

# Pressed Flowers and Leaves

## Overview:

Encourage a sense of wonder in young scientists at home by going on a backyard plant exploration to collect leaves and flowers to press and preserve. You can use your specimens to make a guide to the plants growing in your garden and landscape or to inspire a host of art and gift projects, including notecards, bookmarks, and placemats.

## Materials:

- A plant press (you can purchase a pre-made press or create your own by using squares of corrugated cardboard, sheets of newspaper and/or blotting paper)
- 2 plywood boards (cut to the same size)
- Something to bind the stack such as a belt, bungee cord, or a heavy rubber band
- Thinned white glue or Mod Podge (a water-based sealer, glue, and finish)
- Weight (such as heavy books or bricks)

**Approximate Time to Complete:** 30 minutes to collect, 2 weeks or more to dry (depends on the thickness of the material collected)

**Location:** Outdoor and indoor

**Ages:** Fun for all ages

**Season:** Spring - Fall

## Instructions:

1. Collect plant material. It's best to collect plants for pressing when they are free of dew or rain. Children can use scissors to snip flowers, leaves, or entire plants. Select relatively small, flat flowers, as they tend to press better than bulky ones. (Try pressing individual petals of larger flowers.) Collect several flowers from a plant so they can be displayed with front, back, and side views. Collecting flowers at different stages of bloom can also inspire a more interesting display.
2. To keep collected plants fresh, put them in sealed plastic bags out of the sun. You'll want to get plants in the press as soon as possible. If you need to keep them overnight, a wet paper towel in the bag will keep them from wilting too much. Alternatively, children can press and protect plants in a phonebook or catalog until placing them inside the planting press. Label each bag with the type of flower or leaf collected.
3. Place materials in your plant press. A plant press sandwiches plant parts between layers of absorbent material so they will dry quickly. (This better preserves specimens and color.) Although you can press plants in old phone books or catalogs, a setup that enables air movement speeds up the drying process.
4. The interior of your plant press will consist of alternating layers of plants arranged on absorbent material (newspaper and/or blotter paper) and corrugated cardboard. The cardboard enables air circulation so the plants dry more quickly. Children should carefully lay each specimen in between a folded sheet or two of newspaper (or blotter paper, sandwiched in between newspaper). You can lay numerous flowers or plants of the same thickness on the same piece of paper, as long as they don't touch. Try to arrange flowers and other plant parts in a natural way, so their parts will be visible when pressed.
5. Make the sandwich. In between each plant/paper layer, insert a piece of corrugated cardboard. Finally, place wooden boards on either side of your layered pile. Next, you'll need to bind or weight the stack to create pressure that will help the plants dry. You can tighten straps or belts around it or simply put something heavy on the stack. Some presses have screws and nuts in each corner that can be tightened to create pressure. Leave your press in a warm, ventilated location.

6. Check your specimens. Although many plants will dry adequately in ten days to two weeks, some may take longer. If you find they are still moist when you check them, and you have them between more than one newspaper layer, you can change just the outer layer. (The delicate plants, when moist, will likely stick to the piece they're touching.)
7. Use your pressed flowers and leaves. Consider mounting your pressed collections for display. To create classic herbaria pages, children should give each plant its own sheet of paper. Or pressed leaves and flowers can be used to decorate notecards, bookmarks, placemats, or other objects.
8. Always begin by deciding on your layout of your plant material first before mounting it with any type of adhesive. (Once leaves and flowers are attached, they are not easily removed, even when the glue is still wet). Have children use white glue thinned with water or Mod Podge to attach plant parts to heavy paper. If a flower, petal, or leaf seems breakable, put the glue on the paper and let it sit until it dries a bit and becomes tacky. Next, pick up the flower with a damp fingertip and press it gently onto the glue. Once glue is dry, cover pressed plants with clear contact paper to protect them. (This is a job for adults or older children).