. It is also found in domestic rose plantings. Infection is thought to start with rapid elongation of a new shoot. The rapid shoot growth may continue for several weeks to a length of two to three feet. Following shoot elongation, a witches' broom or clustering of small branches occurs. The stems develop excessive thorniness and produce small, deformed leaves with a reddish-purple pigmentation. Stems and petioles of *Rosa multiflora* plants may have reddish blotches or streaks. Rose plants infected with the rose rosette virus die rapidly, usually within one to two years. Rose rosette is caused by a Emaravirus species. Transmission of the disease has been shown experimentally through grafting and is also thought to be spread by mites. Though KnockOut roses are resistant to many diseases, they are susceptible to this one.

There is no effective control measure for infected plants. In garden settings, infected plants should be removed and destroyed, including roots. Any roots that remain after plant removal may produce infected shoots which can harbor the disease. If possible, eliminate all multiflora rose plants from the vicinity as they are extremely susceptible and will act as a carrier. Multiflora rose is the wild rose often seen growing in ditches and pastures. Since the disease can be transmitted by pruning shears, disinfect the shears when moving from one plant to another by using rubbing alcohol or a disinfectant such as Lysol.

Sidedressing Annual Flowers

Modern annual flowers have been bred to flower early and over a long period of time. They are not as easily thrown off flowering by high nitrogen levels as vegetables are. As a matter of fact, providing nitrogen through the growing season (sidedressing) can help maintain an effective flower display for warm-season flowers. Apply a high nitrogen sidedressing four to six weeks after flowers have been set out. Additional fertilizations every three to four weeks can be helpful during a rainy summer, or if flower beds are irrigated. Common sources of nitrogen-only fertilizers include nitrate of soda, urea, and ammonium sulfate. Blood meal is an organic fertilizer that contains primarily, but not exclusively, nitrogen. Use only one of the listed fertilizers and apply at the rate given below.

- Nitrate of soda (16-0-0): Apply 1/3 pound (.75 cup) fertilizer per 100 square feet.
- Blood Meal (12-1.5-.6): Apply 7 ounces (7/8 cup) fertilizer per 100 square feet.
- Urea (46-0-0): Apply 2 ounces (1/4 cup) fertilizer per 100 square feet.
- Ammonium Sulfate (21-0-0): Apply 4 ounces (½ cup) fertilizer per 100 square feet.

If you cannot find the above materials, you can use a lawn fertilizer that is about 30 percent nitrogen (nitrogen is the first number in the set of three) and apply it at the rate of 3 ounces (3/8 cup) per 100 square feet. Do not use a fertilizer that contains a weed killer or weed preventer.

Spring-Flowering Bulb Foliage can be Removed

It is important to leave spring-flowering bulb foliage in place until it “ripens” or becomes brown. The energy produced by the leaves after flowering is transferred to the bulb so that it can flower the following year. The ripening process should be near completion now for tulips, daffodils and various other spring-flowering bulbs. Use clippers, scissors or even a mower to remove dead foliage. Also, try to map out where the bulbs are planted as there will be no foliage to make the location next fall when it is time to fertilize.

Onions Developing

This is the time of year that onions grow and develop rapidly. Regular watering (if needed) and a light fertilization are helpful to maximize growth. Onions develop so that as much as 2/3 of the bulb remains out of the soil. There is normal and there is no need to cover the bulb with soil.

Some varieties of onions are nearing harvest time when the tops begin to fall over. Others may not be ready to harvest for about a month. You may wish to break over the tops that haven't fallen to encourage drying of the neck. Allow a few days to pass and then dig the onions to insure they don't sunburn. Temporarily store them in a dry, well-ventilated area for a week or two before cutting the tops to insure the necks are completely dry. Remove the foliage (or braid the leaves) and store in a cool, dry location.

How to Make Tomato Cages

Commercial tomato cages are often too wimpy for Kansas conditions. Fortunately, you can make your own cages from concrete reinforcing mesh (wire). This material is normally 5' high with the “mesh” forming 6" squares. The shortest rolls are usually 50' long, but some lumber yards will cut off just the amount you need. Figure 6.5 feet of mesh to complete one cage. You will need to cut the mesh in order to make the cages. Small bolt cutters work well for this. Be careful when cutting as the mesh comes in rolls that will spring back into a cylinder as the last cut is made. Count off 13 squares but cut each horizontal wire at the end of the 13th square. This will leave a series of 12 complete squares horizontally with prongs left on the 13th square. Use these prongs to make a cylinder by bending the prongs over the vertical wire on the first square. Cages using this method will be about 2 feet in diameter. Tomatoes with large, rangy vines need all five feet of the mesh, but those with shorter, semi-determinate vines can get by with a shorter cage. Also, cut off the bottom horizontal wire to leave prongs that can be pushed into the ground to help with stability. In windy locations, a T-post will likely need to be driven near the cage. Tying the cage to the T-post can help prevent the cage from toppling in windy conditions. These cages will last for years, but do take up a lot of storage space when not in use.