An Introduction to Preserving Flowers

FLOWERS TO AIR DRY

Strawflowers, goldenrod, hydrangea, celosia, Queen Anne's lace, statice, baby's breath, globe amaranth, salvia, astilbe, yarrow, love lies bleeding, pearly everlasting, artemesia, astilbe, safflower, centaurea, cattail, Chinese lantern, clover, cockscomb, globe thistle, larkspur, lilac, marigold, milkweed, rose, santolina, tansy, thistle, lavender, lilac, sea lavender, grape hyacinth, peony, poppy, zinnia

Air Drying Flowers for Arrangements

THE EASIEST WAY OF ALL: HANG THEM UP Air-drying can be very successful with herbs, everlasting and ornamental grasses. As a general rule, remove leaves from flower stems and hang upside down in a warm, dry, dark place until the moisture content is greatly reduced. An attic, closet, or pantry is a good place; avoid basements, porches, or garages, which might be damp.

Know when to pick flowers Picking flowers at the correct stage of maturity is very important to drying success. Flowers with a papery feel usually dry well. Hydrangeas need to be turning "papery" to the touch before drying, otherwise they will shrivel. Most other flowers should be well developed before drying. Strawflowers are an exception; they should be picked when the outer petals have developed, before the center of the flower is on view. Pick flowers when they are dry – never after a shower, as moisture can be trapped between leaves and petals and can cause mold to develop.

How to Divide the flowers into small bunches, and tie each bunch with an elastic band. Don't use string or wire, as the stems shrink as they dry, and may fall on the floor. Hang the bunches upside down in an airy and warm place, preferably dark. Allow plenty of room for air circulation. Most flowers will take around 2 weeks to dry. You can tell when they are dry by carefully flexing the head of the flower – if it gives, then it is not yet ready.

Some flowers need to be dried upright in water: Hydrangea, gypsophila, and alchemilla mollis should be picked, then the stems placed in a vase with about an inch of water in the bottom. By the time the flowers have used all the water, they will have dried successfully.

PRESSING FLOWERS Pressing is an easy way to preserve flowers by placing them between layers of paper and applying weight. Use newsprint, an old telephone book, or between layers of paper inside a heavy book. You can buy commercially made flower presses, or make your own.

How to prepare and dry Cut flowers when the weather is dry. Arrange them so they do not overlap between several thicknesses of paper. Keep flowers of the same thickness in each layer, so that they press evenly. Cover the flowers with several more layers of paper. Additional layers of paper and flowers can be built up and then covered with a board or piece of cardboard before pressing down with a heavy object. Drying time depends on flower size and moisture content, anywhere from 1-3 weeks.

Most flowers and leaves are suitable for pressing, except those with bulky centers or fleshy leaves, such as succulents. Odd shaped flowers, such as daffodils, need to be cut in half and opened out before pressing. Thick flowers like chrysanthemums need to have the calyx reduced in thickness. Single petals can also be dried, and reassembled when making your picture. Store between sheets of paper in a dry place away from sunlight.

References

Preserving Flowers

Using Drying Agents

Flowers preserved using desiccants retain their shape and color if they are kept airtight, and out of direct sunlight. There are several types of desiccants available for drying flowers, including silica gel, fine white sand, borax, and homemade mixtures. Whichever type you use, the method is the same.

Stems become weakened and brittle when dried. When using silica gel, flowers will sometimes reabsorb moisture and wilt. For best results, display your flowers in a sealed container to keep out dust and high humidity.

**SAND.** Sand must be very fine, clean, dry, and preferably salt free. Sifting is recommended to remove coarse grains and foreign particles. Cut flowers at the peak of bloom, after dew has fully evaporated. Make sure stems are dry.

**How to**

Using a container (with a lid) 6 inches deeper than your flowers. Fill with 1 inch of sand, then add flowers and begin to add sand around petals. Roses and cup-shaped flowers are dried face up; daisy-type flowers dry face down; and snapdragons and other elongated flowers are placed horizontally onto the sand. Cover flowers completely. Place covered container in a warm, dry spot for 1-3 weeks. To remove sand, carefully tip container a bit and let sand flow out one corner. Gently lift out each flower as it frees from sand. You can also dry flowers in the oven for 1-2 hours, at the lowest temperature. Use a shallow pan filled with one inch of sand and completely cover flowers.

**SILICA GEL.** Silica gel absorbs moisture from flowers rapidly, preserving color better than other drying methods. Most flowers dry in 36-48 hours. Store gel-dried flowers in an airtight container with a little silica gel packet.

**How to**

Using an airtight container, place flowers stem side down into a layer of silica until the flower head touches gel surface. Add gel around flowers and into petals carefully, making sure there are no air spaces, until flowers are covered by one inch. Seal container and check after 1-2 days; flowers should feel brittle. Carefully pour out the silica gel and use a small brush to remove excess particles.

Preserving with Glycerine

Glycerine replaces the water in plants, making the preserved plant supple and long-lasting. This method is more suitable for foliage than flowers, but certain flowers will preserve well. Plants need to be gathered in a non-wilted state. Deciduous plants should be gathered between the end of June and mid-September. Preserved colors will be in shades of tans and browns.

**How to**

Mix 1 part vegetable glycerine to 2 parts hot water, enough to make the mixture about 2 inches deep in your container, and stir thoroughly. Allow the mixture to cool off until it is just warm.

Pick foliage, remove damaged leaves and cut stems at an angle. Split woody stems about an inch up the stem. Place stems in plain warm water to sit for a few hours. Once conditioned, put stems in the glycerine solution. Immerse individual leaves completely. Check plants daily; you can see the brown glycerine solution being taken up into the leaves; when it reaches the top, it's done. Some plants take 30 hours, while others may take 2-3 months. Don't allow plants to stand in the solution any longer than necessary, or else the glycerine "bleeds" from the leaves.

Cut off the part of the stem that was sitting in the solution. Allow flowers to air dry for a week or so before storing. The glycerine/water mixture can be reused several times.

**FLOWERS FOR SAND DRYING**

Rose, tulip, dahlia, marigold and snapdragon. Flowers which last only one day, like day lilies, do not dry well. Less successful are aster, azalea, chrysanthemum, geranium, petunia, phlox, pink, poppy or violet.

**FLOWERS FOR SILICA GEL DRYING**

Rose, aster, carnation, marigold, dahlia, larkspur, geranium, zinnia, chrysanthemum, delphinium, amaryllis, anemone, calendula, safflower, celosia, centaurea, tansy, clematis, foxglove, teasel, globe thistle, sea holly, heather, globe amaranth, baby's breath, strawflower, hydrangea, lavender, liatris, sea lavender, honesty, grape hyacinth, nigella, peony, poppy, Chinese lantern, salvia, santolina, sedum, thistle, goldenrood, lamb's ears, narcissus, gerbera, camellia, orchid

**FLOWERS FOR GLYCERINE**

Bells of Ireland, baby's breath, statice, lady's mantle, clematis seed heads, sea holly, hydrangea, heather, narcissus, rose hips

**FOLIAGE FOR GLYCERINE**

Apple, pear, boxwood, barberry, dogwood, euonymus, viburnum, gardenia, juniper, pine, Russian olive, yucca, grasses, ivy, holly, oak, maple, eucalyptus, ferns, rosemary, rhododendron