

Once you have learned how to grow a crop the next step is to cure it. You don't want to always smoke weed that's harsh and bad tasting. Here are some basic tips and a few advanced ones you can experiment with. Preparing the harvest curing the crop adding flavors.

Preparing The Harvest

Curing your harvest is an important step in the cultivation process. Many new growers are so eager to try the product they don't even wait for it to mature. They cut off buds that aren't ripe and dry them out fast. I've heard of people putting buds in the microwave because they couldn't wait for them to dry. If taste, aroma and maximum potency is important to you then you want to cure your buds and not just dry them. There are many ways to do this and I'm just going to go over a few basic things. You can find whole books on the subject if you are interested. See the bottom of this page for books.

The First Steps.

Preparations must be made well before curing begins. The experienced grower harvests his crop when 50 to 80% of the pistles have turned color. If you have grown out the strain before you have a good idea when they will be ready. You will need to clear the plants of nutrients (fertilizer) right before you harvest. The growing medium and the plants themselves store some of the nutes you have given them. This will give a nasty taste if you harvest without clearing it out. Excessive nutes will also make the buds hard to burn. Plants need fertilizer to grow and mature so you want to wait right before you are going to harvest and give them plain water. They will use up the ferts they have stored and will not slow down noticeably. If you are using hydro start clearing 3 to 7 days before harvest. This can be done by changing the solution and using only plain water. Some growers will change the solution twice because the rockwool or grow rocks may hold a little. With soil you need to change to plain water at least a week and preferably two weeks before harvest depending on how much soil in each pot. Don't use slow release ferts because they are very hard to clear out. Outdoor farmers who need to use slow release can time it and use just liquid ferts toward the end. So now you have harvested right at the peak. You cleared out the nutes beforehand and you have fragrant, spicy highly potent buds you want to preserve. The most important thing is that they must be dried. Mold is your biggest enemy once you harvest. If you have excessive moisture in the grow room you may have battled mold well before harvest and afterwards it's even more difficult. The trick is to dry them slowly so that certain biochemical processes can go on but not so slowly that mold can get a foot hold. The key is to control humidity. A good cure can last up to 8 weeks or more and will leave you with a stash that's tasty and fragrant and which has lost none of it's potency. A poor cure will leave you with nasty tasting bud that's harsh on the throat. A poor cure can even cost you your harvest.

Curing The Crop

Immediately after the harvest comes the cure. The reasons for curing and not just quick drying your crop are to make the herb sweet smelling and smokable. You want it mild not harsh and you want a good smell and flavor. After all that work don't ruin it with a too quick cure. A good cure lasts for from 3 to 8 weeks but good results can be had in two weeks or so. The idea is to remove the water slowly enough to let biological processes take place that convert the sugars and starches into harmless and flavorful compounds. Sugar or starch will give a harsh smoke that hurts the lungs. Plants need sugars to live on and they produce them from fertilizer and sunlight. This curing process also breaks down some of the chlorophyll which give herb it's green color. Too much chlorophyll gives an unwanted leafy taste. Your main enemy when you are curing is mold. After pot is dried it's not very susceptible to mold but you have to maintain a certain level of humidity to let the curing process do it's work. The way you control humidity is by controlling how much ventilation you allow. You want some ventilation but not too much. Too much and it dries out without curing properly, too little ventilation and you may get mold. If you see or smell the slightest sign of mold you must immediately stop the cure and let it dry out. If mold is unchecked it can destroy your crop in short order. Mold can be detected by sight and smell. It looks white

usually and will be fuzzy. If you see it in one part you can be sure the spores are all over so you may as well let it dry. Mold also has an odor which is always nasty. Never never smoke herb that has mold on it. You want to avoid light and heat at all times with your crop after it has been harvested. Light will destroy it and temps over about 80 degrees are bad. The best place to store it is in the freezer or fridge. If that's not practical a cool dry dark place will do. You need an enclosure to put your crop in for the cure. Depending on the size of your crop you can use a cardboard box, a closet or an unused room. With the cardboard box you want to hang the plants from a string. Don't just dump everything into the box because the plants on the bottom won't get enough air and may turn moldy. I used to put string across the open top of the box and tape the ends to the outside. I would crisscross several strings and attach the plants with twist ties. Make sure the box is tall enough for your plants. If it's not tall enough you can cut the plant in half or even cut off each branch and hang it in the box. The plants or branches should be loose and have some space between it and the next. It doesn't take a lot of space just as long as air can circulate. With a closet you do the same thing. You might want to put nails or thumbtacks in the walls for the strings or the clothes hanger bar may be enough. If you use a whole room you need to set up something to keep the plants hanging upside down off the floor. The first few days you allow more ventilation and as the plants get dryer you allow less. In the box leave the top off, with the closet leave the door open and if you use the whole room leave the door open and use a fan to blow air in. After one or two days you will have lost a good bit of moisture and you can begin to restrict air flow.

I used to put a section of newspaper over the top not quite covering the whole top of the cardboard box. As the cure progressed I would cover the top more and more. As soon as the leaves began to get stiff I'd cover the top completely. They still got a little air because the newspaper was not airtight. With a closet after a day or two close the door all except for a couple inches. As the cure progresses and the plants get drier, close the door altogether. Almost all closets have cracks around the door that air can come through. If you have a very large closet treat it like a room. When using a whole room to cure, after a day or two of letting the fan blow air in, close the door part way. With the room cure it's a good idea to have a fan inside moving the air around and another fan in the doorway blowing fresh air in. Watch the plants very closely to see how fast they are drying. As soon as you notice a little bit of stiffness to the stems they have lost probably 50% of their moisture. When the leaves start to get a little bit crisp you have lost most of the excess moisture and you must restrict ventilation some more. Using a whole room at this point you turn off the fan blowing air in but you leave the door open a little. You never cut off ventilation completely because mold is a threat right up until the end. The leaves should start to get a little crisp after a week or two. If it happens sooner you may be using too much ventilation and should cut back. Along about this time you should notice a very nice smell. This is the curing smell and it smells a little like baking bread along with a piney or fruity or skunky smell from the pot. This is the nice smell you want your herb to have. If you notice the least bit of a nasty or rotten smell it is probably mold and you need to check very closely. After the leaves start to get a little stiff and you have restricted the air flow it takes anywhere from a week to 6 weeks more to finish it. When to stop is up to you. You might want to decide by the color of the herb. It gets less green as it goes along. Buds will retain the green color longer than will the leaves. Buds may still be green at the end of the cure but not quite as bright a shade of green. You will be the proud possessor of a stash of sweet smoking, good tasting buds without the harshness of fresh cured smoke.

Adding Flavors

People pay a lot of money to get seeds they think will grow pot that smells like blueberries or chocolate or something else. Often these strains are hard to grow or may not be as potent or high yielding as other less expensive varieties. People want to know if orange bud smells and tastes like an orange. With the proper techniques you can make your favorite variety smell and often times taste like anything you want. You want to do this without ruining the cure. It's no point having blueberry pot that burns your throat or doesn't get you high. Do not pour any syrup or similar flavorings on your pot. The sugar will make it very harsh and you are inviting mold. There

are better ways. The best flavor enhancing starts while the plant is still growing. You can do a certain amount while it's curing and you can even affect the smell/flavor somewhat after it's been cured. There are two main approaches, inside out and outside in. You can apply flavors inside the plant while it's still growing and you can try to add flavors after it's been harvested but this is from the outside. Anything you put in your plants water will affect the taste of the finished product particularly if you harvest it right afterwards. I learned this about 20 years ago the hard way. I fertilized using fish emulsion right before I topped the plant. Bad move! The resulting top smelled like fish and had a foul taste. What you want to do is select a flavoring that is very concentrated. Lets take orange for an example. You could use orange juice but if you could find concentrated orange extract you would have less pulp etc to deal with. You will find some concentrated flavor extracts in the grocery store. Want your pot to smell like vanilla? Vanilla extract is cheap and readily available, so is lemon extract (cooking variety). Other extracts can be found in stores that specialize in baking supplies. Lets say you can't find any of that and you want to use what you have on hand. I took the example of orange flavoring. If all you have is orange juice you could use that. I would suggest filtering it first to get out as much of the pulp as possible. A coffee filter works well but it'll take a while to filter it all. You may have to change filters a few times. Those with hydroponic units will shudder at the thought of a lot of goop going through their system. That's why I suggested the concentrated extracts if you can find them. It's important to do this shortly before harvest. For one thing, most extracts including the ones you make up yourself have a lot of sugar in them. This sugar will ferment and decay rapidly, even more so in a hydro unit. With hydro I recommend putting the flavoring in the water between 1 and 3 hours before harvest. This rule isn't set in stone but I heard from one grower who used a sugar based clearing solution on his crop and less than 24 hours later the water was foaming from bacteria growth. Plants draw up solution fairly quickly so one hour should be enough for some of the flavoring to reach the top. Three hours should not be enough time for bacteria to grow but you will want to dump out the solution right afterwards and clean out your unit. If you read the SU of Mar 27 you knew to use plain water for a few days before harvesting your hydro crop so all that will be in the water will be the flavoring.

If you are a soil grower it's even easier. You might think it would take longer for the flavor to work it's way through the plant but this is not the case. All you have to do is let the plant dry out a little before you apply the solution. In other words schedule a watering just before harvest. Naturally you were giving your plants plain water for several days to a week or two before harvest weren't you? Give the plant the water with the flavor when it's a little bit thirsty and it will draw it right up. One hour is more than enough time for this to happen. After harvest it's important to give it a good cure as I described last week. Resist the temptation to fast dry some of the weed to try it out. You will find it's even more harsh than it would be normally because you have added some sugar to the plant by way of the flavoring. The curing process will take care of the extra sugar and give you nice mild smoke. It will also have the flavor and aroma you are looking for. I'm sure I will get a deluge of email asking me what the exact formula is for the flavoring. I can hear it now "how many drops of Bosco per gallon?" First of all, I don't know what you want. You may want something that smells exactly like an orange or a blueberry and doesn't smell at all like pot. As far as I know that's not possible. You would probably ruin the pot if you succeeded. What some people think is a nice hint of strawberry may be way too strong to the next person. What one grower thinks is very blueberry may not smell or taste like blueberry to his friend. I suggest that you don't treat your whole crop this way while you are experimenting. Dirt growers will find this easy because they could use something different in each pot. Hydro people may want to isolate a plant or two with the solution. This wouldn't be very hard because you wouldn't need circulation for the short period of time it would be soaking in it. Other things you could try are guava, pineapple, grapefruit, passion fruit, cherry, mint or even pina colada. Stronger and more concentrated flavorings will have a more pronounced effect than more dilute products. You may need gallons of orange juice to get what you want but a half ounce of concentrated strawberry essence might do the job nicely. I may start collecting recipes and have an issue of the SU devoted to peoples favorite recipes sometime in the future. In short, experiment and see what works for you. The other approach is to use something in the curing process. People have had good results with orange peel, lemon peel or other citrus peels. This will only give a bit of odor,

it's not as strong a technique as the previous one I mentioned. For those who just want a hint of something this may work fine. It's important to watch very closely for mold when curing. The moisture from the peels may promote mold if you're not careful. Let the herb dry for a day or two before you add the peels This might work a little bit with pot that's already cured and dried but it's less effective at that point.