



Heather Henson designed an all-pink bouquet and hairpiece with botanicals she grew and dried. The flowers perfectly complement a vintage winter coat.

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# DRIED FLOWERS REDUX

A modern tale of everlasting blooms

**I** declared that “dried flowers are having a renaissance” as part of “Slow Flowers’ Floral Insights” for 2016. I noted that if you are from my generation, you remember how important dried flowers were for home décor in the 1970s and ’80s. Like me, you’ve probably noticed the recent renewed interest in dried flowers. This awareness has been stimulated by sustainable sourcing practices and the desire on the part of North American flower growers to “extend the season” beyond the last frost.

For **Heather Henson**, of **Boreal Blooms** in Cold Lake, Alberta, Canada, growing flowers that can be dried and incorporated into late fall and winter floral arrangements has been a game-changer. During her growing season, this farmer-florist relies on a vivid palette of annuals, perennials and ornamental grasses to supply her studio – which provides a weekly floral CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) program for more than 50 customers and designs florals for local weddings.

Entering her seventh year, Henson knows that retailing the flowers she grows is her most profitable channel. But with Boreal Blooms only able to produce fresh flowers from May to September, this farmer-florist began several years ago to dry flowers for her design work.

# DRIED FLOWER TIPS

A visit to **Charles Little & Co.**, in Eugene, Ore., reminds one of the seemingly endless variety of everlastings it's possible to produce – if only there's space to hang bunches of flowers for drying. Founder **Charles Little** recalls when the crafting trade "gobbled dried flowers in big bites during the late 1980s and early '90s." He originally sold bunches of larkspur and dried flower wreaths to California wine country florists while working as a resident farmer at the Farallones Institute Rural Center in Occidental. Little returned to Oregon in 1981 and established the farm to grow and dry flowers to supply wholesalers nationwide.

Then came a dry spell (which he blames on the silk flower craze). That's when Charles Little & Co., pivoted to field crops and woody ornamental branches, for which it is known today.

But Charles and his partner-wife, **Bethany Little**, never stopped drying flowers. The evidence can be seen in the rafters of their magnificent barn, where there's everything from *Ammobium* (or winged everlasting, a tiny daisy-like flower) to *Achillea* (yarrow) – a satisfying array of flowers that provide beauty long after they've been harvested and air dried. *Echinops* (globe thistle) is their best-seller, valued for its modern orb-like form and intense blue hue, even when dried.

Wreath makers, crafters and designers are again integrating dried botanicals into their work, especially during winter. There is nothing more sustainable than finding an after-life use for flowers that you may have in excess. Once dried, they're not perishable, so you can design something today, such as a swag, spray or wreath, and not have to worry about its shelf life.

Take inspiration from the images shown here, and experiment with drying a variety of stems from your garden or studio. See how much beauty lives on with a new purpose.

## CHARLES LITTLE & CO. OFFERS THESE TIPS

**Best practices:** Naturally dried botanicals require heat, good air circulation and time.

**Color fastness:** Eventually, all dried flowers will fade, but the Little's dry their flowers in the dark to ensure longer-lasting pigments. Store dried floral inventory in a box away from sunlight and in a bug-free environment.

**Combining fresh and dried blooms:** It's okay to combine dried and fresh stems in water when used for event work, such as wedding centerpieces or bridal bouquets. Otherwise, insert or glue dried flowers, with stems cut short enough to not touch the vase water of a fresh arrangement.

**Ordering:** Place a dried flower order weeks in advance so the product can be shipped more affordably at ground rates.

**Details: Charles Little & Co.**  
[charleslittleandcompany.com](http://charleslittleandcompany.com), @charleslittleandco



This gallery of Boreal Blooms' vivid CSA and market bouquets illustrates the color diversity of dried flowers

© Heather Henson



Dried floral bouquets designed by Boreal Blooms for a December wedding in Alberta's Jasper National Park

© White Leaf Photographs





Demand for dried flowers went dormant for several decades, so it wasn't immediately obvious to know which flowers dry well, Henson say. "I'm a research hound, and what I found very helpful are vintage dried flower books. I scoured the Internet and found some really helpful guides." The treasure chest was an out-of-print guide to dried flowers specifically grown in her province, produced in the 1980s by a local horticulture college.

Today, Henson considers every fresh bloom she grows a candidate for drying. She has expanded the list of flowers to more than 60 varieties that are either sold fresh or saved for drying. She tried other flowers, such as peonies, to see how well they grow. "Last year, I dried some of my peonies, and they're just flipping stunning," she raves. "Now, I plan on consciously saving some to dry because they are just so beautiful."

Henson's reputation as one of Canada's most prolific dried flower producers and designers has lured others to take her workshops and follow her Instagram feed for inspiration. What began as a necessity is now part of Boreal Blooms' brand, evidenced by winter brides requesting locally-grown dried florals rather than expecting Henson to source from abroad.

"Dried flowers answer so many problems for growers and designers who are thinking about sustainability," she explains. "It's the same thing as we experience with our food system. We pick those perfect, delicious tomatoes in September and turn them into salsa and pasta sauce because we know it's better for us, and it tastes better. We turn summer strawberries into jam because we want to have that flavor all winter. And now, we take our beautiful fresh flowers and dry them so we can have those vibrant colors in the winter. It's not just a financial solution for my business, it's the aesthetic of it, too. To me, my dried flowers give my customers the essence of summer in the winter, just like the tomato or strawberry." ■

## DETAILS

**Boreal Blooms**, @borealblossoms

**Heather Henson** co-hosts the **Sustainable Flowers Podcast** with **Clara Qualizza** of **Meadow & Thicket Farm Flowers**.

Listen and subscribe at [sustainableflowerspodcast.libsyn.com](https://sustainableflowerspodcast.libsyn.com)

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