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# DRYING FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE

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## DRIED FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS

Arranging flowers need not be limited to the summer months when garden flowers are plentiful, but can be practiced the year round. Dried arrangements can be as colorful and exciting as those made from fresh flowers. They have a wide range of shapes and textures and their colors include the tans and browns not found in living plant materials. Dried arrangements have the following advantages too:

Once the arrangement is finished, the lines do not shift or change. No new flowers open, the old ones do not fade and the design "stays put." This makes it possible to study it, correct mistakes, and make improvements.

Dried arrangements are long-lasting. Even when they become dusty, they can be cleaned by careful brushing. When they become a little dull, they can be freshened and the colors brightened by putting them in the bathroom filled with steam for an hour or two.

They are time savers, for they can be made in advance and stored until they are needed.

They furnish visual warmth and beauty during the winter months when there are no garden flowers.

Collecting and processing plant materials can be very pleasant and an interesting hobby. Flowers and other plants can be grown in the garden to be used in dried arrangements, or they can be collected in the fields and woods. Even some faded flowers can be used. Before throwing them away, look them over for interesting centers that can be dried after removing the faded petals. The centers of daisies, gaillardias, peonies; the calyx of iris, dahlias, and roses are all very attractive.

### Gathering, Drying and Processing Techniques

You will improve your chances of success in drying flowers if you follow certain procedures discussed in this publication.

Cut flowers just before they are at their fully opened stage and not after they have begun to fade.

Cut and work on a warm, sunny day. Flower surfaces should be as dry as possible when they are processed, to prevent mold and mildew.

If you cannot process them immediately after cutting, put them in water for no longer than 24 hours. Water taken up through the stem will do no harm but surface moisture will cause damage. Some flowers, like the ageratum and yarrow, will hold their color better if allowed to stay in water for several hours.

Process much more material than you think you will need, to allow for loss and shrinkage.

Allow about two weeks for most materials to dry.

#### Upside-Down Method

1. First, prepare the place where the flowers are to hang. Since they must be dried as quickly as possible, a dimly lit attic with a good air circulation is ideal. Most basements are too damp, and closets have too little air circulation. String wires or cords in parallel lines, about six inches apart.
2. Strip all foliage from the flower stems.
3. Tie the smaller flowers in bunches with differing stem lengths, so that the flower heads do not touch each other. Large flowers should be tied individually.
4. Fasten the bunches and individual flowers to the lines already strung, far enough apart so they do not touch.
5. Leave from two to three weeks - most flowers will dry in this length of time.
6. When thoroughly dry, pack them in boxes according to size--heavy materials in one box, delicate flowers in others. Label carefully--this is a real timesaver.
7. Flowers that will dry easily upside-down include:

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Astilbe                  | Lavender          |
| Baby's breath            | Larkspur (annual) |
| Blue thimble flower      | Lemon verbena     |
| Butterfly weed           | Marigold          |
| Calendula                | Meadow-rue        |
| Castor bean pods         | Mullein           |
| Cattail                  | Okra              |
| Chinese lantern          | Onion             |
| Chives                   | Plume poppy       |
| Cockscomb                | Plume grass       |
| Dock--pink, green, brown | Queen Anne's lace |
| Dusty miller             | Sage              |
| Everlastings             | Straw flowers     |
| Gaillardia               | Yarrow            |
| Globe thistle            |                   |
| Goldenrod                |                   |
| Honesty                  |                   |

#### Sand and Borax Method - Cornmeal and Borax

Flowers that cannot be dried upside-down can be preserved by burying them in sand or borax. Clean, sharp shore sand is best, though that used by building contractors is nearly as good. Borax may leave a slight film that is difficult to remove from delicately textured flowers.

1. Be sure the sand is clean and dry. Damp sand will spot and spoil the flowers.
2. Use an ordinary cardboard carton large enough to hold several flowers. Put several thicknesses of newspaper in the bottom for more strength and pour in the sand to a depth of about four inches.

3. Strip flowers of all foliage and cut stems to the desired length. Short stems can be lengthened later with wire.
4. Stand the flowers upside down, placing their heads so that they do not touch each other and pour sand gently over them. When the large flowers are partly covered, the spaces in between can be used for smaller ones. Continue to pour on sand until the flowers are buried. It is not necessary to completely cover the stems, as most stems dry fairly easily in air. Be sure there is sand between each petal and in the trumpets of flowers like the daffodil and lily.
5. If the flower is spike-shaped (like the coral-bells or bleeding-heart) or pyramidal (like the lilac), lay them lengthwise in the box and cover them gently with sand.
6. When they are thoroughly dried, brush off the sand with a soft brush or tissue, and pack them in boxes.
7. Label each box with the name of the flowers it contains and store them in a cool dark place for at least two weeks--longer if necessary.
8. If borax is used, be sure it is not lumpy--it may be necessary to sift it.
9. Flowers that dry well in sand or borax include:

|                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Asters             | Day lily           |
| Balloon-flower     | Geranium           |
| Balsam             | Gladiolus          |
| Bleeding heart     | Gloriosa daisy     |
| Butterfly bush     | Iris               |
| Candytuft          | Lilac              |
| Canterbury bells   | Lily               |
| Carnations (pinks) | Lily-of-the-valley |
| Chrysanthemum      | Loosestrife        |
| Coleus leaves      | Liatris            |
| Columbine          | Lupine             |
| Coneflower         | Painted daisy      |
| Coral bells        | Pansies            |
| Coreopsis          | Peony              |
| Cornflower         | Rose               |
| Cosmos             | Shasta daisy       |
| Daffodils          | Stock              |
| Dahlias            | Snapdragons        |
| Delphinium         | Tulip              |
| Dandelion          | Zinnias            |

10. Experiment with the materials you select.

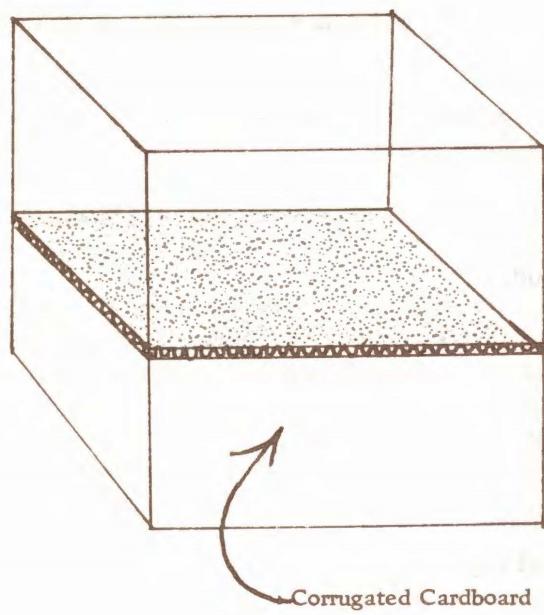
Silica Gel Method (follow the directions on the can)

This is a chemical compound that is expensive, but the results are good. However, do not feel that it is a necessity for drying, because the other methods are also good. (Silica gel can usually be purchased from a florist.)

If you decide to use silica gel, the minimum amount you should buy would be five pounds. Ten or 15 pounds will be better if you are drying many flowers. This will last a long time. Use it for flowers only; preserve foliage in other ways.

Silica gel is made from two sizes of the gel, a fine mesh that is white and a coarser mesh that is blue. When the blue fades to white or turns pink, it indicates that the gel has absorbed moisture. The gel cannot be used again until the moisture is removed. To do this, place it in a shallow pan in the oven at 300°F until the blue color returns. Put it in an airtight container and seal at once; allow it to cool before reusing.

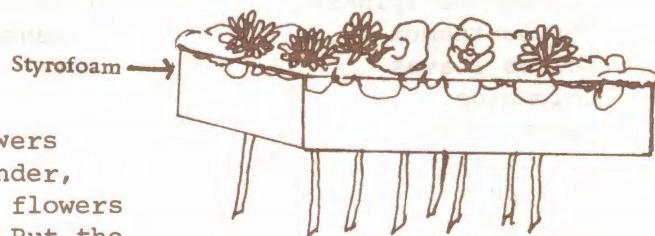
One way to use silica gel is to get an airtight container; cut a strip of corrugated cardboard about 3 inches wide to fit inside and around the lower part of the container.



Cut a piece of styrofoam (2-inch thickness) to fit the inside of the container and rest its edges on the corrugated cardboard. Place a thin layer of cotton over the styrofoam.

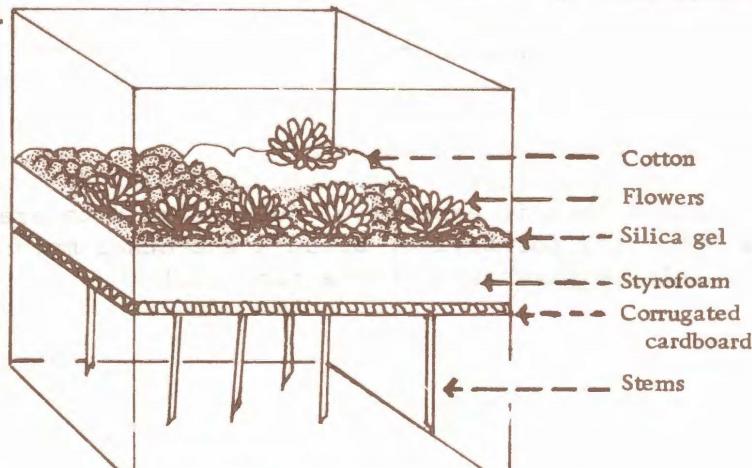
Punch holes in the styrofoam and cotton with a skewer, ice pick, or similar object so that the flower stems can go straight through it. The heads of the flowers will rest on the top of the cotton.

The cotton prevents the silica gel from falling through the holes. Pull the stems of the flowers through the styrofoam, but the heads of the flowers should not touch the cotton.



Place the styrofoam, cotton, and flowers in the container. Pour the silica gel under, around, and between the petals until the flowers are lightly but not completely covered. Put the lid on the container. Be sure that it is airtight. The container can then be sealed with masking tape.

When the flowers have dried, pour the silica gel off and remove the flowers. The stems will not dry as rapidly as the flowers; therefore hang them up until the stems are dry.



Cross section showing:  
Corrugated cardboard, styrofoam,  
cotton, stems, silica gel, and flowers.

Glycerin for Foliages

This method is successful with most foliages.

1. Wash the leaves or branches in water to remove all dust and dirt. Select only perfect specimens.
2. Cut off lower inch of stem to remove the air bubble which prevents the easy flow of liquid.
3. Stand the stems upright in a can or jar of glycerin solution, using one part glycerin and two parts water. Some heavy leaves (such as magnolia) require a half-and-half mixture.
4. Leave the materials in solution until full absorption has taken place. The leaves will change color, and when the color is the same all the way to the edge, it means the leaf has absorbed all of the liquid possible. This usually takes two to three weeks.
5. Some low-growing plants absorb moisture through their leaves and with these it is better to submerge completely and to use a half-and-half-solution. Galax, lily-of-the-valley, and ivy foliages fall into this class.
6. Good air circulation is necessary and it is best to use this method during hot weather, so that the foliages will absorb the solution quickly. Leaves should be wiped occasionally with a cloth dampened in the solution. This helps check drying before the glycerin has reached the leaf edge.
7. Glycerin changes the colors of some leaves more than others--depending on the variety, the stage of maturity, and the length of time left in solution. Barberry gathered in early spring will turn a bright red; in the fall, it will turn brown. If gathered early, beech, crab-apple, plum and forsythia will retain their natural color. With some leaves (flowering plum is a good example) a few drops of red cake coloring added to the solution will result in a glossy, red color.
8. If the leaves get droopy, it means they have been left in the solution too long. Wipe them off, tie a string around their stems and hang them upside down. This will usually restore them.
9. Before storing in boxes, wipe the leaves thoroughly with a soft cloth to remove excess moisture. Label the boxes and check them frequently to be sure there is no leakage from the leaves, because this will cause them to mold.
10. Leaves that will take the glycerin solution well, include:

Aspidistra

Barberry

Beech

Bergenia

Birch

Canna

Coral bells

Forsythia

Galax

Geranium

Huckleberry

Iris

Ivy

Lily-of-the-valley

Magnolia

Peach

Plum

Poplar

Privet

Yucca

### Other Materials, Other Methods

Grasses such as pampas, sorghum, millet, and others can serve well as tall floor bouquets. These can be dried in curves or straight. If tied onto a curved wire hanger, they will dry in any curve you make. Place in a dark, warm, dry place to dry.

### Tinting and Dyeing

Natural colors can usually be preserved so that tinting is not often needed. When color is desired for corn tassels, magnolia seed pods, etc., they can be dipped in hot dye and hung to dry. Dried Queen Anne's lace may be dipped in food coloring and water. Flat paint can be brushed on money plant, a spray paint can be obtained from florists.

### Storing Dried Flowers

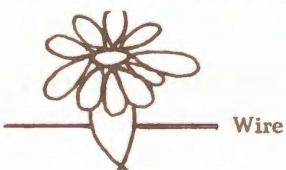
Dried flowers should be stored in a dry place. Keep them in darkness until you are ready to use them in arrangements. Dried flowers can be left in shoe boxes.

### Making Dried Arrangements

Use the same principles in arranging dry flowers as you do in arranging fresh ones.

For line or mass arrangements, establish the line or outline. Next, place large flowers or flower clusters toward the front as a focal point, then fill in the space between. Allow several leaves and some of the flowers to extend over the front edge of the container so that its line is broken.

If you have some flowers with short stems or practically no stems at all, the flowers can be wired and the wires covered with green florist tape. Toothpicks, florist picks, and florist tape can all be aids in working with dried arrangements. Visit the florist shop and note the mechanical aids or improvise, using what you have. This makes your experience more fun.



### Containers for Dried Arrangements

Since dried materials need no water, you may use a flat tray, a disc of wood or metal, a fiber or bamboo mat, or a slab of wood. Baskets seem especially suitable for casual arrangements of rather simple materials, especially when the baskets are made of plant materials.

The search for containers may be a life-long hobby that never loses its appeal. This search takes one to gift shops, department stores, potters' studios, second hand stores, junkyards, and to the ocean and mountains. Sometimes this hunting is a fascinating adventure and the rewards are rich.

In making effective decorative use of flower arrangements, placement is an important consideration, and one too often overlooked. Much attention is given to styles of arrangement, and to the types of flowers and plants which might be selected. But before either of these is considered, thought should be given to where an arrangement is to be placed. This will determine its shape, its components, and its colors. Your decision might be to mass flowers in gay profusion, or call attention to a single blossom in the Oriental manner. Some situations call for feminine arrangements, others need bold and dramatic ones. Once you know where yours will go, you can decide what its character and components should be. Not all flowers are born with flattering foliage. They can be made lovelier and more dramatic by arranging them against a setting of handsome contrasting foliage. If figurines and accessories are used to highlight the theme, they should conform to the basic design. Dare to be different; use flowers around your rooms in unusual ways. Just as you need the proper equipment for good cooking results, you will need the right tools for professional looking flower arrangements.

A little trouble and interest in this touch for your home is very rewarding. Rejoice in the fact that flower arrangements are one of the best and least costly means of having fun with design. The more creatively the design is put together, the more fascinating its contribution will be to the room. It is so much fun to decorate your home with materials you have combined and arranged, especially those you have grown in your own garden.

#### Joy Items To Make From Dried Flowers

##### Old English Potpourri

While gathering flowers to be dried, perhaps you might like to use the leftover or less graceful blossoms for a potpourri. Roses are the most popular flower for this purpose, but lavender, lemon verbena, and rose geranium all work well. After drying about 15 ounces of petals on a screen or newspaper in a dry, sunless, warm place (about ten days), mix in the following ingredients from a pharmacy: orris root (13 ounces), oil of rose (1/8 ounce), oil of rose geranium (1/4 ounce), oil of sandalwood (1/8 ounce), oil of bergamot (1/2 ounce), tincture of musk (1/2 ounce), yellow sandalwood in chips (1 ounce). Allow to mellow for about six weeks in a tightly covered container, then place in crystal bottles. The delightful fragrance will last for years.

##### Painting With Petals (Use left-over flowers)

Flower painting, also called local color painting, is a popular new hobby. Flower paintings are made by using the juices of flowers and other parts of plants to color landscapes and other outdoor scenes.

It is easy and fun. The materials--a drawing pad, felt-tip pen, some plants, and a rag for hand wiping--are easy to get and inexpensive.

Here Is How To Do It: Pick an outdoor spot and select a variety of plant materials. Then test the colors they make on the back of the drawing pad. Decide which plants produce the colors you want to use, and collect several handfuls of each kind. It is best to use only two or three colors for each picture.

Now make a fairly large sketch of the scene with a felt-tip pen. The shapes of hills or a shoreline will usually work well. Do not put in many small details.

Now you can add color to your picture. You will have to grind the plant juices in with heavy pressure. Almost every stroke will take a complete petal or leaf.

You can get interesting results by putting the color on unevenly. It is best to let some of the white of the paper show through. You might try putting one color over another, but you will have to wait for the first color to dry. Also, try leaving small particles of the plant right on your paper to give a textured effect.

There are many different kinds of plants which will work very well. Dandelion petals make beautiful yellow skies. Mixtures of mud and moss will make interesting hills while roses and geraniums give vivid colors.

Plants do not always produce the colors you will expect them to. American Beauty roses, which are red, make a purple color. Part of the fun will be experimenting with new color effects.

You will have to remember, however, that waxy leaves and flowers will not work well because they do not have enough moisture.

When your flower paintings are completed, the paper will be rather wet from the plant juices. To keep your picture from wrinkling as it dries, you will need to put it overnight between sheets of newspaper, and place it under a stack of books or some other weights.

You can use flower paintings to decorate your room, or as gifts for friends. You can also make flower paintings for Christmas cards. Flower paintings are, also, an excellent way to remember the places you visit on a vacation trip.

There are many books on dried flowers. You might want to check out what is available at your local library and creative design centers.

This publication is to start you on a fun experience for learning elements and principles of art.

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