PINCHING OF PERENNIALS THROUGH THE SEASONS

Now hear this. Pinching and cutting cause more problems than they fix.

One thing we forget is that, in nature, plants manage to survive without our infinite wisdom and assistance. Fact is, we're really not that important! Much of the maintenance we do on plants is therefore to please ourselves more than the plants. What I'm saying is that if you're unsure of what to do, do nothing, for plants can take care of themselves. They might not be the epitome of tidiness, but they'll survive. Following are some recommendations that fulfill the desires to tidy up and / or perhaps increase blooming, hopefully without affecting the plants in a negative way.

When I use the word "pinch", feel free to interchange that with "clip", "shear", "trim" or otherwise "whack the devil out of". I often even use a lawn mower set at a high wheel setting to knock off spent dead foliage in the winter. And don't be in such a hurry! When cutting back in the off-season (for which I mean "winter"), this trimming should never be done until the plants are fully dormant and the tops are dead or mostly so. Some plants do retain a greenish crown or tuft at the base: thing to do with these in winter is cut off everything except the green parts.

Finally, this list contains some plants that have the potential to get aggressive in certain cultural conditions. I don't know your conditions, so I don't stand in political correctness judgment of these plants. If a plant needs to be held in check it can be done so by physical barriers, digging out areas you don't want, using chemical means as a form of edging, or just planting them in containers where spreading may be prevented.

Some perennials really need nothing done to them, winter or summer, or both. If you wish to tidy them up in the winter by removing what little foliage that hangs around, feel free to do so, but at no point during the winter do you want to cut off tissue that is still alive. Whenever live tissue is present, that means the plant is still manufacturing nutrients for itself and is not yet 100% dormant.

ACHILLEA (YARROW)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

ACONITUM (MONKSHOOD)
IN SEASON- may need staking; do not pinch
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

AGEPODIUM (BISHOP'S WEED)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

AGASTACHE (HYSSOP)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

AJUGA (BUGLEWEED)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

ALCHEMILLA (LADY'S MANTLE)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

ALLIUM (ONION)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

ALOPECURUS (ORNAMENTAL FOXTAIL)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

ANEMONE (FALL ANEMONE)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

AQUILEGIA (COLUMBINE)
IN SEASON- may need staking, otherwise leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

ARENARIA (SAND HERB)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

ARMERIA (SEATHRIFT)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

ARTEMISIA
IN SEASON- pinching improves branching in tall types
OFF SEASON- wait to spring then cut back hard

ASTER (HARDY ASTER)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

ASTILBE (FALSE GOATSBEARD)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

CALAMAGROSTIS (REEDGRASS)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

CAMPANULA (BELFLOWER)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

CAREX (SEDGEGRASS)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

CHELONE (TURTLEHEAD)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

CHRYSANTHEMUM (SHASTA DAISY)
IN SEASON- pinching sometimes encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

COREOPSIS
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

CORTADERIA (TRUE PAMPAS)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

CROCOSMIA (SWORDFLOWER)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

DELOSPERMA (ICE PLANT)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

DIANTHUS (GARDEN PINKS)
IN SEASON- pinching sometimes encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

DICENTRA (BLEEDING HEART)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

DIGITALIS (FOXGLOVE)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

DORONICUM
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

ECHINACEA (CONEFLOWER)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

ERIANTHUS (PLUMEGRASS)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

EUPATORIUM
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

EUPHORBIA (WOOD SPURGE)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

FALLOPIA (FALSE BAMBOO)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

FESTUCA (FESCUE)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- cut back by 80%

GAILLARDIA (BLANKETFLOWER)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

GALIUM (SWEET WOODRUFF)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

GAURA (WANDFLOWER)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

GAZANIA (FREEWAY DAISY)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

GERANIUM (CRANESBILL)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

GYPSOPHILA (BABY'S BREATH)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

HELENIUM
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

HELLEBORUS (LENTEN ROSE)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

HELIANTHUS (HARDY SUNFLOWER)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

HEMEROCALLIS (DAYLILY)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

HEUCHERA (CORALBELLS)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

HEUCHERELLA (FOAMYBELLS)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

HIBISCUS (MARSH MALLOW)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

HOSTA
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

IRIS
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

KNIPHOFIA (POKER)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- cut back by 80%

LAMIASTRUM
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

LAMIUM
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

LAVANDULA (LAVENDER)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

LIATRIS (BLAZINGSTAR)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

LIGULARIA
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

LIRIOPE (LILYTURF)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

LOBELIA (CARDINALFLOWER)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

LYCHNIS CORONARIA
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

LYSIMACHIA
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

MAZUS
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Miscanthus (Japanese Silvergrass)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Monarda (Bee Balm)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Nepeta (Catmint)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Oenothera (Sundrops)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Ophiopogon (Mondograss)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Panicum (Switchgrass)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Pennisetum (Fountaingrass)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Penstemon
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Perovskia (Middle Eastern Sage)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- cut back by 90%, leave a stump

Phalaris (Ribbongrass)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Phlox paniculata
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

Phlox subulata (Mountain Pinks)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Physostegia
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- cut back to ground level

Polemonium (Jacob's Ladder)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Potentilla (Cinquefoil)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Pulmonaria
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Rudbeckia
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Salvia (Sage)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Scabiosa (Pincushion)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Sedum
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Sidalcea (Miniature Hollyhock)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Solidago (Golden Rod)
IN SEASON- pinch early season for branching, then leave be
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Stachys
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- clean out dead areas / leaves

Stokesia
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Tanacetum (Sunfern)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Teucrium (Germander)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- cut back by 80%

Thymus (Thyme)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Tiarella (Foamflower)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Tradescantia (Spiderwort)
IN SEASON- pinching encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Tricyrtis (Toadlily)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Trifolium (Clover)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- needs nothing, leave go

Verbascum (Mullein)
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Veronica (Speedwell)
IN SEASON- pinching sometimes encourages rebloom
OFF SEASON- shear back leaving green crown of foliage

Yucca
IN SEASON- needs nothing, leave go
OFF SEASON- cut out old flower stalks