

THE ART OF PRESSING PLANTS

You don't have to be a botanist to appreciate the simple technique of pressing plants - and you don't need fancy tools.

Collecting, pressing and mounting plant specimens is one of the best ways to learn about plants. Mounted plants make better study material than any manual. A properly dried, pressed and mounted plant is attractive, easily displayed and will last a long time.

A plant collection makes for an interesting conversation piece in the home and can be used as an exhibit at fairs, schools and other displays.

Equipment

- **Trimming tool**—a sharp knife or a pair of scissors.

- **Specimen container**—plastic bags are recommended for keeping or container with a bit of water for the stems.

- **Notebook and pen**—to record important information about the plant.

- **Plant press or heavy book**

- **Newspaper—and cardboard**

Collection Procedures

Start in your own backyard, choose diverse shapes, sizes and colors. Plan to collect several times throughout the seasons.

Choose plant specimens carefully, at least one or two of each selection. Avoid plants that are off-color, fading, diseased or not normal.

Collect in dry weather for faster drying time and to prevent mold. In general, the faster a plant dries, the better it retains color. Most plants fade over time, some more than others. Regardless, they will still be beautiful.

Never harvest outside your own property without permission!

Pressing Plants

The object is to quickly dry the plants under firm pressure to retain color and to arrange the plant in pleasing positions.

Press the plants as soon as possible after collecting. On the second day, you could open the pages and rearrange any plants that have overlapped or folded before finishing the drying process.

Plant Press (homemade or store bought)

Have plenty of newspaper pages folded lengthwise ready to use and a supply of corrugated cardboard sheets (cut to fit the press). As you fill your press, alternate the cardboard sheets and folded paper (beginning and ending with a sheet of cardboard). This keeps the specimens flat and speeds the drying process.

Set the bundle over a 100 watt bulb for up to a week to speed drying, then leave the bundle for a week or two before opening. Some botanists leave the bundle in the trunk of the car, for some “sun” drying. Inside the car may be warmer than the trunk.

Or use a heavy book. Lay the flower between two pieces of wax paper and close the book. Do not allow the plants to touch or overlap. Stack additional books on top to add weight. Let the plants dry undisturbed for a couple of weeks. Then, open press or book very slowly. If plants stick to the pages, they probably need more time to dry.

Mounting Plants

After the plant specimens have been pressed and dried, they are ready to be mounted or saved for an art project.

A transparent glue (for example, Elmer's glue) is preferred to spot fasten the specimen to the sheet. Use sparingly. For papery flowers, dab lightly where petals overlap and on the backs of stems and leaves. For thicker plants, dot glue and position. I have successfully used photo spray mount (do it outside and change the bottom paper under the spray between each application).

Apply small weights, such as large nails, heavy washers or nuts to hold the plant to the mount sheet while the glue is drying. I put wax paper between plant and the weight.

Do not expose the artwork to strong direct sunlight or colors will fade in a very short time (less than a day), much like watercolors or photographs.

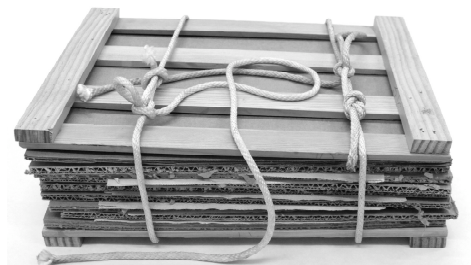
Storing Plants

1. Mounted plants are usually stored in a cabinet or case to protect them from dust and insects.

Your plants should be filed in a logical order that makes it easy to find a specific specimen. Herbariums file all specimens by family, then arranging the family members in alphabetical order by genus and species, it makes it easy to find a specific specimen.

It is usually a good idea to store a few moth balls with your plants to protect them from insects.

Have fun with it!
Trena McNabb



<http://msuextension.org/publications/AgandNaturalResources/MT198359AG.pdf>
For a simple and illustrated guide to pressing plants for personal herbarium or 4-H project.

Herbarium supplies: <http://www.compleatnaturalist.com>