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HOW TO BRING THE SIGHTS AND SCENTS OF SUMMER INDOORS FOR ENJOYMENT ALL WINTER LONG WHEN PETALS FALL

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WITH summer flowers fading faster than last year's rock star, you'll have to move quickly to save the season's brilliant colors and subtle scents for indoor enjoyment this winter.

There are two ways you can treat yourself to an endless summer, says **Virginia Saso**, a flower crafts person and co-owner of Saso Herb Gardens in Saratoga:

(check) Dry flowers for arrangements by hanging them upside down in bunches. (check) Pluck off the petals to create aromatic potpourris.

Whichever route you choose, flowers should be picked while the blooms are small, tight and lively looking in the early days of September before cold weather does them in.

Of the two, drying flowers is the easiest way to preserve the sunny season. "Dried flowers can last until you get tired of them," Saso says. "They provide a means of having real flowers, as opposed to silk or plastic ones, in the house constantly."

And you don't have to rely on exotic or unusual blooms. There are many good candidates in your own yard. The flowers that are known as everlastings -- statice and strawflowers, for instance -- are excellent choices. So are herbs (dried both for their foliage and flowers), yarrow, lavender, stock, salvia, roses, celosia, globe thistle, onion flowers and Queen Anne's lace.

"You can pick just about any flower from the garden and dry it with some measure of success," Saso says. It takes two to three weeks for flowers to air dry, a natural process in which the air evaporates the moisture from the flower or foliage.

Some flowers don't hold up in the process, however. Geraniums, carnations and chrysanthemums tend to shatter; orchids and heavy-headed bulbs such as tulips and daffodils droop quickly.

Keep in mind, too, that dried does not mean dead. "You can't let flowers shrivel on the plant (before you pick them), because the colors fade and turn ugly, and the petals often shatter," Saso says.

For the prettiest petals, flowers should be picked at their peak on a warm sunny morning. Strip off the foliage since it seldom dries pretty. Pick the flowers just as the buds begin to open. Most flowers continue to open during the drying process, so if a flower is fully open at the beginning, the petals may shatter before the drying is complete, Saso says.

The easiest way to dry flowers is to hang them heads down in a dark airy place where they won't get mildew. "The idea here is to hang these flowers away from sunlight, so the garage or a closet are good places to hang them," Saso says. To dry flowers by hanging, Saso suggests these steps once the flowers have been gathered:

(check) Sort the flowers by type into small bunches.

(check) Use a rubber band wound tightly around the stems at the end to hold the bunches

together. When the stems shrink as they dry, the rubber band will keep a tight hold on the stems.

(check) Hang each bunch from a hook, or from a wire coat hanger.

For those who like the fragrance of summer flowers, a potpourri is another way to enjoy flowers long after their season has past, Saso says.

"People think there is something mysterious about assembling a potpourri, but it's just like a cooking recipe," she says. "You put all the petals together in a big pot and mix them up. But you choose these ingredients for their scents instead of their tastes."

You can find many of these scented ingredients in your own garden. "In a potpourri, you're looking for scent and color so the mixture should look pretty as well as smell good. You absolutely have to have roses, but everything else is frosting on the cake," Saso says.

For instance, Saso's favorite potpourri mixture uses lemon verbena, a variety of mints, roses, calendula, yarrow, rose buds, marigolds, clove pinks, fuchsias, scented geranium (flowers and leaves), ivy geranium flowers and lavender. She always adds orrisroot as a fixative, and scented potpourri oil such as peach or strawberry for additional scent.

Like flowers for drying, petals for potpourri should be picked in the morning, when the scents are strongest, before the sun hits, Saso says. Here's how to put it together:

(check) Collect the dried flower heads, petals and leaves.

(check) Put them all in a very big pot (she uses a soup pot) and gently mix the ingredients together, using care not to crush the delicate petals.

(check) Use an eyedropper to scatter drops of the scented oil over the mixture.

(check) Add the orrisroot fixative.

(check) Lightly stir the mixture with your hands.

(check) Put the mixture in a cool dark place and turn the ingredients every day during a two-week period.

(check) Then put the potpourri in covered glass jars for an additional six week.

Saso says the fragrance will last for years if you take the lid off the potpourri container for a couple of hours a day. Potpourri that is left uncovered will lose its scent more rapidly.

Even if you have a large garden with many plants, you'll probably have to buy a few extra ingredients. Specialty shops such as Crabtree and Evelyn Co. sell dried, scented flowers for potpourri.

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