

DRYING FLOWERS

Several garden flowers can be dried at home for use in floral arrangements and other craft projects. The methods described here work best on flowers that have been picked just before they reach maturity.

The easiest and least expensive way to dry flowers is to hang them upside down in bunches after removing the foliage. Stagger the lengths of the stems so that the flower heads don't touch. Choose a warm dark place with good air circulation. The flowers should dry in 2-3 weeks. This method works well for astilbe, baby's breath, butterfly weed, pot marigold, Chinese lantern, onions, globe thistle, money plant, larkspur, blue salvia, dusty miller, strawflowers, cattails, and goldenrods.

If the flowers wilt when hung upside down, dry them instead by burying them in silica-gel. Lay flowers face down on a bed of silica-gel, being careful not to bend the spikes. Carefully cover the blooms with the silica, sifting it between the petals. Check for dryness after about 10 days.

Flowers that do well with this method include asters, candytuft, gaillardia, carnations, coleus leaves, columbine, geranium, coreopsis, pansies, Shasta daisies, coral bells, delphinium, lily-of-the-valley, and larkspur.

To dry foliage, cut the lower 1 inch of stem off and stand the leaves upright in a jar of 1 part glycerin to 1 part water. Foliage will change to either its fall color or to brown, and is completely dry when the color change has reached the margin of the leaf. Cast-iron plant, barberry, beech, birch, cannas, coral bells, iris, Oregon grape, and yucca

Handle your dried flowers carefully, since they are very brittle. If the arrangement wilts in high humidity, placing it in a plastic bag with silica for a few days will perk them up.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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