

Summer Gathering for a Winter's Day

BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES

Many gardeners plant “everlastings,” flowers and herbs that maintain their color and form when dried, specifically with the idea of using them in craft projects. Included in wreaths or other displays, they extend the beauty of summer’s bloom. There are many plants that hold their shape and color well, from the deep yellow of yarrow to the vibrant purples of statice and gomphrena.

Most everlastings can be dried simply by hanging them in a warm, well-ventilated area out of direct sunlight for about three weeks. Plants are dry when the stems snap easily.

Ornamental grass seedheads, leaves and seedpods also dry well. They can be displayed with pumpkins, gourds and potted mums in fall and with evergreen boughs, ribbons and other plants for winter. When dried properly, grasses will last all through the season without deteriorating.



Drying Flowers

It’s best to collect flowers on cool mornings, after the dew dries. Many plants will wilt if collected on hot days, often ruining their shape and color. Stripping the leaves from the stem helps reduce the drying time. Seedpods should be collected soon after they mature to prevent them from shattering while drying or in the arrangement.

Arrange the stems and bind them with a rubber band while you are collecting to make handling much easier. Branches that are tied with a rubber band will accommodate the shrinking stems as they dry. Keep the bundles relatively small so the drying air can move between the stems. Then hang them upside down so they will dry with the stems and heads straight rather than bent.

The best color is retained when plants are dried quickly at 105-110 F. Using a fan can increase the air flow and reduce the drying time. A garage or shed is probably the most convenient location to dry flowers. If possible leave the door or windows open to provide some air movement during the drying process.

After they are completely dry you can store them in a large box or hang them in a dry area out of the way. In general there is no need to spray everlastings with a fixative if they are picked at the right time.

Tips for Harvesting

Some flowers will fade or shatter if picked too late. The best rule of thumb is to experiment on a number of different flowers and blooming stages each year to find out the best time to pick. Here’s a few tips:

- For flowers that open after picking—strawflower, globe thistle, beebalm, chives, rose—pick buds as soon as the first set of petals opens.
- The clusters of flowers that contract after picking—tansy, ageratum, feverfew, calendula—should be picked as the center buds open and sides are just beginning to open.
- Flowers that remain the same after picking—yarrow, gomphrena, statice, cockscomb—can be picked when fully open but before the color begins to fade.
- Hydrangeas are best cut August-October when they are somewhat dry and begin to feel papery. They should be gathered on dry rather than rainy days and the heavy blossoms should be hung upside down to avoid bending the stems.
- Spike-type flowers—salvia, goldenrod, larkspur, gayfeather—can be picked when half developed, but before the bottom begins to fade.
- Grasses can be cut when the seedheads are fully ripe but while the stems are still green.

Plants not mentioned above that dry well include: Artemisia, black-eyed Susan, globe thistle, sea lavender, sunflower. Some of the best seed pods are: love-in-a-mist, Baptisia, beebalm, milkweed, penstemon, poppy, coneflower, Siberian iris, hibiscus and sumac.

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