

AWARD OF MERIT WINNER

Roses That Last ...

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It's fall! My thoughts instantly wrap around awesome autumn color, evening fires, and lots and lots of hot chocolate. Fall is also the time I harvest the last of my roses, and any good plant material I can use, and turn my closet into a "drying room". Designing and building dried rose arrangements can make great holiday gifts, but mostly helps me "overwinter" indoors while my garden overwinters outdoors. Dried arrangements bring me the promise of spring to come on damp, foggy days. Large or small wreaths, bouquets, garlands, it's "designer's choice," and a colorful and creative way to preserve beautiful blooms long past the growing season.

Believe it or not, drying roses is an easy process to learn, and there are several methods an arranger can try depending upon preference, time, and occasion. However, success with dried arrangements involves three things: choosing the best possible roses and suitable plant material; applying the drying method you want to use; and using the appropriate tools to build your arrangement. I personally prefer to hang dry my roses whether they are mini, standard, or any type in between. I try drying them all. There is one hard and fast rule to follow no matter what method you use to dry roses. Always cut your roses on sunny days, after the dew has dried in the garden. This is important because dry roses hold their form and color, and you don't want petals and leaves spotted with water during the drying process.

After I have cut my roses, I strip the leaves, at least most of them, it depends what I'm using the roses for, and then I hang them in bundles of three with floral wire from a coat hanger. If I'm hanging a very large rose. I'll hang it alone. I personally prefer this "old-fashioned" method because it's so easy, the roses usually dry in under five days, it depends on my closet humidity, and my closet smells so good for a long time. Once my roses are thoroughly dry, (you'll know when), I stand these upright in a tall container and spray them with dry flower preservative. I love how this method preserves the rose form and color, and I don't have to brush gel or cornmeal particles out of the fragile, dry rose petals.

Many rose arrangers prefer and use the silica gel method to dry roses. This product, which looks like white sand, can be used over and over, lasting indefinitely if it is dried after each use. Instructions for use, all equipment, and floral preservative is usually included in the box. Just follow the instructions. In using this method just remember to use only dry roses. Make sure no moisture is present on the petals, stems, or leaves before they are buried in the silica gel. Also be aware that any flaws on the roses or leaves will be magnified during the drying process. If I'm using the roses for a show and any flaws are obvious, I don't use them.

Silica gel comes under a number of name brands and is very easy to find in craft stores. The arranger has the choice of container drying by burying the roses, or any plant material, over a period of days, or by microwave drying. I have used both methods and prefer "burying". Microwaving is O.K., but you have to experiment to get the time right, and when you dry roses in different bloom stages or sizes this can be tricky. Experiment is the key. Silica gel drying preserves the beauty, form, and color of the roses but does require extensive cleaning of the dried material to remove the particles of drying agent.

The borax-cornmeal method is another time honored technique for drying plant material. For the arranger who wants to try this method there are excellent instructions in most flower arranger books. This method works fine but hang drying or using the boxed silica gel is easier.

Once the roses have been dried and thoroughly cleaned, it's time to decide how you want to

use your roses. It is also time to assemble your tools by which to build your design.

Arranging dried roses and foliage is different from arranging fresh roses simply because dried roses are fragile. Patience, care, and glue are the key words for putting together a dried design. Just make sure you give yourself time and space in which to work. Depending upon design: dry flower foam, tweezers, Tacky glue, needle nose pliers, toothpicks, and floral wire are some tools you might need. Remember, if it breaks you can glue it back, petals, leaves, etc. Be generous with yourself, nothing has to be perfect, and any new task tried is always a learning experience. Have fun with your design. Let your creative spirit GO! Once your arrangement is completed, the dried material should be sprayed to preserve the color. I use 'DMP' or Dried Plant Material Preservative, but there are many brands available. These preservatives seal, protect, and help prevent roses from shattering and fading. They work, so make sure you use one of them!

I normally keep my completed arrangements out of direct sunlight. However, when I build wreaths for my front door, I really spray them well and don't worry about the sun. So far I haven't had any major problems.

Building a dried arrangement is lots of fun and a fantastic way to preserve the lasting beauty of your roses and other garden plants. It's a great way to share your love of roses and the garden with others all year long.