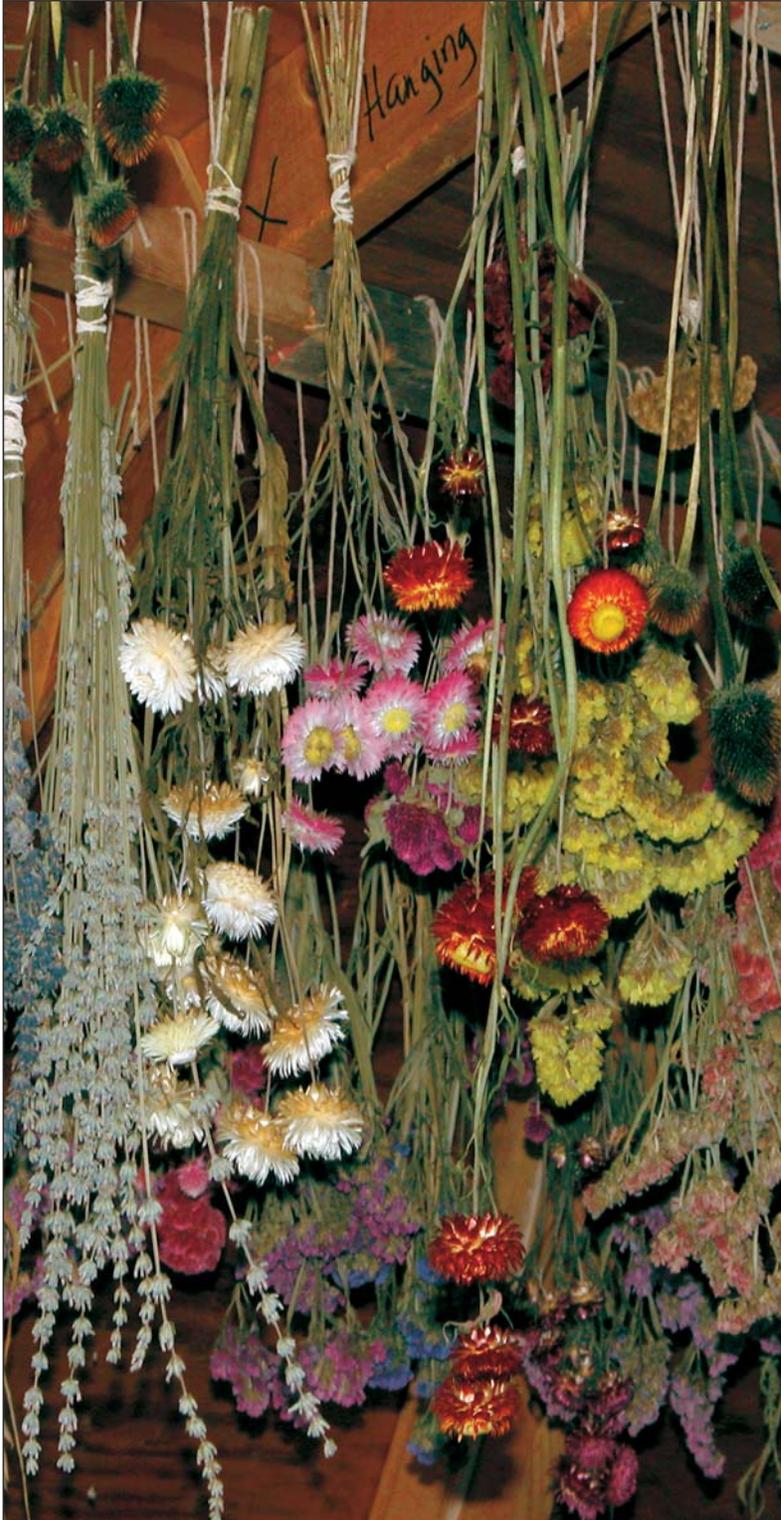


Delaware State University  
**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAM**  
**Drying flowers and other plant materials**



*Drying flowers and other plant materials is fun and very easy. Once plant materials are dried they can be used to create decorations and other crafts. There are a couple of methods that can be used for successful drying of flowers, grasses, leaves, and/or seed pods. These are Pressing, Burying and my favorite Hanging.*

**Pressing** is accomplished by laying several leaves, flower petals and other flat plant parts between several layers of absorbent paper. I like to use old telephone books. Do not use catalogs that have colored and shiny pages. When placing leaves, be creative: curve them or leave them straight; adjust the shape as you think you will need when using the material after it is dried. Keep in mind, once the leaf is dried and very brittle, you will not be able to change the shape. It is easy to dry or process many plant parts at one time, just be sure to have several pages and/or paper layers between the plant material layers. Placing a brick or two or something heavy on top will help in pressing the plant material, too. To make sure they are how you want them to look, recheck them after a day.

The **burying** method to dry flowers is accomplished by completely burying the flowers or plant material in one of the following materials: Borax combined with extra fine, clean, dry sand or cornmeal; Borax and cat box filler; or equal parts of Borax and white cornmeal. You may want to mix about 3 to 5 tablespoons of non-iodized salt to the mixture, too. Allow air movement around the mixture while drying; low cardboard boxes with reinforced bottoms are great. Whatever mixture you use, remember sand is heavier and if it is not gently placed around the blooms carefully, it may tend to flatten the flowers. Be sure flowers are facing upward.

**Silica gel** is another material used for drying flower heads at home. It is found in most craft stores and comes in white or blue color. When drying in Silica gel, be sure to use an airtight container like a cookie tin, coffee can, or plastic storage container. Otherwise, the gel will pick up

moisture from the air, which will slow down or prevent the stemless flowers from drying. When used, the gel will gradually turn pink indicating that it has absorbed all the moisture it can. To recharge or dry your Silica, spread it out on a cookie sheet about ½-inch thick by heating it in a 250 degree oven and stirring it occasionally. It may take an hour or two until it turns blue or white again. Store unused gel in an air tight container.

**Hanging** is the method I use mostly. This traditional method is what the early settlers used; in fact many of us have seen pictures of small bundles hanging in colonist kitchens drying for later use. I gather 3 to 5 stems and remove all or most of the leaves from the stem. Tie securely together with two rubber bands (in case one breaks) or wire twisties. Stems shrink while they are drying and may slip out of the bundle if tied together with string. Suspending the stems upside down keeps them straight and their flower heads upright. Attach the small bouquet to a drying rack until dried. This may take several weeks to several months



depending on plant material and drying conditions. Be sure to have good air circulation and warm, dry temperatures.

**When should I gather the material?** Cut plant parts on sunny days after the night dew has dried. Flowers should be cut before they reach maturity when the color is at its peak. Don't wait until the color begins to fade. Remove all leaves from the stem.

**How and where can I hang tied plant bunches?** Wire coat hangers, wooden clothes racks, clothes lines, or partially hammered in nails in ceiling rafters work very nicely as drying racks. Flower bundles can be hung in an outdoor shed, attic, basement or garage, any location with no humidity and good air circulation. Do not use a closet. Be sure the location is mouse proof. You may want to create a screen house within the structure if

mice are a problem.

Space the bundles so that there is good air circulation around each part of the plant. Be sure they are out of direct sunlight while drying. Direct sunlight may cause the colors to fade.

**How do I determine when stems are dry?** If the drying environment is hot and dry, begin checking your hung bundles after 2 weeks. The majority of the plant material may be dry under these conditions. Under cool air and high humidity, drying may take 2 months or more. Therefore, environmental conditions determine the length of drying time. Plants are completely dry when they are stiff to the touch and the stems will break or snap easily.

**Where should I store my dried materials?** Remove the tied bunches and store them in boxes or plastic containers that are out of direct light and not in humid conditions. If you have several containers, you may want to place a label on the outside describing color, size and the type of plant material inside. Once plant materials are dried and in storage containers, they can be used to create decorations and other crafts. Some flowers may be prone to harboring insects. Therefore, you may want to place a couple of mothballs in the storage container.

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