

Dear Aggie, I want to preserve my fall flowers. How do I dry them?

Taking care of your garden flowers throughout the summer can be fun and after harvesting you may want to preserve your blooms for a long time. Placing the flowers in a vase gives them up to a 2-week lifespan, but have you ever considered drying the flowers in the fall to help them last longer? There are a few different methods for drying your own flowers: air drying, pressing, or using silica gel.

Before you start drying your flowers, you must know how to harvest them. Harvest in the morning when the dew has evaporated and before the sun is too strong. Some flowers can be cut before they fully bloom like roses, lavender, and strawflowers. While others you may want to wait until they are fully open, such as sunflowers. Most flowers should be cut at their peak bloom like gomphrena, statice, marigolds, and larkspurs. After their peak blooms, hydrangeas can be cut because they become papery and dry. Some people prefer to dry their flowers as seed pods; *Nigella* are often cut this way. It's important to note that each species can be harvested at different times!

Air drying is the easiest method. Be sure to pinch off the leaves as they can slow down the drying process and increase chances of rotting. Then cut the bouquet at the end of the stems at an even length. Double wrap the bottom of the stems tighter and tighter as they shrink. Then hang the blooms upside down out of direct sunlight. Place them in a well-ventilated area for a quicker drying process and to prevent rotting.

Pressed flowers can be picked on a dry day to reduce moisture. You can use a pressing kit with a book, placing the flower in between thick paper and cardboard, or you can place them in between wax or parchment paper to allow the flowers to dry quicker. Weigh a book down to keep the pressure on the flowers. Make sure all the flowers are dry and flat before using them for crafts.

Using silica gel can be beneficial for special flowers that are difficult to dry using the first two methods. Find a plastic container that's large enough to hold your flowers and fill the bottom of the container with 1 to 2 inches of silica. Place the flowers face up into the container and use more silica to fill the container. Make sure the flowers are completely covered. After the flowers have dried, you can gently brush off any silica dust.

Preserving your flowers through can be done in multiple ways. If you would like to know more about how to dry a specific flower, research the species, and find what method works best as each has different requirements. Drying your flowers can be worthwhile and you can use them in dried bouquets, resin products like ornaments and much more!

If you have questions about drying flowers, feel free to contact our local CCE Office at 315-788-8450 or Cierra Williams at clw247@cornell.edu.