

Make a plant press for kids

For the builder in your house!

Why?

Preserved plant specimens help you learn about the kinds of plants in your area. A collection of dried or preserved plant specimens is called a 'herbarium'.

One of the most famous plant collectors was Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus who invented the system of plant and animal classification.

Materials

- Cardboard
- Paper towel
- Newspaper
- Scissors
- String
- Plant specimens from your garden

Material substitutions

- No cardboard, paper towel or newspaper? Place specimens inside a phone book or catalogue.
- Use blotting paper instead of paper towel.
- If you have access to thin board place this at the front and back of your press to create a tighter press.

Before you begin

Only pick plants from your own garden that you have permission to collect. Do not collect plants from the side of roads as they may have pesticides on them, or parks or nature reserves as they are protected.

Make sure you have already created your plant press before you pick your plants. It's important to press your plants straight away before they wilt!

Tips for picking

- Pick on a dry sunny day as there will be minimum moisture present in the air
- Make sure your plant or flower is free of dew or rain.
- Collect items in the late afternoon as this is when a plants moisture content is at its lowest
- Place plants in a bag out of the sun as you collect them to keep them safe.
- Label your bag with the name of the plant (if you know it), the date and location of collection and your name.

Instructions

To make the plant press:

1. Have an adult help you cut 6 cardboard squares about the same size as paper towel. This will be enough to press 5 plants. If you have more plant specimens, then just continue to cut more cardboard. By having the

different layers this will help air circulate speeding up the drying process.

2. Cut the newspaper so they are twice the size of your paper towels. Then fold each of them in half.
3. Lay down one piece of cardboard first, then 2 paper towels to act as a blotter to remove moisture from the plants, next a folded sheet of newspaper. Then add another piece of cardboard and keep adding the remaining items in the same order. You should finish with a piece of cardboard.
4. Cut 2 lengths of string long enough to go around the plant press twice.
5. Place a heavy weight on top of your press, for example, heavy books, wood or bricks.

To press your plants:

1. The best way to preserve the colour and shape of the plant is by pressing and drying your plant as quickly as possible.
2. Lay your plant inside the folded newspaper.
3. Spread the plant or flower petals out so it doesn't overlap.
4. Try to lay it out in a natural way.
5. If you have more than one plant together make sure they are not touching.
6. Create your press as described above, placing all the layers together like a sandwich.
7. Tie the string around your press, once at the top and one at the bottom. Tie it tightly.
8. Place your plant press in a warm place to dry for at least a week, longer, up to 2 weeks is better.
9. After one week check on your plants. If they are still moist change the newspaper, not the paper towel as the plant may stick to the paper towel and tear if you try and move it.

What do I do with my pressed plants?

- Once your plants are dry you can mount your collection. Create a booklet where you can tape or glue your leaves and flowers to and include a label of the name of the plant if you know it, and the other information you wrote when you collected the plant including date, location and your name.
- Use your pressed specimens to decorate cards, create bookmarks
- Frame your specimens
- Digitise your collection by scanning or photographing your specimens.

