



Design for Everyday Living

preserving flowers for year-round use

compiled by
Clifford W. Collier, Jr.
Extension Specialist
Landscape Architecture
and
Eleanor Glenn—Advisor
State Program Leader for Women (Retired)

Preserving flowers for year-round use has been an artistic form of expression for decades and there are many methods by which flowers, foliage, grasses, seed pods, etc., may be preserved. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages and only through practice, and trial and error will the individual discover the method that suits him best.

HANGING TO DRY

Air drying is one of the easiest methods of preserving seed pods and flowers and involves no expense. Simply tie the flowers in loose bunches and hang upside down until they are dry. A warm, dark room is the best. One to three weeks may be required for complete drying.

BORAX

The use of borax for preserving flowers has an advantage in that the flowers hold their shape and shrinkage is minimal. Generally the color of the flowers is assured except pinks and reds may vary. Time is of the essence, however. If the flowers remain in borax too long, they become brittle and lose their petals.

Generally, a mixture of half borax and half corn meal (white or yellow), sand or oat meal is recommended. The mixtures may be sifted and the borax used over and over. Some experts use a 1 to 5 and still others a 1 to 10 mixture. Experimenting will be necessary to suit individual techniques and preferences. Apply the same method as when sand is used. Lift the flowers from the borax mixture by gently running the hand under the flowers.

The individual must decide whether the flowers should be dried face-up, face-down, or horizontally. The form or shape of the flowers will determine the best method.

Drying face-up: Use a shallow box propped up over another carton about 8 inches high. Punch holes in the box large enough for the stems to go through and far enough apart that the flower heads do not touch. (The stems do not need to be very long as they may be lengthened by florist wire.)

Draw the flower stems through the holes, leaving the flowers face-up resting gently on the bottom of the top box. Sift the borax/meal mixture under and between all the petals and around each flower until it is completely, but lightly covered.

Drying facedown and horizontally: Cover the bottom of a box with an inch or more of the borax/meal mixture. Make little mounds in the mixture on which to place the flowers. Sift more meal and borax around the flower until it is covered. (Stems do not need to be covered.) Place only one layer in each box.

When the flower petals are dry, they may be removed from the mixture. Occasionally test one flower head to see how it is drying. When dry remove all the meal and borax with a soft brush.

SAND DRYING

Fine white sand, such as that found on the seashore, is the best. Use a cardboard box with holes in the bottom. Cover the bottom with newspaper and place one-half inch of sand in the box. Place the flowers face-down, stems and foliage in the box and cover with additional sand. 7 to 10 days will be required. Then punch holes in the bottom of the box and let the sand drain. Do not pull the flowers from the sand as the petals and foliage may be destroyed.

Sand from the river and beach should be washed and baked in the oven until dry. This should be done twice. Fine builders sand is cheap and may be used without additional preparation.

GLYCERIN

For foliage: a mixture of 1 part glycerin and 2 parts water is generally recommended. Heat the water and then add the glycerin. Place the stems in the hot mixture for quicker results. Branches may

be any length. Pull back the bark and crush the base of the stems about 4 to 6 inches. Place the branch ends in the solution 4 to 6 inches deep as soon as they are cut. Branches should be allowed to remain in the solution 2 to 6 weeks. The foliage should then last indefinitely.

Most foliage preserved by glycerin will turn brown but will remain pliable. Some leaves if cut green will retain their color if they are removed from the glycerin within 24 to 36 hours. Cake coloring may be added to the solution to obtain a green, red-brown or yellow-brown color.

PRESSING

Placing fragile flowers and foliage between layers of newspapers and weighting to keep them flat is the best method, since newspapers are very absorbent.

Another method of pressing to maintain a natural look is to collect branches at their peak of color and place them face down on five or six thicknesses of newspapers. Cover with the same amount of newspapers. Do not use too much weight but only enough to hold the papers and branches in place. Leave for 5 to 10 days. The foliage should last indefinitely.

OVEN DRYING

Place one inch of sand in the bottom of a shallow pan and place the flowers on the sand. Completely cover the plants with additional sand and place in an oven one to two hours. The oven should be set at its lowest reading.

SHELLACKING

Shellac is used to hold berries and seed pods to their branches and twigs. The shellac may be applied with a brush or spray or dipped into the shellac and then hung to dry. Clear shellac thinned with denatured alcohol gives the best results.

COMMERCIAL PREPARATIONS

There are special preparations such as Flower-Dri, especially made for drying flowers. These are generally sand-like materials with a great moisture absorbing capacity. Although they are expensive, most experts consider these materials the best to use as the drying process is fast and the natural colors are preserved.

OTHER METHODS

There are many other materials that may be used for drying flowers such as using detergents. They may be used alone or mixed with corn meal at the rate of 1 part detergent and 2 parts corn meal. Kitty litter is also very absorbent and light in weight and may be used by applying the same techniques used for sand or borax methods of drying.

There are many other materials that may be used and each individual may want to experiment with using materials around the home. Their only requirement is that they be very absorbent, such as blotters or paper towels.

Although it sounds odd, sometimes plants may be dried in water. The tip end of the stem is crushed and placed in about one inch of water. The branch or stem remains in the container until the water evaporates.

TIPS FOR COLLECTING MATERIAL

A wealth of material for drying exists around the home, in parks, and along roadsides. They may be cultivated flowers or those considered as weeds. Each will have a particular characteristic which will qualify them for use in dried arrangements.

1. Keep alert to materials the year around.
2. Look for varying shapes, colors and textures. Be especially aware of unusual shapes or curved lines.
3. Obtain flowers at different stages of growth and bloom; that is, some while still in bud from partially open and those in full flower. (Flowers dry best when cut at the peak of bloom.)

GENERAL TIPS ON DRYING

1. Begin drying plants immediately after cutting. Do not put them into water unless they must be kept fresh in transit.
2. Be sure all moisture is removed from drying agent before using.
3. Pick flowers and foliage when they are dry. Do not pick after a rain or when dew is on the plant.
4. Flowers being dried should be kept in an air tight container.
5. Store dried material in a dark, dry, air tight container. A plastic spray makes material resistant to moisture as well as minimizes the possibility of their coming apart.
6. Wire flowers before drying.
7. Do not dry or store flowers in the sun because they will lose their color.
8. When using borax, sand, detergents or commercial preparations and drying the flowers face-down, insert a long pin, such as an upholstery or corsage pin, through the center of the flower. The head of the pin should rest gently on the bottom of the box, extending through the drying medium. This will keep the flowers from having a flat appearance.

LIST OF PLANTS AND TREATMENTS

Below is a list of plants which may be preserved and the recommended treatments for each. This list is by no means complete but it does give instructions on how some specific plants may be treated and can serve as a guide for preserving similar plants not listed. These are not the only methods but are the methods used by those experienced in preserving flowers. It should be noted that the plants are listed according to the names by which they are most commonly known, whether they are common or botanical names.

PLANT	TREATMENT	REMARKS
Ageratum	Borax - 4 days	
Althaea	Commercial preparation	Cut when green
Apple	Seed pods: hang to dry Foliage: glycerin - 4 to 7 days	Watch continually
Anemone	Sand	Fragile; handle with care
Asters	Borax Singles - 5 days Doubles - 10 days	
Astilbe	Borax - 4 days Hang to dry	
Baby's Breath	Hang to dry	
Baptisia	Foliage: glycerin - 6 days Flowers: hang to dry Pods: shellac	
Barberry (B. julianne)	Glycerin - 4 days	Turns a warm brown; remove thorns before treatment
Bayberry	Foliage: glycerin - 4 days	
Bells of Ireland	Borax - 4 days	Cut when lower bells begin to turn; turns ivory to brown when dried. Remove corallas and leaves; run Elmer's glue along stalk before drying; remove immature tips as they may shrivel
	Hang to dry Glycerin - 2 to 3 days	
Beech	Foliage: glycerin - 3 to 10 days	Green cake coloring added to glycerin will keep greenness Length of treatment will depend on color preferred—they change from green to brown; treat after leaves start to turn for lighter shade; cut green and remove from glycerin in 24 to 36 hours and foliage will remain green
Bittersweet	Berries: shellac	Should be dried in water to prevent excessive shrinkage and to keep longer. Shellac improves their appearance.
Black-eyed Susan	Sand	
Bleeding Heart	Foliage: press	
Blackberry Lily	Fruit: shellac Hang to dry	
	Flowers: borax, sand	
Boxwood	Glycerin - 4 days Upright in water	
Butterfly Weed	Sand	Difficult to dry; interesting seed pods
Carnations	Commercial preparation	Difficult to dry
Castor Beans	Stalks & seed pod: hang to dry	A light coat of shellac will aid in securing the pods to the stems. Foliage may be sheared to give an oriental appearance; dry in tops of mason jars.

PLANT	TREATMENT	REMARKS
Cattails	Hang to dry - 1 to 3 weeks	Spray with shellac or hair lacquer; let dry on stems and cut later
Chinese Lantern	Hang to dry	If picked green, they will remain green
Chrysanthemums	Sand Borax - 7 to 10 days	Not all chrysanthemums are satisfactory for drying
Christmas Rose	Borax - 5 days	Wire stems before drying
Clematis (<i>C. paniculata</i>)	Flowers: borax - 5 days Seed pods: glycerin - 24 hours or stand up to dry	Large flowers are difficult to treat; glue petals to stem before drying Seed pods are most interesting
Clover (red)	Hang to dry	
Cockscomb	Hang to dry - 1 to 3 weeks	If damp, stand upright to dry then hang upside down in dark location; keep out of light after drying
Coleus	Borax - 5 days	
Columbine	Hang to dry	Cut when green
Coneflower	Sand	
Coral Bells	Flowers: borax or press	Wild varieties are the most desirable
Cornflower (small)	Borax - 5 days	
Corn	Hang ears to dry Tassel: cut when dry	Pick when mature and pull back husks; pick from corn stalk when dry
Daffodils	Borax - 3 days average	Remove stems when treating; store in de-moist crystals
Daisies	Upside down in borax Field daisy - 3 days Shasta - 6 days Gloriosa - 5 days Gerber - 5 days	Cone-like center of flower may be used after drying
Dahlias	Borax: small flowers - 5 days large flowers - 10 days	Place shredded waxed paper between some of the petals; use corsage pins if dried face-down
Delphinium	Sand Borax - spikes, 5 days florets, 3 days	
Dogwood	Bracts: borax - 4 days Foliage: glycerin - 7 to 10 days	
Dock	Hang to dry or pick dry	Changes color in different stages of growth Pick in September
Dusty Miller	Hang to dry	
Euonymus	Foliage: glycerin E. elatus - 5 days Others - longer Berries - shellac	
False Dragon Head	Borax - 3 to 5 days Hang to dry	
Ferns	Press	For curves lay on a flat surface and let dry naturally
Fennel	Hang to dry	Bright green and feathery
Feverfew	Borax - 3 days	Dry upside-down
Firethorn	Berries: dry in water shellac	Remove foliage when treating
Forsythia	Foliage: glycerin Flowers: borax	Turns light to dark brown or purple-red

PLANT	TREATMENT	REMARKS
Gardenia	Foliage; glycerin	Turns an attractive black
Gladiolus	Sand	
Globe thistle	Commercial preparation Hang to dry	Cut before bracts have fully opened; allow some foliage to remain on the stem
Goldenrod	Hang to dry - 1 to 3 weeks Dry in water	Pick before upper florets open
Gourds	Dry in open mesh bag or sieve, turning occasionally	Pick before frost when stems turn brown; leave part of stem on gourd
Grains (wheats, oats, rye, etc.)	Hang to dry - 1 to 3 weeks	
Grasses	Hang to dry - 1 to 3 weeks	May be picked dry
Iris	Seed pods: shellac	
Hedge apple	Fruit: oven dry Air dry	Pick when green - slice like a tomato; will turn brown when dried in an oven; if hung in a warm location it will remain green when drying
Hollyhocks	Borax - 6 days	Becomes transparent - experiment
Honesty	Hang to dry	Allow to dry before removing outer covering of silver discs
Huckleberry	Foliage: glycerin - 7 to 10 days	
Hydrangea	Hang to dry - 1 to 3 weeks Borax - 4 days Cat Litter - 6 days Pick when dry	Peegee - pick in September Hills of Snow - July Pink and blue florists type - August or when blooms are cured on bush Oak Leaf - May or early June
Juniper	Glycerin - 7 to 10 days	
Lantana	Borax - 3 to 5 days	Colors may change
Larkspur	Hang to dry Borax - 4 days	
Laurel	Glycerin - 10 days	
Leucothoe	Glycerin - 10 days	
Ligustrum	Glycerin - 7 to 10 days, maybe longer	
Lilac	Hang to dry Borax - 3 weeks	
Lily	Seed pods: pull when dry	
Lily of the Valley	Flower: borax - 3 days Foliage: oven dry	Clean the foliage and bake in an oven at 250° for 15 minutes
Magnolia	Leaves: glycerin - 10 days to 6 weeks Flowers: borax - upside down	Pick flowers in buds
Mountain Ash	Seed pods: shellac	
Marigold	Fruit: hang to dry Borax - 7 to 10 days	Remove stems
Milkweed	Hang to dry Hang to dry	Cut when pale green and remove silk
+ Mullein	Rosettes: dry upright in jars	Place shredded paper between layers of leaves; very brittle after drying
Okra	Hang to dry	Cut before frost
Paulowiana Tree	Hang to dry	Seed pods: gather green and remove seed

+It has been reported that mullein and pampas grass may begin to char or burn when dried. Caution should be exercised when these plants are used in dried arrangements.

PLANT	TREATMENT	REMARKS
Pansy	Press Sand	Store in de-moist crystals
Passion Flower	Borax - 4 days	Interesting seed pods
Peony	Borax - 8 days Borax - 5 days Doubles - longer	
Pear	Foliage: glycerin - 7 days to 3 weeks	May turn black, cut from tree when green
Pine	Glycerin - 10 days	Cut from tree when green
Polygonum	Hang to dry	Cut before maturing; remove foliage
Poppies	Seed pods: hang to dry	Cut green or dry
Poplar (white)	Foliage: stand in a jar to dry	
Queen Anne's Lace	Press Borax - 5 days	Use hardware cloth over a box and drop stems through holes; leave until dry
Roses	Hang to dry Borax - 5 days Sand	Red roses not too satisfactory; singles and semi-singles best
	Commercial preparation (best)	Best when buds are half-open; lay buds horizontally and open flowers face-up
Rose hips	Shellac	
Rose of Sharon	See Althaea	
Russian Olive	Glycerin - 6 weeks	Leaves turn golden on top
Salvia	Borax - 4 days	Blue - fall blooms deeper in color
	Hang to dry	Red - turns pink or orange
Santolina	Hang to dry	Yellow flowers; silver or green foliage
Smoke Tree	Flowers: hang to dry	
Snapdragons	Florets: borax - 4 days	Dry each separately; wire florets before drying: difficult to dry
Statice	Hang to dry	
Stock	Borax - 4 days	
Strawflower	Hang to dry	Cut when flowers are half-open
Sugar Cane	Pods: hang to dry	
Sumac	Seed pods: hang to dry	
Sweet Gum	Hang to dry	Gather seed balls in November
Sycamore	Foliage: glycerin - 8 to 10 days	Pods, pick when green
Tansy	Hang to dry	
Teasel	Dry upright in jars	Sandpaper to remove thorns
	Pick when dry	
Thistle	Dry upright in jars	Sandpaper to remove thorns
Tulip	Borax - 6 days	Cut before fully open; use Elmer's Glue to secure petals before drying
	Commercial preparation	
	Pod: pick when dry	
Tulip Tree	Borax - dry face up	Pick flowers in bud
Viburnums	Foliage: glycerin - 3 to 5 days	
	Berries: shellac	
	Pick when dry	
Yucca	Leaves: glycerin - 5 to 7 days	Pick pods before frost
	Seed pods: hang to dry	
Yarrow	Borax - 5 days	
	Hang to dry	
	Pick when dry	
Water Lily	Borax - 10 days	
Zinnias	Borax - 6 days	Remove stems: colors change: yellow, coral whites and greens dry best; reds are not as satisfactory.
	Dry upside down in mixture	