

Hybridizing for Fun

By Gail Trimble

Pollen Collection

Before you can hybridize, you have to collect pollen, which is best accomplished early in the day. Pollen can only be collected from **fresh** anthers. The point in a flower's life that you attempt to collect pollen from is very important, as the anthers will not release pollen if the bloom is too young or too old. Generally speaking, double blooms are ready when they are $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ open, and single petaled blooms are ready when they show color but have not opened. You can also do the "squeeze test"—if the bloom has just turned soft at the base, it is ready.



Anthers on the left are fresh but too dry on the right

The easiest way to collect pollen is to cut the bloom off of the plant with a short stem, remove the petals, and place on a sheet of paper, indicating the variety. If you have multiple stems of the same variety, do not let them touch each other on the paper. The bloom should be indoors in a warm area but away from the direct sun and drafts. Within 6-24 hours, if you tap on the bloom with your finger, pollen will drop on the paper, as in the photo below.



Alternatively, you can pull the anthers off with your fingers, a knife blade, small scissors, or tweezers and put them in a film canister or baby food jar – marking the container with the variety name.



Leave the container uncovered in a warm area. After 6 - 24 hours, if you cover the container and quickly swirl the canister or jar, you will find pollen has been released on the sides and bottom of the container.



The advantages to this method are several. By removing only the anthers, you can use the same bloom to hybridize with different pollen. While pollinating, a capped container is much easier to keep in your pocket than carrying a sheet of paper which can flap with a breeze – losing all the pollen! Also, you can refrigerate the pollen (covered) up to 2 weeks, or freeze it while in the container for up to a year. However, regardless of the method you use, the ripened pollen will be just as effective and will remain viable 2-3 days more if left uncovered.