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Curriculum Connections

Dried Flower Creations



Potpourri

Flowers and herbs, long appreciated for their beauty, symbolism, and medicinal uses, have also been employed to conceal offensive odors! In 18th century Europe and colonial America, fresh water and refrigeration were at a premium, sewers were often open, and horses wandered through streets. Crushed dried flowers, herbs, and spices were strewn on floors, kept in dressers to keep insects from clothing, and used to deodorize streets and people alike.

Although we don't *rely* on the fresh aromas of flowers today to make our lives, well, bearable, fragrant mixtures of leaves and petals from dried flowers and/or herbs — called potpourri — make great gifts and products for fundraisers. Here are some guidelines for making potpourri. Encourage your students to invent their own custom mixtures and

packaging.

1. Gather and dry petals from a variety of aromatic flowers and from blooms that simply look good. Consider extending your harvest by asking florists and supermarkets for donations of old flowers. If your potpourri product will be visible (e.g., in a basket or clear cellophane), you may want to leave petals whole. However, if you're creating enclosed sachets (in the form of small muslin bags or pillows, for instance), you can crush your ingredients. Think about using other ingredients for nose and eye appeal such as cinnamon sticks, dried berries, and scented oils. Here are some other suggestions:

Potpourri materials that smell good

roses, peonies, lavender, scented geranium leaves, rosemary, thyme, orange and lemon peels, vanilla beans, cinnamon sticks, cloves, star anise

Potpourri materials that look good

black-eyed susan flowers, marigolds, bachelor's buttons, lamb's ear leaves, money plant, statice flowers, dried berries

Note: If you want to try an old remedy for protecting clothing in dressers from insects, fill sachets with a mixture of lavender, rosemary, and southernwood (a type of artemesia).

2. Have students blend their unique ingredients in a bowl and adjust the mixture as they see fit. Consider adding "orris root," a fixative that will help the potpourri keep its color and fragrance longer. It is available at most pharmacies in small quantities, but it should be handled with care because it can cause allergic reactions. Students should use utensils when stirring or handling a mixture containing this ingredient.

3. Store potpourri in closed glass jars until you want to use it. Here are some thoughts on products students can create to give as gifts or sell to raise funds:

- Find or make and decorate small baskets or bowls and fill them with potpourri to sweeten the air.
- Put an aromatic mixture in jars and decorate the lids with fabric or tissue paper tied with ribbon.
- Cut 1-foot-square pieces of muslin or decorative fabric, fill them with potpourri, and tie them with ribbon. Another option is to make small pillows from fabric squares and fill them with your mixture before stitching the last side. Either can be used to sweeten



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Dried Arrangements and More

Once your students have collected and dried blooms from the garden and wild, there's no end to the products they can create. We hope these few ideas inspire their creative juices.



Dried arrangements — Your class might start simply and create dried bouquets (including seedheads and pods) by binding stems together with florists' tape or wrapping them in tissue paper. You can also make creative arrangements in recycled planters, baskets, and other containers. Try putting floral foam (found at craft stores) or a similar substance into the bottom of containers so stems will remain where they're placed.

Hanging wall pockets — For this project, you'll need to create, buy, or get donations of small baskets or pockets that can be hung, and then decorate them with paint, ribbon, or other materials. Next, arrange flowers in containers by sticking them into floral foam that you've placed in the bottom.

Free-form swags — To create this type of wall art, use a length of straight wire as a base and attach dried flowers and greenery to it. Make small bundles of different types of flowers and attach them to the base by wrapping florists' tape or a lighter piece of wire around the stems and base. Once the materials are attached, you can bend the wire to a desired shape, such as an "s" or semi-circle. Consider adding colorful ribbons to the ends.

Dried-flower wreaths — You'll need some type of base material to make a wreath. Craft stores carry styrofoam and other types of pre-formed bases, but students can make their own from natural materials such as braided grapevines or straw. To make a base from straw, first form a circle with heavy, stiff wire and twist the ends together. Next, attach a lighter wire and secure the straw to the circular base by wrapping the wire around it.

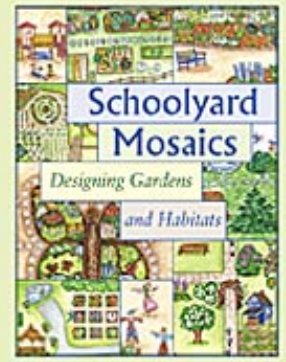
If you have leafy plants in abundance, such as artemisia, sage, or Spanish moss, you can use those to cover the base and add spots of colorful flowers to that. Another option is to fill the entire wreath with a variety of blooms. You can insert flowers and other wreath materials into the base or attach them with a hot glue gun. If you're not using a glue gun, it may be easiest to insert the stems at an angle and maintain that angle around the whole wreath.



Budding Science Investigations

There's more than one way to dry a flower and lots of variables — humidity, temperature, air flow, flower type, and so on — that can affect the final product. As your students set out to preserve their precious blooms, challenge them to research and test a variety of strategies, experiment with different factors, and otherwise explore questions that intrigue them. Consider the following sample questions:

- *How do ___ flowers that were dried in silica and sand compare with the same types dried in a sand-borax mixture? (Or how do air-dried flowers compare with those dried with a desiccant?)*
- *What factors seem to affect how long it takes flowers to dry?*
- *How can we speed up the drying process when we hang flowers? (Using a fan to circulate air helps pull out moisture. Certain flowers, such as delphiniums, actually keep their color better if they're dried quickly near sources of warm air, such as a heater, while other do best without high heat.)*
- *If we try to save space by making alternating layers of flowers and silica gel, will that affect the time it takes to dry or the quality of the flowers?*



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We welcome your questions and comments about this newsletter or your membership. Please reply to: [Growing Ideas editor](#).

- *What's the best way to dry marigolds?*
- *Can we successfully dry flowers in kitty litter? A mixture of kitty litter and sawdust? What other substances might draw out moisture?*
- *What will happen to silica gel if we leave it open to the air? To cold air versus hot air? (Students can explore the relationship between humidity and temperature.)*
- *Can we change the ratio of ingredients in a sand-borax-salt mix to speed up the drying process?*
- *How do different drying conditions and agents affect specific flower colors? (In general, the faster a flower dries, the more color is retained. Reds typically turn more purple or bluish, magenta turns to lavender, and yellow and orange flowers tend to hang onto their hues. Flowers typically darken when they dry. This happens because the pigment is more concentrated as water evaporates and because of the oxidation reaction with air.)*

Did you know?

Freshly cut flowers will eventually fade if left in the light because a chemical reaction requiring water and light breaks down the pigment. If a fresh flower is left in the dark, the reaction can't happen. However, once you have successfully removed water from the flower (that is, dried it) it can linger in the light without fading. If you do notice a dried flower fading, it has likely reabsorbed some moisture from the air, which has reacted with light and drained the pigment.

As groups plan investigations, help them consider the "steps" they'll take in terms that help them think through the problem. Some of the questions to ponder throughout the process are: *What do we want to find out about ____? How can we make the best observations? What do we already think we know or have we observed about ____? What is the best way to answer our questions? What types of data will we need? How can we make it a "fair" test? What types of observations or measurements should we take? How can we organize and communicate the data and results to present the clearest answer or strongest explanation?* They can then mirror what scientists do by presenting their plans to peers, who give feedback on the experimental setups.

Explore the Language of Flowers

They have long inspired humans with their beauty and fragrances and we've bestowed them with symbolic meanings. During the Victorian England in the 1800s, flowers so inspired certain classes of society, that a language, of sorts, was developed in which elaborate meanings were attributed to specific flowers. Blossoms worn in hair and on clothing, or given as gifts alone or in combination, had better be carefully chosen; they could convey a variety of positive and negative statements and emotions. These messages were particularly important in love and romance. Entire dictionaries were even created to help people both encode and decode floral messages! Here are a few examples of floral meanings:

baby's breath = *innocence*, carnation (pink) = *I'll never forget you*,
carnation (purple) = *capriciousness*, oleander = *caution*,
mock orange = *deceit*, zinnia = *goodness*

Consider inviting your students to explore the language of flowers by discovering some of their meanings (see the Web site link on the [Resources](#) page) and musing about how these may have come about. (Is it apparent from observing a flower's structure and features?) Then, let students create their own small bouquets (sometimes called nosegays) to convey messages.



You might follow up with a brainstorm and discussion of ways in which our language today reflects flower, vegetable, and other plant symbolism. Consider the meanings and possible origins of phrases such as these: *a shrinking violet*, *cool as a cucumber*, *strong as an oak*.



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