



Bringing the Beauty in

Fall can be a difficult time those of us who love being surrounded by plants and nature. But there are ways, other than bringing containers inside, to bring the beauty indoors and make it last.

To dry flowers, grasses or other plants for later use, collect them on a cool morning after dew has dried or in the early evening. Many plants will wilt if they are collected on hot days, and the flower shape and/or color will be ruined. Stripping leaves from the stem will help reduce drying time.

To make handling easier, arrange the stems, cut them somewhat longer than desired length and bind them with a rubber band while you are gathering them. Binding them with a rubber band will tighten around shrinking stems as they begin to dry. It's best to keep the bundles relatively small so air can move between the stems. Then hang them upside down, to keep the stems and heads straight, from a string or twist-tie on a nail.

The best color results from drying them quickly at 105-110° F. They will dry best in a warm, well-ventilated area away from direct sunlight, possibly a garage or shed. Keeping doors or windows open will provide better air movement during the drying process; running a fan is another way to increase air flow and reduce the drying time. The plants are dry when stems snap easily. This can take up to three weeks. Once plants are completely dry, they can be stored in a large box or remain hanging somewhere out of the way. Everlastings should not need to be sprayed with a fixative if they are picked at the right time.

Sturdy or abundant plants like grasses, branches, seedheads and seedpods are wonderful for drying. They're also tough enough and visually strong enough to be used in outdoor containers on decks, patios or porches. They can be displayed with pumpkins, potted mums or ornamental cabbage in fall and later with evergreens through the entire winter.

Tips for Harvesting

Some plants dry easily, while others will fade or shatter if picked too late. The best rule of thumb is to experiment on a number of different flowers at different stages to find the best time to pick. Below are some general rules for harvesting plants to best retain their shape and color.

- Some flowers open after picking, so it's best to pick them in bud form just as the first set of petals is beginning to open (strawflower, globe thistle, beebalm, chives, rose).
- Some contract after picking and are best harvested as the center buds open and the sides are just beginning to open (tansy, ageratum, feverfew, calendula).
- Flowers that remain the same after picking can be picked fully open before color begins to fade (yarrow, gomphrena, statice, cockscomb).
- Hydrangea blossoms are best cut after they have dried on the branches in fall. Simply cut the blossoms, remove foliage and hang them upside down.
- Spiky flowers are best picked when only half of the length of the spike is in flower and has not yet begun to fade (salvia, goldenrod, larkspur, gayfeather).
- Seedpods should be collected soon after they mature so they don't shatter while drying or in an arrangement.
- Grasses can be harvested when the seedheads are ripe and stems are still green.

Plants for Harvesting

Annuals: calendula, cockscomb, dusty miller, globe amaranth, larkspur, statice, strawflower, sweet Annie.

Perennials: artemisia 'Silver King', beebalm, black-eyed susan, cattails (collected when they first turn brown), feverfew, gayfeather, globe thistle, goldenrod, pearly everlasting, sea holly, sea lavender, sunflowers, tansy, yarrow.

Seed pods: love-in-a-mist, *Baptisia*, poppy, prairie coneflowers, St. John's wort, sumac.

Ornamental grasses: Indiangrass, switchgrass, sand lovegrass, ravenna grass, big bluestem, maiden grass.