



Drying Flowers in Minutes, The Micro Way

Microwaves are terrific, not only for their quick cooking capabilities, but also for the extra, fun things they can do, like drying flowers. Beautiful flowers can be dried in the microwave in just minutes, instead of days!

Here's what you need to dry your own favorite blooms:

1. **A Drying Medium:** Silica Gel (available at craft and hobby shops) is best and fastest, but also the most expensive; it costs \$4 to \$5 for about 1½ pounds. This quantity is enough to fill one loaf pan, or three cereal bowls (will dry 2 to 4 flowers in 15 to 20 minutes. If you need to do a lot of flowers at one time, you will need more than this.

Cat litter, not the green type, will also work and is the cheapest

drying medium. However, the coarse texture frequently marks thin flowers like daffodils and pansies. Sifting the litter and using only the smaller grains helps.

A third drying medium is cornmeal and borax, mixed in equal amounts. Both of these are available at the grocery store, are finer in texture than the litter, and less expensive than the silica gel.

2. **Containers:** glass loaf pan, custard cups, bowls, small cardboard boxes or shoe boxes. The container should be at least an inch bigger all around than the flower. Several small flowers may be put in one box, but it is easier to remove the dried flowers if they are each in a separate container.

3. **Flowers:** Freshly cut. Pick flowers that are newly opened, and dry. The color holds best in flowers picked at midday on a hot sunny

day. Do not pick flowers damp with rain or dew. Pick some leaves to dry too, to tape on wire stem. Thick petaled flowers like zinnias are easier to handle. Flowers with long thin petals, like tulips, are very fragile when dry and the petals split or shatter easily.

4. **Tools, Misc.:** Scissors, toothpick or thin knitting needle, spoon, small soft paint brush (to clean off dried flowers), 20 gauge florist wire and green floral tape (to make new stems), clear craft spray, and thin plastic disposable-type gloves, optional (to keep drying agent from drying your hands!).

General Drying Instructions

1. Pour an inch of drying medium in a container. Leaving about ½-inch stem on flower, clip off the rest of the stem. Place flower face up on drying medium, pressing stem down into it a little.

2. Carefully spoon additional drying medium around the flower. Take your time: use a toothpick to separate petals, and the spoon to slide drying agent in between petals. It is important to get the petals separated, and just like you want them when dried. Fill all the spaces between petals. When flower is almost completely covered, add another ½ to 1 inch of drying medium on top. No petals or parts should be exposed.

3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 for each flower to be dried at one time. When all are covered, continue with step 4.

4. Place a cup of water in a corner of the oven. Put container(s) holding the flower(s) in the oven. Leave uncovered and

microwave on high. Now, how long? That depends on what drying agent you are using and how many flowers you have.

It may take a little while to get a "feel" for the timing, but here's a guide to get started with. Choose the time for the type flower you have. These times are for using silica gel. For cat litter or cornmeal, you may need to microwave another 30 to 60 seconds longer.

- 4 to 6 small thin flowers, like wildflowers: microwave 1½ minutes.

- 3 to 4 thin, large flowers, like pansies or daffodils: microwave 1½ to 2 minutes.

- 1 rose: 1½ minutes each.

- 2 medium size, thicker flowers, such as chrysanthemums or carnations, 2½ to 3 minutes.

- 1 large thick flower, zinnia, 2 to 3 minutes each.

5. After microwaving, let flower stay in drying medium for 5 to 10 minutes. Use 5 minutes for thin flowers, 10 minutes for thicker flowers and leaves.

6. Gently and slowly tilt container to remove drying agent. Be careful not to bend or bump petals. Use the spoon, to help lift out the flower, if necessary. If the petals are still soft, lay the flower on top of the drying medium for a few minutes. Flowers like sunflowers or daisies with thin petals and thick parts should be removed from drying agent, but then laid on top of the agent with the stem pushed down into the medium for several hours to finish drying.

7. After the flowers are fully dry, you can finish the job: Clean off any medium stuck to the petals with the soft paint brush. Be very gentle! Insert florist wire into remaining stem on flower, and wind tape around it to hold in place. (Florist tape sticks when it is stretched and wound firmly around the stem and wire). Making a small hook on the end of the wire and pulling it down through the center of the flower helps anchor it more securely. Spray lightly with a clear craft spray to help protect the flowers and make them less fragile.

Notes:

- The drying agent may be used over and over again, but it is best to cool it and containers before re-using. Petals became too brittle (over-dried) before the centers dried when I used the drying agent warm.

- If the flowers are brittle and shatter, they've been over dried. If the petals sag and are limp, they weren't dried enough.

- To keep a permanent arrangement of dried flowers looking its best, it should be protected from dust and moisture with a glass dome or frame. On very humid days, dried flowers may reabsorb moisture from the air.

- Dry a collection of pretty spring flowers and save them in a shoebox. Then use them to brighten your spirits on a dreary day next February! Happy drying!

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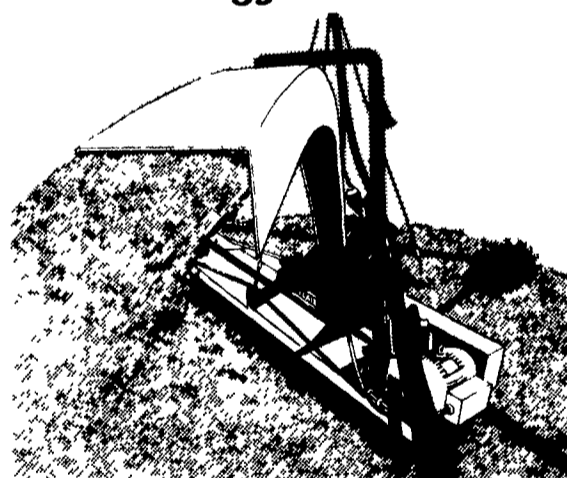
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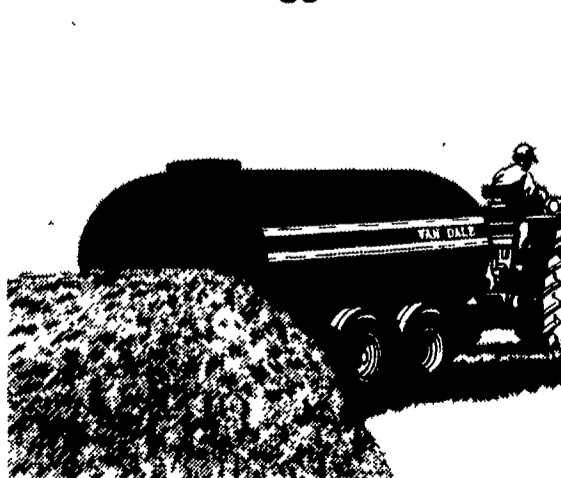
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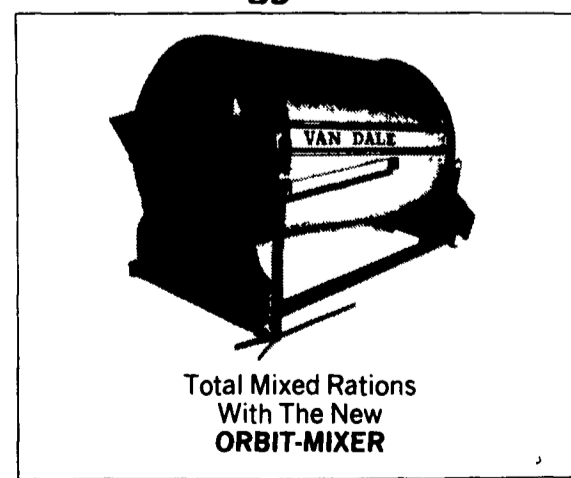
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