

Drying and Pressing Flowers

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We love the garden colors at this time of the year; those perfectly shaped pink roses, that huge Joe Pye weed, the colors in the ornamental grass heads, and even the seed pods of our Love in A Mist.

But of course, it will not last as we enter the fall and winter months. But if you enjoy the fun of drying and pressing plant material you can still preserve much of the color of gardening for a long time. This isn't a new idea. Dried bouquets have been found in tombs that are more than 2000 years old, showing us that the use of flowers at memorials began long ago. The bouquets were faded but still intact. The oldest dated collection of pressed flowers collected from 1699-1702 include 300 native and cultivated species from the island of Gotland, an island province of Sweden.

It's time to get started with some tips to help guide you, and we begin by discussing air drying. Gathering time is in the afternoon. Our plants are moist in the mornings but by afternoon a bit of the drying has already begun for you. You can dry anything, but you could have mixed results. Snip flowers when they are in bud stage or barely open. Fully opened blooms might fall apart. Colors can change slightly too. Experiment for what pleases you.

Find the best place to hang. A dark closet, the garage or maybe the basement will work. Dark and dry are the keys. Cut what you want to dry and use a rubber band to secure them in a little bundle. Do not use string because as the plants dry, they shrink and will fall out. Cut a wire, create a bend at one end, slide under the rubber band, and create another bend at the other end of the wire and hang them up.

A curtain rod will work for hanging but there are other ideas you could use. Consider suspending something from the ceiling, such as a piece of bed springs that fit the area. It will hold a lot of bundles of flowers.

There are other means of drying flowers, especially if you just want the bloom itself. It is called silica and is the same substance you see in those little packets found in merchandise such as new purses, shoes, etc. It is used to keep moisture from damaging items, but it can also be very good for drying blooms. It can be purchased in large bags, and after use can be spread out on a flat pan to dry and use again. It can be used for years. Nestle the head of your flower, right side up, into the silica, and begin mounding around the outside of it and gently fill between the petals. Completely cover the whole flower with silica. This means of drying produces a papery feel, a silk look, and keeps the flower in the same shape you began with.

Pressing flowers can be a fun activity for the kids as well as you. The same rule about gathering in the afternoon applies to flowers used for pressing. Don't stop at just flowers but include leaves

as well. It is great to have a flower press, but an old book works well also if you put weights on top of it. It would be easy to construct your own press using scrap lumber and drilling some holes in each corner for the wing nuts to hold it all together.

A caution about collecting in the wild. We are writing about your garden, but of course there is a lot of nature out there. Be aware of private property or government land and parks. Always ask permission.

The flowers you hung to dry can be used for bouquets, wreaths, or swags. Your pressed flowers can be used for homemade cards or framed for wall art. There are many sites online, instruction on YouTube and our local library has much information also. If pressing flowers becomes a passion for you, check out www.helenahpornsiri.com to see the art this woman creates. And as always, if you have questions, feel free to ask our Master Gardener clinic.