

PRESERVING



A PLANT SPECIMEN



An herbarium is a collection of preserved plant and/or fungal specimens. At The State Museum of Pennsylvania, over 13,000 specimens are preserved including vascular and non-vascular plants, fungi, lichen, moss and liverwort. Most plant specimens are dried by pressing and then are mounted on archival sheets or stored in packets. Thick plants and fungi are dried without pressing and stored in boxes. Each preserved specimen has a label with its name, information where the specimen was growing when it was collected, who collected the specimen and when it was collected. A preserved specimen and its label can provide detailed information and aid in scientific study. If preserved properly, these mounted specimens can last for over 100 years.

Let's Press a Plant!

Materials

- Trowel
- 2 flat pieces of wood
- String or twine
- 4 pieces of cardboard
- Old newspaper
- 1 piece heavy cardstock (acid-free)
- White craft glue
- Water
- Cup
- Paintbrush
- Tray
- Plain 3x5 card
- Heavy books (*Optional*)
- "Field" notebook
- Measuring tape
- Wax paper



find a plant

1



Be sure to have permission to collect a plant. For this activity, select a small plant. Try choosing a plant from your yard. If using a different location, follow the 1 in 20 rule - only take 1 if you can see 20 other good plants of the same kind. Avoid plants that could cause rashes. Before you collect the plant, take a photo of it. It may help in identifying and documenting information about the plant. Use the trowel to collect all of the plant, from the top to the roots. Write down information in a field notebook about the plant's location, surrounding habitat, color, height, the date and time that it was collected and your name as the collector. You can use this notebook each time that you collect a plant.

Press the plant

2

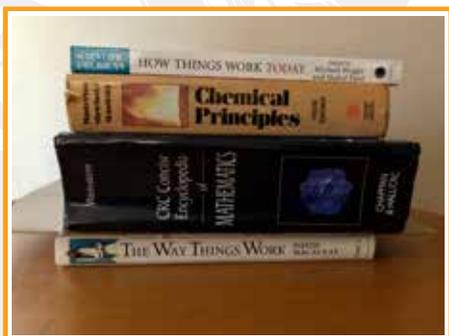
Press the plant soon after collecting to prevent them from browning. A plant press uses absorbent materials to draw the moisture out of the plant in order to prevent decay and preserve color and two outer hard flat surfaces, to apply pressure to the plants. To press your plant, place several sheets of flat newspaper or other absorbent paper, over a piece of cardboard. Lay the plant on top of the newspaper. The newspaper will absorb the moisture. Use additional newspaper for larger specimens. Try to lay the plant as flat as possible.

The way that the plant is laid is how it is preserved. Make sure the plant is in the center of the paper. Fold the paper over the plant so that it is covered. Place the second piece of cardboard on top. Place a piece of wood underneath and overtop the cardboard layers. Use the twine to tightly bind it together. You may have to stand on top to close it tightly. If you don't have wood, then use a stack of heavy books. You made a plant press!



Wait and Identify

3



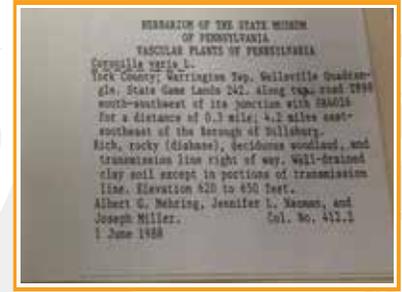
Leave the plant press in a warm, dry place for about 3 weeks. You can check the specimen periodically. If the plant feels like it will bend and fold, it is not ready. Change the paper if it is damp. While you wait, identify your plant.



Create a Label for Your Specimen

4

Cut the 3 x 5 card in half vertically. Use your field notes to create a label on one ½ of the card. Give your specimen a number and also include that number in your field notes. Include the common and scientific name of your plant, and your name as the person who collected the specimen. Include the location date and time. Include information about the plant such as the color and size. This may change after the plant has dried.



Mount Your Specimen

5



Once the plant is dried, you can mount it. Plan to arrange the plant as realistically as possible. Make a mixture of ½ white glue and ½ water. Pour the mixture into the tray. Use the brush to paint the glue mixture onto the label and place it on the bottom right corner of the cardstock paper. Gently paint the glue mixture on the cardstock paper where the plant will be mounted. Gently paint the glue mixture on the plant specimen and then place it on the card stock. Remove any excess glue. Cover the top with a sheet of waxpaper to prevent the wet glue from sticking. Place a sheet of cardboard on top to keep it flat. Place heavy books on top and wait about 24 hours for the glue to dry.

Display or Store Your Mounted Specimen

6

You can store your mounted specimen in a file folder to protect it and use it for study. Store it in a dry, cool place. You can also display your mounted specimen as a decoration. Be careful, dried plant specimens are fragile.

*Ready to mount
another specimen
for your herbarium?*

