

Preserving Gifts from the Garden

In the 18th century, most homes included small working gardens on their land. Vegetables, fruits, flowers, and herbs were grown to support the activities of colonial families. Fresh foods and herbs enriched the dishes served from kitchen fireplaces, flowers became the basis of dyes for colonial textiles, and herbs were used in cleaning, as fumigants and in medicines and first aid supplies.

The ingenuity of our ancestors helped them take advantage of the diversity of wild and cultivated plants, preserving many of them for use when out of season. You can try preserving some of the plants in your backyard using the methods they found effective.



The grounds of the Historic Odessa Foundation encompass approximately 30 acres of property in the historic center of town.

The Assignment

Look around your yard and neighborhood and collect plants that you would like to preserve. These can be flowers, leaves, stems... even roots. Once you have preserved them, using the methods below, identify your plants and research their uses in your saucepans, scrub buckets and medicine chests.

- **Air drying:** Wrap your flowers, herbs or other plants with rubber bands and hang them, upside down on a hook in a well-ventilated area. Keep out of direct sunlight as it will cause them to fade. If you want to preserve just the flower, strip all the leaves off the stem before hanging. Air drying can take a week or more to depending upon the moisture in the plant. When dried, your plants will be fragile so handle with care.
- **Pressing:** Use a heavy book and some absorbent paper and press the plants. Pressing works best with flat, less moist plants. Place the paper around the plant and place it in the middle of the book and close it. Make sure the book is heavy enough to press the plant flat. If you need more weight, pile more books on top of the one you are using. Let the weight put pressure on the plant for two to four weeks depending upon the moisture in the flower.
- **Immerse in sand:** Place your plants in dry sand and gently cover. Let them sit until all the moisture has been taken out. Gently brush off all the grains of sand.

From Our Collection



Needlework Sampler

Dates: Mary Corbit

Dates: 1823

Beige, brown, and blue cross-stitches form sixteen Quaker-type flowers and two hexagonal designs surrounding the legend.

Take a video or picture of your preservation process and post it with the hashtag **#historyathome**.

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