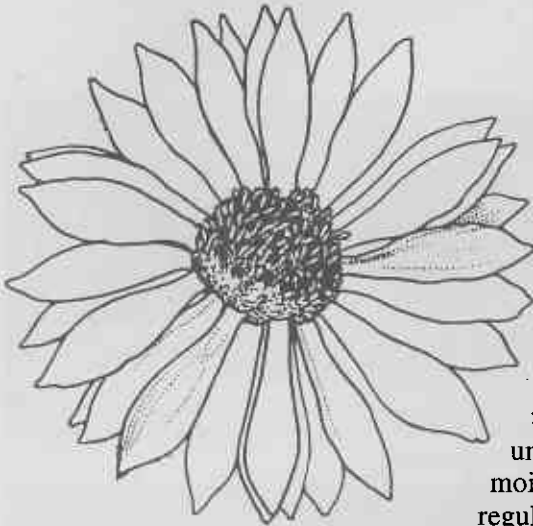


PRACTICALITIES

PRESERVING EVERLASTINGS

By Carol Davies



REMNANT bush areas in the Wheatbelt contain a wide variety of native flowers that can be harvested in advance and utilised for homecraft activities or that special occasion - like a dinner party, wedding, birth or conference - successful business functions always 'get the flowers right'. (I should mention that you may need a collecting licence from CALM - check with your LFW Officer.)

The 'Immortelles', as they are known overseas, are really the least immortal of all our wildflowers but the most romantic. Mention 'wildflowers' and people smile and think of the unending fields (after good rains of course!) of everlastings. Some of my favourites are the *Rhodanthe*, including *chlorocephala* subsp. *rosea* (roseum), *chlorocephala* subsp. *splendida* (splendid everlasting), *humboldtiana* (Humboldt's everlasting) and *manglesii* (Mangles' everlasting); though I have to say that *Bracteantha bracteata* (tall yellow strawflower), *Helichrysum macranthum* (tall white strawflower) *Waitzia acuminata* and *W. suaeveolens* (waitzias) should also be included. These are the easiest of our wildflowers to preserve.

When gathering everlastings, if you plan to use them for arrangements, they are best gathered early in their flowering, not when

fully blown. Small bunches picked in the morning and secured loosely with a rubber band can be strung upside down in a dark, airy corner of the shed for up to three weeks to dry. After a week, check under the rubber band to see if the moisture has gone, if not, then regular checks after that will ensure that you don't allow them to dry out too much. This procedure will give you a product that will have opened up further during the drying process, will retain its natural colour longer and remain upright in an arrangement. The use of glycerine in preserving may cause the heads to droop. However, a solution of one part glycerine to ten parts of warm water, wherein freshly-cut stems are immersed up to about 5 cms and allowed to stand in a reasonably constant temperature for two to three days before being hung upside down to dry, can be experimented with as well.

Once the moisture has left the bunches, they should be taken down and lightly but firmly wrapped in tissue paper and stored in a box with camphor, moth balls or naphthalene flakes to ensure that insect damage does not occur before you need to use them.

Another method of preserving some of the everlastings is to pick only the buds as they are about to open and while still fresh poke them onto fine floristry wire. The moisture in the base of the head will 'rust' them firmly onto the wire stem. These can be dried upright by placing them loosely in a vase. As the buds dry and rust onto the wire, they will open. This method is great for adding colourful everlastings to fresh arrangements of foliage and the like when there aren't any fresh flowers around.

If you are collecting everlastings for pressed-flower cards, lampshades or similar craft activities, they can be picked when fully out. They should be placed between sheets of smooth, absorbent paper such as blotting paper and weighted down on a flat surface. Many years ago I have used an old iron print press with a brass screw-down handle to press wildflowers, but today you can use a microwave oven. Put two pieces of thick cardboard on either side of the blotting paper and the flowers, weigh it down with plates, and then zap for up to a minute. You will need to experiment with the times and settings for each variety. I have used this method with *Swainsona formosa* (Sturt's desert pea) without any colour loss.

One last piece of advice on preserved everlastings is that over the course of the year they will deteriorate, they will fade, they will not look the same as when you first harvested them, even though you could swear they do! So please throw them out and gather some new ones!

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