

How to extend the flowering season in your garden

The plants and techniques to make your garden more colourful this year

What is the Chelsea Chop?

It's a technique designed to prolong the flowering display of perennial plants, so here's how to go about it.

The Chelsea Chop gets its name partly because late May – when the famous RHS Chelsea Flower Show is usually held – is a good time to do it. But it's also so-called because nurserymen, when they returned from exhibiting at Chelsea, would carry out the technique on the perennial plants they had remaining on their nursery to make them bushier and more saleable later.

The idea of the Chelsea Chop is to cut leggy perennials back by about a third or a half thus reducing their size. By doing so, the plant is kept compact as it will produce more bushy growth. If you have a windy, exposed garden, by not letting them get too tall is a great way to help plants survive any gusty summer weather. It also lessens the need for staking.

The other effect of cutting plants back like this is that the flowering is delayed. Often the flowers of 'chopped' plants are smaller, but to compensate they are more plentiful. This technique also prolongs the flowering season and ensures you have colour until late in the year. If you carry out the Chelsea Chop on some plants, but leave others, this will stagger their flowering for an even longer display.

Plants that benefit from the Chelsea Chop include Achillea, Asters, Campanula, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Lupin, Penstemons, Phlox, Rudbeckia and Sedum



What is the Hampton Hack?

Ideally timed around early July, the usual time for the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, the Hampton Hack is all about tidying many of the early flowering summer plants such as Philadelphus, Weigela, Cistus corbariensis, Cistus purpureus, Phlomis fruticosa and Helianthemums. They will all then make much tidier and productive plants for next year.

Cut back any messy growth on herbaceous plants that have finished flowering, are threatening to go to seed or simply are overwhelming other plants. Good candidates would be Alchemilla mollis and Iris siberica leaves. With straggly Pansies, Violas, Astrantias and herbaceous Geraniums these are best cut back to keep in shape as well as to encourage a few flushes of late season flowers.

Our guide to plants with naturally long flowering seasons

Perennials: Achillea, Astrantia, Astilbe, Anthemis tinctoria, Campanula, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Erysimum 'Bowles's Mauve', Geum, Hardy Geraniums, Lamium, Penstemon, Scabious, Nepeta, Valerian



Seasonal plants: Popular bedding favourites Begonias, Dahlias, Geraniums, Marigolds, Pansies, Petunias and Violas.



Shrubs: Abelia, Buddleja, Cistus, Hydrangea, Hebe, Hypericum Hidcote, Hardy Fuchsia, Lavandula, Leycesteria, Potentilla and repeat flowering Roses.



Groundcover plants: Hypericum calycinum (Rose of Sharon), Nepeta (Catmint), Hardy Geraniums, Potentilla Gold Carpet, Rock Roses (Helianthemum), Rose Flower Carpet (various colours)

