



Linda Gay, left, in Mercer's Bamboo Forest. Right, properly pruned cuttings, such as this angelonia, right, don't need to be thrown away.

PRUNING PRETTY PLANTS FOR PERENNIAL PLEASURE

By Linda Gay

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The Fall Equinox (Sept. 22) gives us four wonderful months to work in our garden pruning, planting, feeding and nurturing. Many long blooming perennials still have flowers, but may have gotten leggy. Prune to a nice shape so they will bloom until winter arrives.

Do not prune fall blooming perennials such as Philippine violet (*Barleria*), Mexican mint marigold, *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican sage), *Salvia elegans* (pineapple sage), or Copper Canyon daisy. Trim and shape these from spring through summer. Provide food and soil after each trim.

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Do not prune -- l to r, Philippine violet (Barleria), Mexican mint marigold, Salvia leucantha (Mexican sage), Salvia elegans (pineapple sage), or Copper Canyon daisy.

UPRIGHT GROWERS: remove energy-sucking lateral (horizontal) branches and twiglets that never develop flowers. Remove top 1/3 (or more depending on species). The vascular system (xylem and phloem) is suddenly on a smaller race track. A sprout may appear where you never thought it would! Feed the root system. Top dress with 1-2" of compost.

For low growing and spreading plants (verbena, lantana), do a "bowl cut." I hand-gather up all spreading stems or sections of stems and remove half the foliage in my hand. Release and finish pruning, even-ing up to create a dome or conical shape.

Prune skinny Angelonia stalks down to the main plant (left below) to redirect energy back to the base for more leaves, stems and new blooms. This strengthens the plant, increasing vascular circulation. Remove sparsely blooming tips and stems. Leave a full base to regenerate about 4-6" tall.

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Left, angelonia plant (far left) pruned down to main stalks, with cuttings in bucket to use later, and a 4" pot of fertilizer. Center: sprinkle pot of fertilizer round plant's "sweet spot" (top 4-6" of soil) to help create, right, a more lush beautiful display. Photos courtesy of Linda Gay.

After pruning add a 4" pot (measurer - white arrow) of organic fertilizer around each plant. Top-dress with compost to enhance the "sweet spot" (center white arrow - zone of active root growth). The "sweet spot" for ALL plants is the top 4-6" of soil (not including mulch). This soil space grows new roots, increasing strength and health of upper growth. Supercharged plants can fight off pests or diseases.

NOTE: Plant roots do NOT grow in mulch as can be observed when moving mulch around the garden.

TIPS WITH PERENNIALS:

To improve the "sweet spot" of plants: remove mulch to reveal root zone, add organic fertilizer (using a 4" pot) followed by compost (1-2") on top of the organic fertilizer to "marry" the food and compost to start the microbial party! No party is complete without drinks and here is where you hand water with love!

Winter prune Angelonia stems to 1" above the ground. The cool/cold air and soil temperatures keep the plants dormant. Treat pentas, lantana, and verbena the same way, as they are perennials too!



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My Green Thumb Rule of Pruning: when I remove leaves and stems I always reward with food and soil. It is my way of healing and recovery for the abrupt removal of limbs and leaves. The flowers, stems and leaves are gathered, put into water, and enjoyed until gone.

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