

# Dry summer flowers for winter enjoyment

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GUELPH—Many flowers, from garden and countryside, can be dried and used to make inexpensive floral arrangements.

Flowers and other plant materials, properly dried and preserved, will provide lasting decorations for the winter. Dried flowers are ideal for areas with low light and humidity.

There are many methods of drying flowers, however, the two most common are air drying and silica-gel drying. Air drying is the simplest

and oldest method of preserving flowering materials, but it is not suited to all species. Remove only the foliage from the flowering stems. Then, hang the stems upside down in a warm, dry place until they have lost all of their moisture.

Plants with very little moisture content in the mature flower, such as yarrow, statice, or strawflowers, are best suited to air drying.

Plants with many small flowering parts or clusters of small flowers, such as baby's breath or goldenrod, can also be hung to dry. Although the

individual flower parts may wither or partially collapse in the drying process, the overall form of the flowering stem and the flower color remain intact.

The success of air drying flowers depends on the flowers' stage of maturity and on drying conditions. A warm, dry place, without exposure to direct sunlight, is best. The area should be large enough to allow for adequate circulation of air around the plant material. A warm, dark attic or a large, open closet is generally well-suited to drying flowers during the summer. Even a work area in

a warm basement can be used if the humidity is less than 60 percent, preferably between 35 and 40 percent. Areas exposed to bright sunlight, damp areas and those with poor air circulation should be avoided.

Many delicate flowers and plant materials with high moisture contents can be preserved using silica gel, a desiccant which absorbs moisture from the flower.

Florist's wire is used to reinforce or replace flower stems, before silica-gel drying. After wiring, follow these steps to complete the drying process.

Place flowers in the container, on the silica gel, face up or face down, depending on the shape of the flower (flowers must not touch one another).

Sprinkle silica gel around and between the petals carefully, until the entire bloom is completely buried. Try to keep the flower petals in their natural position.

Cover the container and seal with masking tape.

Place the container in a warm, dry place until the flowers are dried.

Once the flowers are dried, they should be carefully removed from the silica gel.

Dust off excess silica gel from blooms with a camel hair artist's brush.

The greatest limitation of the silica-gel drying method is timing. It works quickly, so care must be taken not to leave the blooms in the gel material too long. Over-drying can cause brittleness, excessive shrinking, and burned petals.

The silica gel material can be used several times before it absorbs too much moisture and becomes ineffective. Drying the silica gel crystals on an open pan, in a warm oven (250 F or 121 C), will restore effectiveness.

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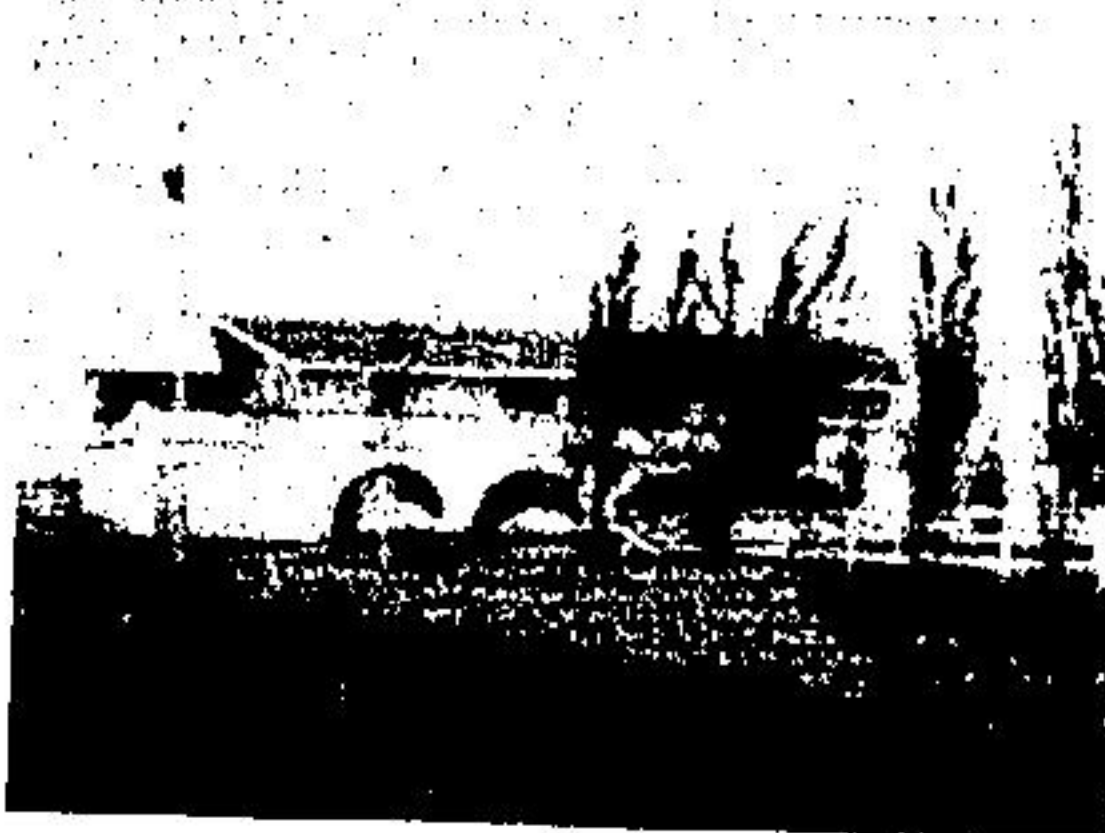


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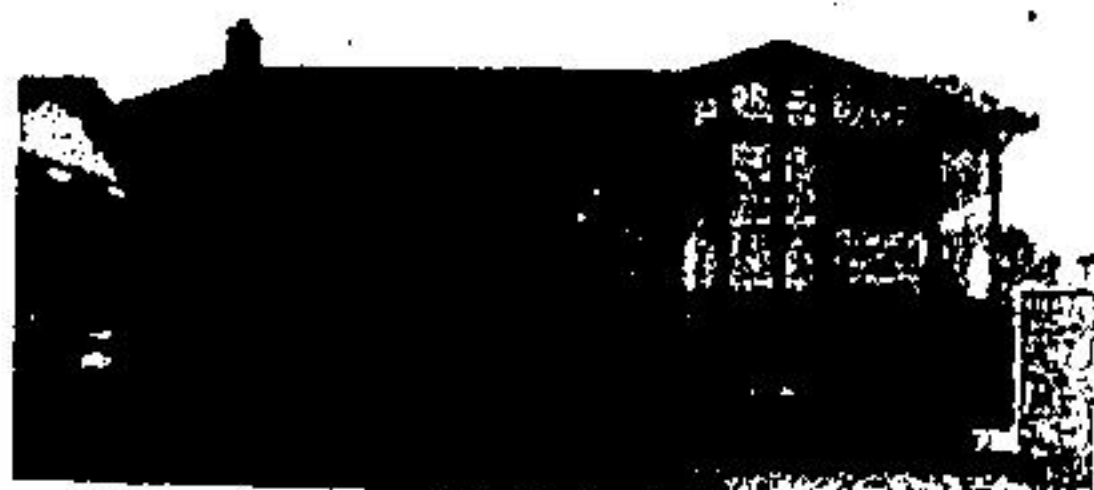
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