

Maintaining Your Container Garden

Weeding

- Use good potting soil to reduce the growth of weeds.
- For large container plants, add a layer of quality mulch on top of the soil.
- When weeds do appear, use your hand, a kitchen fork, or a trowel to pull them up. Hold the stem or stems as close to the potting mixture as possible. Follow the root some distance into the soil and pull slowly.
- Plant or weed? Don't be alarmed. Almost every gardener has pulled up a plant by mistake. Get to know your plants by shape, texture, and smell. If in doubt, allow taller growth before pulling.

Deadheading Flowering Plants

- Deadheading is removing dead flower heads from plants. You'll create new flower growth and boost plant health.
- Begin deadheading in late spring and continue through growing season at least every other day. Most annuals and many perennials will continue to bloom if you keep up a regular schedule.
- Use your sense of touch as well as sight. A fresh bud feels pliable yet firm. A spent flower is usually faded in color, wilted, and wrinkled.

continued...

- An easy way to deadhead is to simply pinch with your finger and thumb. Grasp the stem below the dead flower and pinch the head off, making the pinch just above the first healthy leaf. For plants with tougher stems, use pruning snips or garden scissors.
- For plants with many small flowers, like geraniums, cut back the whole plant with a hand pruner. Remove old blossoms, stems, foliage, and buds. Leave 3 to 5 inches of plant height remaining.
- Deadheading is not an absolute must. You might find it relaxing, but some gardeners find it bothersome. Deadhead if you want your plants to be lush and filled with new blooms. Do not deadhead if you want your plants to self-seed, or if you want to attract wild birds and other wildlife to your container garden.

Pinching

- Pinching is removing the top or central growing point. This encourages side shoots to develop, creating a bushier plant.
- Wait to pinch a new plant until it is at least 4 inches tall. Use your fingers or pruning shears to nip off the growing tip of the central stem. That's the leaf cluster around the top of the stem. Two new stems will grow outward from this cut. After new branches have grown, pinch off the growing tips from them. Repeat this process until the plant is due to flower.

continued...

- Pinching works for just about any plant, including herbs, and especially for fruiting vegetables like peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes.

Pruning

- Pruning is cutting back excess growth from a plant to maintain its shape and health. This keeps your containers looking tidy, encourages healthy new growth, and helps your plants grow bushier and more compact.
- Proper pruning requires an understanding of your plant's growth pattern. Check your plant's directions for the best time to prune.
- Plants grow from the tip down. New growth emerges from the dominant bud at the end of a branch or stem. So prune from the bottom up and from the inside out.
- Prune out any dead growth, flower spikes that are done blooming, and any leggy growth. Then trim back the rest of the plant to the desired size.
- Make your cuts on an angle just above a bud, leaf node, or side branch. Try to make a few large cuts rather than lots of little ones. Make your cuts as clean as possible. Never prune off more than one-third of a plant at once.
- Hand-held pruners will work for small jobs. Use a lopper for larger branches and limbs. Wear gloves to protect your hands.