

Activity: Harvesting Goal: Physical Populations: Rehabilitation

## TH Activity Plan – Drying Herb Flowers

Text by Diane Relf, PhD, HTM & Susan Morgan

Photo by F. Relf



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will prepare and dry flowering herbs for future use in culinary, floral, or other activities.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice executing functioning & sequencing skills; increase working memory

**Physical:** Build hand dexterity/pincer grip; practice fine motor skills; practice using adaptive tools to accomplish one step of task on own

**Psychological/Emotional:** Build confidence; reduce agitation

**Sensory:** Practice self-regulation w/ fewer outbursts

**Social:** Work independently w/ few prompts

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Prepare a drying screen or piece of cardboard covered with a paper towel for each participant. Harvest flowers and gather other materials to be used.
2. Facilitator begins session by providing four to six floral stems or individual flowers of an herb for drying to each participant (or as many flowers as are available).
3. Demonstrate how to select out flowers by cutting about 3 to 6 inches below the flower head with scissors. Participants begin tasks.
4. Remove and discard any dead or diseased leaves or petals and woody stems.
5. Lay flowers on a screen or paper towel laying on cardboard. Do not use a metal tray.
6. Work with each participant to prepare the herb flowers in the same fashion until the drying surface is full. Allow ample space between flowers for good air circulation.
7. Place in a cool, well-ventilated area out of sunlight. They should be dried within several days.
8. Stir or move flowers around once or twice a day to allow for increased air circulation and to prevent mold.

**Materials**

Herbs harvested earlier in the day, such as lavender, globe amaranth, echinacea, nasturtium & chamomile

Safety scissors, wipes

Non-metal screen, piece of burlap, or piece of cardboard & paper towel for each person

Airtight storage containers

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** For those in rehabilitation, working with flowers may be a visually/sensory appealing activity in which to engage in working therapeutic goals and provide a meaningful distraction while doing therapy. Provide a typed list of instructions, with accompanying photos illustrating each step, for each participant to refer to and enable more independent work. Do modeling, hand-over-hand assistance, and task sharing with participants, especially if working with individuals with cognitive or fine motor challenges, to reduce frustration. If materials and time allow, invite participants to take 1-3 leftover flower stems, arrange in a cup of water, and take with them to enjoy until other prepared flowers are dried. Present this activity as part of a multi-

step program, in which participants are involved with harvesting flowers directly from the garden, drying them, and then using the dried flowers in a variety of culinary, floral arranging, crafting, or other uses.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Wash hands or use gloves and follow sanitary food handling procedures throughout activity if herb flowers will be used for culinary purposes. Supervise careful handling of materials and equipment during activity. Remove thorns or sharp edges (or avoid use) of plant materials ahead of time.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Small lavender buds or chamomile petals may fall off when drying, so be sure to use a small mesh screen or cover the screen with a paper towel to collect the parts. Some herbs can be difficult to separate from unused parts after they become dry and brittle, so be sure to separate or cut the needed parts before drying. For the best color, scent, and flavor, herbs should be dried in a dark, cool area, whether indoors or outdoors. Suggested places are garages, attics, closets, or under beds. Be sure the drying area is dry and cool. Herbs can also be dried in the microwave. Dry in small batches and microwave for about 30 seconds at a time until they are dry and crumbly. Lavender may also be dried in bundles. To do this, gather the harvested stems into a small bunch (about a handful or less), wrap them with rubber bands, string, or twist ties, and hang bundles upside down in a cool, well-ventilated place out of sunlight. Hang a sturdy string or rope set up like a laundry drying line and use paper clips or clothes pins to secure bundles to the drying line. They should be dried within two weeks. Aside from the flowers, drying nasturtium leaves is another way to preserve the plant's peppery goodness. The dried leaves can be powdered and sprinkled onto food as a seasoning or used in herbal tea blends to soothe a cough or cold. To dry nasturtium leaves, spread them onto dehydrator trays and process until crispy. Or, you may dry your edible flower heads in the oven at 100-120 degrees F. Drying takes only a few hours – from 2 to 5 hours – so be sure to check them periodically to measure their progress.

Refer to THAD *Harvesting Herb Flowers*, *Freezing Herbs*, and *Air Drying Leafy Herbs* activity plans.

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Cut and Dried Flower Farm. (accessed 2023). Drying flowers and herbs.

<https://cutdriedflowerfarm.com/gardening-tips/drying-flowers-and-herbs/>

FTD. (2018). How to dry flowers: 4 simple ways + décor ideas. <https://www.ftd.com/blog/how-to-dry-flowers>

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.