



A LITTLE MAINTENANCE GOES A LONG WAY

June is a kind month to gardens. Many perennials are in bloom, annuals have been freshly planted, lawns are green and glowing. Is there anything we can do to freeze-frame this glorious time?

Why not spend some time now on “preventative” maintenance that will keep the garden looking good and reduce chores later in the season? Following these few practices will have a positive effect both on the garden and leisure time later in the season.

Weed, Weed, Weed

While not the most glamorous of garden chores, if early spring weeding wasn’t accomplished, get out there and tackle those weeds before they get out of control. It’s particularly important to rid the garden of weeds before they go to seed and spread even more voraciously. While hand pulling is kindest to the garden, many seek chemical means – just be sure to read labels carefully and take care not to kill the desirable plants.

Mulching

Placing mulch around plants will reduce weeds as well as retain

moisture. It also gives the garden a neat appearance, and organic mulch, such as bark or mushroom compost, will eventually break down and enrich the soil. This benefit outweighs the fact that organic mulches generally have to be reapplied more often. After planting and watering, lay mulch about 2 inches deep around and between plants, taking care not to cover the crown of the plant.

Staking

Staking or supporting the stems of plants is best done early when the plant is a few inches tall. It is simply easier to place a stake around young foliage vs. a tangled mass of leaves and flowers. Support those that have historically “flopped” in the garden, such as tall delphinium, balloon flower (*Platycodon*) and lilies. Note that some plants flop because they are not properly sited. Plants that require full sun, yet are planted in shade, will often fall over; moving them to a sunnier spot may fix this problem.

The type of stake used is based on personal preference. Many styles are available in a variety of shapes and sizes and some suit particular plants such as peonies

and lilies. Some gardeners prefer a natural looking stake such as curly willow. With a little ingenuity, stakes can be fashioned from pruned stems and branches.

Cutting Back

Cutting back is a practice used to rejuvenate a plant by encouraging a flush of new growth. It can also be done to remove diseased growth such as powdery mildew on phlox or bee balm. Some plants respond very favorably when cut back such as Artemesia ‘Silver Mound’, creeping phlox and dianthus—they are less likely to form a hole in the middle. Catmint (*Nepeta*) will likely re-bloom after shearing back by half after the first flush of bloom has faded. The groundcover Lamium benefits from a haircut.



Deadheading

Removing spent flowers is known as “deadheading”. This is a key

practice in keeping the garden looking attractive. Annuals, especially, benefit from having their faded flowers removed regularly. It encourages the production of more flowers and prevents plants from going to seed. Generally, the cut is made just above new buds. If new buds are not visible, prune to the end of the stem of the faded flower.



Scabiosa benefits from deadheading.

Perennials benefit from deadheading, too. The bloom time of some perennials can be prolonged when their faded flowers are promptly removed. Examples that benefit from this practice include Bee Balm (*Monarda*), Shasta Daisies, Salvia and Scabiosa.

Plants such as daffodils, iris and hosta (all of which bloom once per season) can have their flower stems pruned down to the base of the plant. This will maintain a neater appearance and, in the case of daffodils and iris, plant energy will best be used to “feed” the bulb for next year rather than

wasted on its faded flower stalk. Be sure to leave the leaves intact until they begin to yellow so that they, too, can restore energy to the bulb.

Remember that many perennials have one bloom time so don’t expect a second flush of flowers on plants such as False Indigo (*Baptisia*), Poppies or As-tilbe. Fall-blooming perennials, such as Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’, Boltonia and Coneflowers are best left with flowers intact, as they provide interest throughout late fall and winter.