



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension



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Drying Flowers: What You Need to Know

Whole books are available on the subject of drying and preserving flowers. Chapters are devoted to considerations of color, time of year for collecting, the many types of materials which can be dried, ideas for arrangements, etc. If this is an activity that you would like to spend a number of sessions on, or if you enjoy the subject, check your local library for more information.



There are many ways to dry and preserve flowers. Outlined here is one of the methods: air drying. Using this technique, many different materials can be selected to give a rich array of effects. When looking at dried materials, you'll find an unlimited diversity of size, form, texture and color. Statice alone offers a wide range of colors, including white, yellow, red-violet, blue-violet and blue. Strawflowers, baby's-breath, roses and chrysanthemums are garden flowers that dry well.

Joe-pye weed is a dusty pink flower that can be easily collected along roadsides. Airy grass "heads" are attractive in arrangements. Carefully collected and dried leafy materials will also provide a bounty of shades of green, yellow and brown. There are many, many materials to choose from. After you have dried flowers, they can be used in making dried arrangements.

Advance Preparation

Before beginning this activity, you will need flowers and plants for drying. Whether you purchase from a florist, cut plants from a garden, or collect wildflowers, your material should be in the best possible condition you can manage! The best time to pick is on a sunny afternoon when plant parts contain the least amount of moisture. Also, harvest flowers just before they have fully opened, since they will continue to mature after they have been cut. And if some of the flowers you pick are fully opened, it will be okay, too. Place them in water right away to avoid wilting. You can take them out of the water when you're ready to begin drying them.



After a flower is cut, strip all the foliage from the stem to help speed drying. You can easily do this by holding the stem just below the bloom and running your gloved hand down the stem (see picture below). Participants may enjoy this part of the activity; many people enjoy wearing gardening or work gloves. This does take two hands, but if this poses a problem, two participants can work together on a single stem -- one person carefully holding the stem right

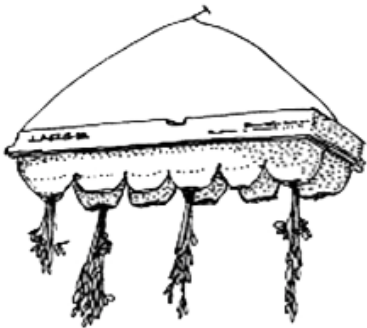
Materials Needed

- Flowers (and leaves, if you like)
- For harvesting: sharp shears, a sharp knife, work or garden gloves to protect your hands, vase or pail of water
- Styrofoam egg cartons, one for each participant.
- Paper clips for hanging, masking tape for name labels
- Spring-operated scissors for participants to use.
- "Banded scissors" for participants with weak grasps are lightweight scissors that close with a gentle squeeze and return to the open position with a built-in spring. These scissors are shown in many therapeutic catalogs.

below the flower-head, the other person gently removing the leaves. Be aware that drying can take 1 to 4 weeks, depending on how much moisture is present in the flowers at harvest, and the humidity of the room in which the material is drying. In addition to flowers and leaves, interesting seed pods (honesty and poppy), fruits (small wild crabapple and dogwood), and grasses (wheat, oats, and foxtail) can be found. Use your imagination!

The Air Drying Method

Air drying is the simplest and oldest method of drying flowers, but not all flowers respond well to air drying. Flowers with low moisture content, such as strawflowers, yarrow, statice, globe amaranth, and celosia are best suited to this method of drying. There is also an abundance of wild flowers and plants that air-dry well, such as golden rod, Joe-pye weed and common dock. Drying methods depend on whether you are doing it by yourself, or including participants. The simplest technique to use is hanging the flowers upside down. Tie the flower stems securely in bunches, 10 to 20 stems per bunch. As stems lose their moisture they shrink; elastic bands or twist ties are better at holding stems together than strings. Attach the tied bunches to a drying line, rack, or nails. If space is a problem, the bunches can be hung on a vertical drying line, leaving enough room in between each bunch.



If you are including participants who have problems with dexterity, tying the flower stems with elastic bands or twist ties may be difficult for them. Instead, try this. Mark an 'X' in magic marker on the base of each compartment in an egg carton. Then cut along the 'X' with a single-edged razor blade or exacto knife. Have participants poke the flower stems individually into the holes, then hang to dry.

Any warm, dry, well-ventilated place will do for the drying process. After drying, store in covered cardboard boxes in a dry place until you are ready to use them.

Some plant materials, such as baby's breath, Chinese lantern, golden rod, Joe-pye weed, cattails, common dock and many grasses dry very well in an upright position in jars or vases. The leaves of cattails and grasses can be left on. They will turn and curl, forming interesting lines in the arrangements of the dried flowers.

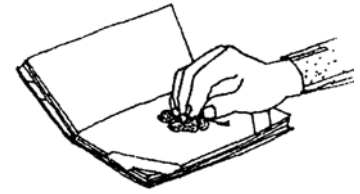
This time of year, look for roses, peonies, lavender, violets, pinks, delphiniums, baby's breath, and bee-balm, as well as many annual flowers such as pansies and statice.

Going One Step Further

To go further with this activity, you can make dried arrangements or simple posies.



Another method you can try involves pressing the flowers in a book to dry.



Tape the pages of the book to hold them in place and mark where the flower is to be pressed, then carefully place the flower flat on the pages, face down.



Close the book, and in a few weeks the flower will dry out and be beautifully pressed. This works especially well for flowers with showy petals.