

JUST A PINCH Some Basics - Joanne Kozier



Pinch for height control and to enhance plant habit and shape. Usually yields more compact plants with smaller, more numerous flowers. Most commonly done on branching perennials. Not for plants growing from rhizomes, bulbs, corms.

Technique: Pinching: remove top 1/2 to 1 inch (max 2 inches) of each plant stalk using fingers. Pinch just the growing tip and first set of leaves. "Cutting back" removes more than 2 inches of plant, usually with pruners. Best time to pinch - Usually early Spring to early Summer, but varies with growing conditions and your goals.

Very useful book: *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden - Planting & Pruning Techniques* by Tracy Disabato-Aust
Perennials are forgiving - experiment!

Perennials That Can Be Pinched

Aster - Cut back by 1/2 or more in late May or early June. Cutting twice can delay blooming.

Autumn Joy Sedum - When 8" tall, usually early June, can pinch or cut to 4".

Balloon Flower - Cut back by 1/2 in late May or early June for shorter plants that don't require staking. Delays blooming.

Bee Balm - When about 12" tall, cut back by 1/2; can cut again in couple weeks by 1/3 to delay flowering & reduce height.

Black Eyed Susan - Pinch to produce more, smaller flowers on sturdier plants.

Boneset - Can cut back by 1/2 when 4 inches tall; then by 1/2 again when 16" tall.

Border Phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) - Pinch to produce shorter plants and delay flowering; early to mid-June may delay blooming 2 - 4 weeks. Pinching in early May may not delay blooming. Can pinch just a few stems for varied height and bloom time.

Cardinal Flower - Pinch before flowering to produce more compact plants. May slightly delay blooming.

Common Sneezeweed - Pinch every couple weeks mid-May until mid-June for more compact plants with more flowers. Could cut back plant instead by 1/2 to 2/3 in early to mid-June.

Culver's Root - Cut back by 1/2 in May or early June to produce more compact, self-supporting plants: 18" tall vs. 36".

Early Phlox (*Phlox maculata*) Pinch or cut back by 1/2 at end of May or early June before flowering to reduce height and delay bloom by 2 - 4 weeks.

Feverfew - Pinch when plants are 6-8" tall and repeat in 2-3 weeks. Or, can shear instead by 1/2 when plants are 12' tall.

Goldenrod - Taller forms can be cut back by 1/2 in early June to reduce height and need for staking. Can pinch back in May to increase branching without affecting height of shorter forms. Will delay blooming.

Great Blue Lobelia - Pinch around first of July.

Hardy Begonia - Pinch to encourage branching and to keep plants compact.

Hollyhock - Tall plants can be cut back once or twice before flowering to produce shorter plants good for flower arrangements.

Joe Pye Weed - Pinching not usually necessary for plants grown in full sun, but can be done when plants are 3 ft tall to produce fuller plants without affecting plant height significantly. Can leave center stems un-pinched for larger flowers there.

Mums - Prime pinching plants, Mums respond to many different pinching techniques. May need to experiment to find the timing that works best, usually 2 - 4 pinching. New Mums planted in Spring

should be first pinched a few weeks after planting. Overwintered Mums can be pinched in May when 6" tall, then every 2 - 3 weeks. When to stop pinching depends on the climate and type of Mum, but generally mid-July.

New York Ironweed - Left "unpinched", plants may reach 9' tall. To reduce height and create fuller plants, cut to the ground when plants reach 2' tall, or cut back by 1-2 ' when plants are 3-4' tall, Can cut different heights for layered effect.

Obedient Plant- Cut back by 1/2 in spring.

Painted Daisy - Pinch plants when about 6" tall to produce sturdier plants.

Peach Leaf Bellflower - Pinching plants when 6" tall may eliminate need for staking. Pink

Turtlehead - Pinch in early Spring when plants are 6" tall.

Rose Campion - Pinch when 6" tall; or cut back by 1/2 in early June when plants are 15" tall.

Russian Sage - Pinch or cut back by 1/2 when plant is 12' tall for more compact plant.

Spike Speedwell - Pinch back taller forms in early June to reduce plant height.

Upright Hollyhock Mallow - Pinch plants in early May; then cut back by 6" for shorter, wider, more compact plants. Spring, remove dead wood and shape bush, cutting way back, if necessary to stimulate new growth.

Bridal Veil Spirea - Prune at least once a year, after blooming, and, for overgrown shrub, prune more severely in the Spring.

Red or Yellow Twig Dogwood - Prune yearly in late winter or early spring while still dormant. Trim old stems and stems that are losing their red color close to the soil above the first leaf node. May shorten bush by removing 1/3 to 1/2 length of remaining stems. Can actually cut entire bush down to 10' to rejuvenate.

Azalea - Prune after flowering and before new buds form; usually by July 1. Prune individual branches to maintain shape; by no more than 1/3. To rejuvenate a sparse plant, trim 3 to 5 of largest benches by 1/3; then prune other branches to desired shape.

Rhododendron - Remove spent flowers and dead branches. Trim to maintain shape in late winter while still dormant. Large, overgrown bushes can be cut back to 12 - 15 inches above the ground. Prune to above a latent bud, varying the branch heights for more natural look.

Mountain Laurel - Remove spent flowers & trim branches right after flowering. Tolerates hard pruning, even down to the ground, but usually don't remove more than 1/3 of the bush. Prune out large branches to rejuvenate growth and improve airflow.

Roses - Tolerates pruning well. Remove dead, damaged, or diseased branches. Prune to just above an outward facing bud eye. Heirloom Roses . com has useful information on pruning roses under "Planting and Care"