

The 'Chelsea Chop'

Plants that respond well to the Chelsea chop include:

Anthemis tinctoria

Echinacea purpurea

Helenium

Phlox paniculata

Rudbeckia

Sedum (upright, strong-growing forms such as 'Herbstfreude')

Solidago

Many other mid-summer and autumn-flowering perennials can be treated similarly. The degree of cutting back is specific to each species but the closer to flowering time you prune, the greater the delay in flowering. Having said that – The term 'Chelsea Chop' comes from the timing of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, which is late May. The cut-back is therefore performed usually in late May or early June.

Some **herbaceous perennials** can be **cut down by as much as half** with positive results;

The resultant growth is not so large and leggy

They therefore need less staking

The flowers are generally smaller but more numerous

This happens because the removal of the top shoots enables the sideshoots to branch out (the top shoots would normally inhibit the sideshoots by producing hormones in a process called **apical dominance**). Using this method, along with regular feeding and watering, ensures beds and borders look tidy throughout summer.

To carry out the Chelsea chop:

1. Clumps of perennials can be literally be chopped back by one third to a half using shears or secateurs. This will delay the flowering until later in the summer and keep plants shorter and more compact;
2. If you have several clumps of one plant, try cutting back a few, but leaving others. This will prolong the overall flowering time and a contouring effect
3. Another method is to cut half the stems back at the front of the clump which will extend the season of flowering rather than delay it.

The 'Chelsea Chop' should therefore not be applied to Roses and climbers

You can read more about the Chelsea chop technique in the book ***The well-tended perennial garden: planting & pruning techniques*** by Tracy DiSabato-Aust (Timber Press 2006, ISBN 9780881928037).