

Use your heads when it comes to yard clean-up



Carla Keast

AROUND THE YARD

Don't go overboard on the fall clean up. Don't you wish someone would say that about vacuuming?

Focus on raking up the leaves, but go easy on cutting and clearing out the flowerbeds. Drying stalks and petals may look like they're spent, and in terms of the season's growth, they are. But in terms of carrying your yard through the winter, many still have lots to offer.

Flowers in the summer are all about colour, scent, and either intricate or simple shapes. Flowers during the rest of the year are all about seed heads. Large globes, tiny buttons, feathery plumes, spikes.

In combination with some evergreens, or alone against a white canvas of undisturbed snow, seed heads are just as beautiful as the flowers that produced them; they're just different.

Plants may have spent a large part of the summer preoccupied with showing off fragile looking blossoms, but there's nothing delicate about winter survival strategies and not all flowers are up for it.

Many of the flowers I've suggested as good low-maintenance choices also offer superb winter effect. Mid- to late-summer flowering plants are easiest to locate, and probably still have intact seed heads.

The coneflowers have just finished up flowering and are in the process of dropping their petals. The remaining seed heads are large, dark, spiky balls, and have the wherewithal to withstand autumn's winds and winter's snow. They are marvellous!

Globe cornflower (*Centaurea macrocephala*) finished flowering a few weeks ago and promptly receded into the background. Leave them standing and they'll come to the foreground again. The seed heads are like an intricately carved crown, which they proudly hold three to four feet high until spring arrives.

Bee balm (*Monarda*), *Helenium*, and *Rudbeckia* convert the profusion of flow-



Submitted photo

Seed heads can be just as beautiful during the winter as they are during the summer months.

ers they jubilantly tossed up a few weeks ago, into a peppery polka dotting of tiny dense dark buttons. Polka dots always brighten a view. Definite keepers!

Blazing star (*Liatris*) and the Rocket *Ligularia* both produce rigid spikes that add a nice stability to the off-season yard.

Most of the ornamental grasses get even better with the beginning of autumn. Their seed heads are fuzzy feathery plumes, some more like fireworks, and are

surprisingly resilient. Both annual and perennial grasses offer marvellous off-season interest.

Autumn and winter are seasons of rest, but with thoughtful cleaning of your flowerbeds, there'll be plenty to keep the view lively.

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