

Friday's Feature**By****Theresa Friday**

June 28, 2009

Enjoy nature's second bloom

Record setting heat along the Gulf Coast has many gardeners seeking relief indoors. This is the time when gardeners must be cautious when working in the heat. However, there are still gardening tasks that must be done. If you can, work outside in the early morning before the heat of the day becomes oppressive. The evening might also be somewhat cool, but you may have to contend with clouds of mosquitoes!

According to Dr. Gary R. Bachman, Assistant Extension Professor of Horticulture, Coastal Research & Extension Center, an important garden maintenance activity that is sometimes overlooked due to the heat is removing spent flowers or deadheading.

Flowering plants require deadheading for several reasons. It extends the bloom period, removes the seed source of species that could become weedy and maintains the health of our flowering garden plants.

Many plants will bloom repeatedly if the fading flowers are removed. A plant's ultimate goal is to produce seed for the next generation. If we interrupt that process, the plants will continue to try and complete their genetic programming by flowering again.

Flowering plants are capable of producing a large seed bank containing hundreds or even thousands of seeds each year. The germination of these seeds has a couple of unexpected consequences.

First, many times the seedling does not come "true" meaning it is not a duplicate of the original plant. Second, these seedlings could crowd out the mother plant. Deadheading these species before seeds are produced will alleviate the problems of unwanted seedling germination.

Deadheading is also needed for plants that we grow for foliage, like coleus. Removal of the non-showy flowers will allow the colorful foliage to be the focus.

The overall health of your flowering plants can be increased through deadheading. The production of seed requires a tremendous amount of energy from the plant, so much so that the plant will sacrifice all vegetative growth in order to produce the next generation. By removing the spent flower heads the plant can be maintained in a more vegetative growth stage through which the stems, leaves and most importantly

the root system will continue to grow.

The procedure for deadheading will depend on the flowering characteristics of the plants themselves.

For plants having single flowers, such as zinnia or coneflower, removing the flower stalk is all that is needed. You can increase bloom size by removing side flower buds so more energy is sent to the main flower. This will also reduce any seed production pressure later in the season or next year.

Many of our flowering garden plants have clusters of flowers. These can be more troublesome. All of the flowers do not mature at the same time; therefore, seed is produced over a prolonged period. As the flower cluster starts to fade, remove it, and allow the plant to produce new clusters.

Some plants like dianthus produce flowers over the entire plant. Removing individual flowers would discourage even the most dedicated gardener, so simply shear the plant using snips or an electric trimmer being careful to only remove the faded flower heads.

By practicing the task of deadheading throughout the summer season, nature will bless you with a second wave of blooms.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information on County Extension Services and other articles of interest go to <http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu>.

###