Pruning Your Containers, Three Simple Steps
Lisha Utt, Frederick County Master Gardener

Ok you’ve been watering each day, fertilizing regularly and your containers are growing well but it still needs a little something else……it needs some ‘pruning maintenance’. But where to begin?

First, remove spent blooms. Most flowers require some amount of “deadheading”, i.e. removing spent blooms. Regularly removing faded flowers frees up the energy of the plant to produce more flowers and generally improve its vigor. In this container the geraniums and the verbena will require deadheading. To remove the spent blooms, follow the stem of the faded flower back to the next set of green leaves or to a new stem that may be already growing and make your cut there.

Second, trim overly aggressive growers. This is an often overlooked step in tidying up your containers. In this example, the sweet potato vine is the botanical bully, taking over the pot and beginning to crush the
calibrachoa and the iresine. Begin by cutting back the sweet potato vine stems trailing on the ground. Next trim those stems that have grown over the top of the other flowers. The sweet potato vine in this container is meant to be an accent plant and not the whole show. By cutting it back rather severely, you can make room for the more colorful flowers to shine.

**Third, reshape the plants so that the container feels in proportion again.** Often plants will outgrow their expected dimensions throwing your container’s design out of kilter, don’t be afraid to use your clippers to get things back in line. In this example the coleus is getting so tall it’s dwarfing the geraniums and looks out of proportion. By cutting it back a few inches the entire collection looks more unified.

Removing spent blooms should be done weekly but the other steps of your ‘pruning maintenance’ can be done less frequently, one to two times a season depending on the growth of your fabulous plants. Happy Gardening!

![After the ‘pruning maintenance’](image)

C – Cordyline ‘Red Star’
R – Coleus ‘Religious Radish’
G – Geranium ‘Zonal American Coral’
B – Calibrachoa ‘Callie Painted Coral’
S – Impomoea (Sweet Potato Vine) ‘Guacomole’
I – Iresine ‘Purple Lady’
V – Verbena ‘Peach’

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit [www.frederick.umd.edu/mg](http://www.frederick.umd.edu/mg) or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Find us on Facebook at [http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland](http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland)

University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, or national origin.