



# The Dirt

## Carroll County Master Gardener Newsletter

May 2008

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### From the Editor's Desk:

I am excited to take the reins of the newsletter. It came as a surprise and at a busy time for everyone.

Sheila Whiteley has asked me to get the newsletter to her in the week following a meeting.

So, the next one will be as early as this one is late. If you have information you wish to have in the newsletter, please give it to me at the meeting or before Wednesday evening of the following week.

Sharon did a fantastic job and made some interesting changes. It will be difficult to step into her shoes.

~Lynn Reiss



If you have any questions or concerns regarding any of the information contained within this newsletter, please feel free to contact me at 870.423.2958.

Sincerely yours,

Leon Duncan  
County Extension Agent-Staff Chair

## Plant stunning flowers for enjoyment all year around!

Wouldn't it be nice if you could plant flowers in the spring and enjoy their beauty for years? Well, you can if you plant everlastings. Everlastings are those plants that retain their shape and color long after they have been picked and dried.

Everlastings differ from other flowers even during their life – most

everlastings are being imported on a large scale from Holland, Australia and other countries. Local growers are incorporating them into their fields, and you can find a good supply at local craft stores and farmers markets.

### Types

Everlastings can be grown in your yard,

at least in a very warm, dry area with good ventilation. They will shrink to half their natural size after drying.

Perennial plants used as everlastings include: yarrow, allium flowers (both chives and garlic), armeria (true thrift), butterfly weed, artemisia, astilbe, thistles, gaillardia, baby's breath, hydrangea, lav-

enders, liatris, money plant or lunaria (actually this is a biennial, but it freely reseeds), monarda, roses, perennial salvias, santolina and sedum. Most herbs are included in the everlastings, although some hold up better or are more attractive than others. The most commonly used herbs include: rosemary, mints, oregano and

### Harvesting & Drying

heads are great additions, as are the leaves of dusty miller and artemesia. Foliage is often the backdrop for the wreaths, with the blooms and seed pods the decorations. Now that you know what they are, how do you harvest and or

*Everlastings have been around since ancient times. . .*

possess very little moisture in the flowers and feel dry or papery to the touch before they have been dried. Before the availability of cut flowers year-round, everlastings were the only alternative for flowers in our homes. Everlastings have been around since ancient times and were popular through the ages. Then, with the addition of silk

and it may surprise you that some of the plants you are already growing are everlastings. Annual everlasting flowers include: ageratum, calendula, celosia (cockscomb), bachelor's buttons (Centaurea), dusty miller, larkspur, gomphrena (globe amaranth), strawflower (Helichrysum), statice, scabiosa and basil

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dry them? There is no simple answer for each flower. Some flowers are picked when they are mature, others must be picked prior to maturity. Weather conditions play a part, both in humidity and soil moisture. But there are some general rules.

Everlastings can be roughly broken down

*Harvesting & Drying. . .*

or artificial flowers, their popularity waned. But for the past two decades, their popularity has increased. Garden catalogs, magazines and crafters are all selling wreaths, swags and other dried flower materials. As a result,

flowers. Marigolds and salvia can also be used as everlastings, but since they do retain more natural moisture, they are trickier to do. They should be picked just before maturity and hung to dry immedi-

ately after in a very warm, dry area with good ventilation. They will shrink to half their natural size after drying.

Flowers aren't the only part of the plant that is used. Gaillardia spent flower heads – those fuzzy, round seed

into a few categories. The first category applies to daisy-like and spiked flowers that open after they are picked. They must be picked as the bud opens its first set of petals.

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## Plant Stunning Flowers. . .continued

The flowers will continue to open during drying. These include the straw-flowers, gomphrena, bachelor's buttons, alliums, and thistles.

The second category includes the flowers that should be picked as the center bud is almost totally developed. If the flower is picked too early, they won't open enough and you won't get good color development. If you pick too late, the flower will shatter. These include

ageratum, yarrow, armeria, butterfly weed, baby's breath, santolina and sedum.

The other category concerns spike flowers or racemes, which are borne on a central stem and have sequentially opening flowers, either from the bottom or the top. The object is to pick them when as many side spikes, and therefore color, are open. Spikes that open from the bottom up should be picked when approximately two-thirds of the spike is developed, but before the bottom

flowers begin to fade. Spikes that open from the top down would be picked just before the flowers at the top start fading. Spike flowers include: larkspur, statice, salvia, basil, astilbe, lavender, liatris and veronica.

Plants that have extra moisture in them require quick drying.

*Before picking your flowers, try to decide on their future use.*

Pick, hang and dry plants include calendula, celosia and marigold. Some flowers practically dry on the plant, such as hydrangeas. Roses can be picked at various stages, depending on how you plan to use them. If air drying, pick them when they are in the bud stage or just slightly open. Never pick them fully open, or they will fall apart. As with any new hobby, trial and error will give you more information. Finding the right location to dry your flowers may also take some experimentation.

Before you pick your flowers, try to decide on their future use. If you just need small flowers for a

wreath or craft, cut a small stem. If you plan to arrange them in flower arrangements or large swags, you may need a longer stem. The longer the stem and the more leaves attached to it, the longer the flower's drying time will be. Some stems are sturdy after drying, while

others need some reinforcement with florist's wire. How long it takes to dry everlastings depends on the species and the location in which you are drying them.

Temperature and humidity play a big role, as do outside weather conditions. It is not a great idea to harvest after a torrential rain. A goal is to dry your flowers as quickly as you can. The quicker they dry, the more you can expect to preserve the color and shape of the flower. The ideal drying environment is low humidity, good air circulation, limited light and warm temperatures. If there is high humidity, the flowers may mildew rather than dry. There are various

methods for drying flowers. By far, the easiest method is grouping your flowers in bunches and hanging them upside down to dry. This will keep the flower heads together while they dry. As flowers dry, the stems lose moisture and shrink. Be sure to adjust

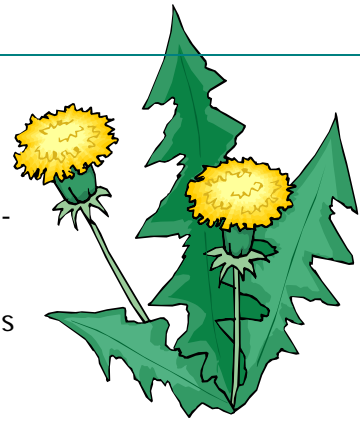
your string or use a rubber band to tie your bundles together to accommodate this shrinkage. Silica gel, oven drying and pressing flowers are all used to preserve flowers, but the flowers we have been discussing dry nicely with the tie-and-hang method. Once they are dry, use them in wreaths, arrangements or other decorations. If you can't use them all at once, continue to let them hang until they are needed. Hanging bundles are a nice decoration all unto themselves.

## Did you “inherit” your neighbor’s weeds?

When the floodwaters recede, people will likely have something else to worry about. In addition to lost planting time and debris clean-up, they can expect new weeds. When the water goes down, farmers are going to have some unpleasant visitors in their fields – the kind of visitors that don't go home and that cost farmers money. We're moving mixed populations of weed seeds around in

flood water, and farmers down-stream are going to end up with someone else's weed problem. Many seeds readily float, including grass seed and resistant pigweed seed, and floodwaters will spread species to areas that don't currently have a problem. Farmers may find weed species they've never had a problem with before. Don't be caught by surprise. Monitor your fields. If your field is under water, scout it closely.

Flowing water is capable of moving almost anything, including seed. But many seeds are specially adapted for movement in water. Some have a waxy coating, others may have air bladders or corky structures that help them float. Various studies have shown that as many as 200 million seeds per acre could be deposited by water. Some studies have found as many as 77 different weed species moving in river water.



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**PLANT STUNNING FLOWERS. . .**  
**continued**

When you harvest has a lot to do with the bloom period of the plants you are growing. With annual everlastings, be sure to get them up before the first frost. Some plants, such as gomphrena, can be harvested as a whole plant late in the season. Fall is also a great time to scavenge for dry materials from the wild. Make sure you have the property owner's permission to harvest before you go collecting. Flowers have always added something special to a home. There is a language of flowers, and whether fresh cut or dried, they are a wonderful addition. By growing and/or using everlastings, we can use "real" flowers and continue to enjoy them for a long period of time.

## MAY Calendar

May 9 ~ **REGISTRATION CLOSSES FOR 2008 STATE MG MEETING** ~ [crwingfield@sbcglobal.net](mailto:crwingfield@sbcglobal.net)

May 10–11 ~ **Wildwood Blooms Event** ~ Little Rock  
 501-821-7275 ~ [www.wildwoodpark.org](http://www.wildwoodpark.org)

May 13 ~ **Plant Propagation** ~ Jim Robbins, U of A  
 ASU Beebe Farm ~ 501-268-5394

May 17–18 ~ **Native Plant ID Workshop** ~  
 Winthrop Rockefeller Institute ~ 501-215-7990

May 29–31 ~ **State MG Springdale Holiday Inn Convention Center**