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# HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN PLANT DISPLAY

EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
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E. F. FROLIK, DEAN J. L. ADAMS, DIRECTOR

# MAKE YOUR OWN PLANT DISPLAY

C. J. SCIFRES 1/ AND L. R. ROBISON 2/

Properly identified and well-preserved plant and seed specimens are valuable references in teaching and identification.

Good plant collections include several growth stages for each species. For instance, most perennial plants have distinct seedling, rosette, and adult forms. Each form may have different identifying characteristics. The collector must harvest all through the year to collect all growth stages for a number of species. Pressing will preserve the plants' shape and color. Properly mounted and stored specimens will last for many years.

A plant press is used to dry specimens under pressure and is designed to be carried on the collecting trip. Therefore, the first step in making a usable plant collection is constructing a suitable press.

An effective plant press does not have to be elaborate. Simple but effective presses are easily and economically constructed (Figure 1). Size is dictated by individual preference, but smaller than 12 by 24 inches is usually impractical.

1/ Assistant Research Agronomist, Crops Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. D. A., and Instructor, Department of Agronomy, University of Nebraska.

2/ Extension Agronomist - Weed Specialist at the Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station and Assistant Professor of Agronomy, University of Nebraska.

Cooperative contribution of the Crops Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the Nebraska Agricultural Experiment station.

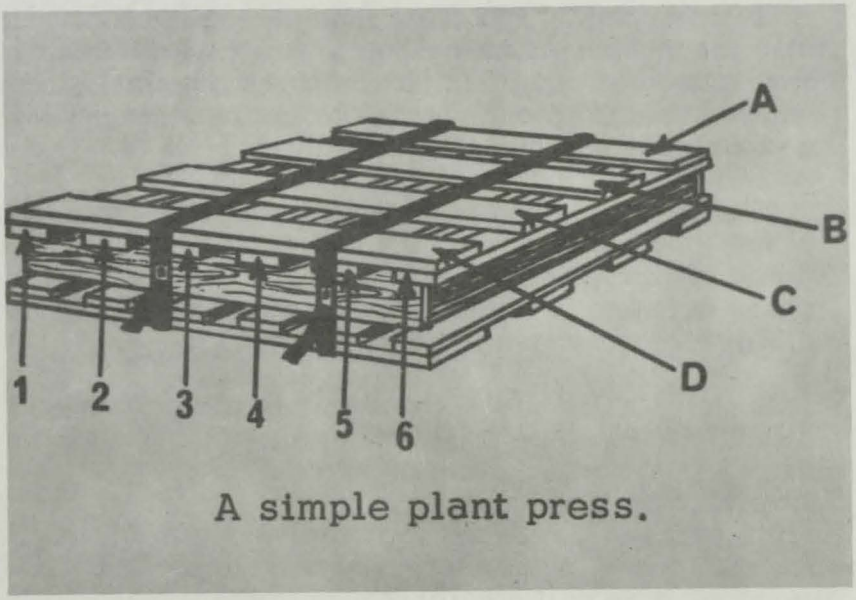


Figure 1. A sample plant press. Pieces labeled A, B, C, and D in the illustration are 3/4" by 1 1/2" and 24" long. It requires eight such pieces to build the press. The numbered pieces are 1/2" by 1 1/2" strips 12" long. Twelve of these are needed. Use nails or screws to hold the pieces together.

## Collecting and Pressing Plants

Care in selection and collection of plant specimens is necessary to produce a presentable amount. Metal containers are produced specifically for plant collecting, but a simple container such as a large plastic bag may be used effectively. A damp cloth or paper towel placed in the container will prevent wilting of the plants before completion of the tour.

A plant press may be taken on collecting tours and specimens pressed in the field. However, if you plan to gather a large number of specimens, it is best not to press until after the collection tour. Small plants can be placed in a large magazine and labeled directly on the page.

Process plants on a large table or similar area. Carefully place specimens between two thicknesses of dry newspaper with all plant parts spread out flat. Discard excess and dead plant material to insure rapid drying and to prevent sample discoloration.

Use care and good judgment in removing plant parts, so that the specimen retains a natural appearance. Place additional newspaper or blotters between samples to absorb excess moisture. Transfer specimens to dry newspapers daily until the sample is dry.

Samples will still be moist and flexible the day after collecting. This is a good time to arrange the plant to the desired position and finish spreading out leaves and flowers. If a large number of plants are put in a press, insert sheets of corrugated cardboard or plywood every fifth or sixth sample to keep them flat and rigid. The use of a forced air oven will greatly reduce drying time.

## Making the Mounts

Equipment and materials required for mounting plants for display include heavy scissors, cotton batting, pressboard backing, rubber cement or glue, masking tape, and acetate or clear plastic sheets for covering the specimen (Figure 2).

Pressboard backing of No. 300 (medium weight) is adequate for specimens up to 24 inches tall, but heavier weight (No. 100) should be used to provide support for larger mounts. It is usually purchased already cut to size. Various weights of acetate sheets are available. One hundred mil weight is easy to manipulate and gives adequate protection to the specimens.

The cotton batting should be cut to fit the pressboard back and a decision made as to thickness needed to mount a particular specimen. A good rule is to allow the sample to sink to at least 1/2 of its thickness. One thickness of cotton batting is enough for most plants especially if they are correctly pressed. However, some plants such as thistles and sunflowers which have large, thick heads and stems may require a double thickness of cotton to insure a smooth mount and to prevent the specimen from slipping and breaking on the mount.

After cutting the cotton to size, place glue around the edges and down the center of the pressboard back. Place the cotton on the back and trim it as necessary. Impregnating the cotton with an insect repellant such as moth flakes will prevent insect damage during storage.

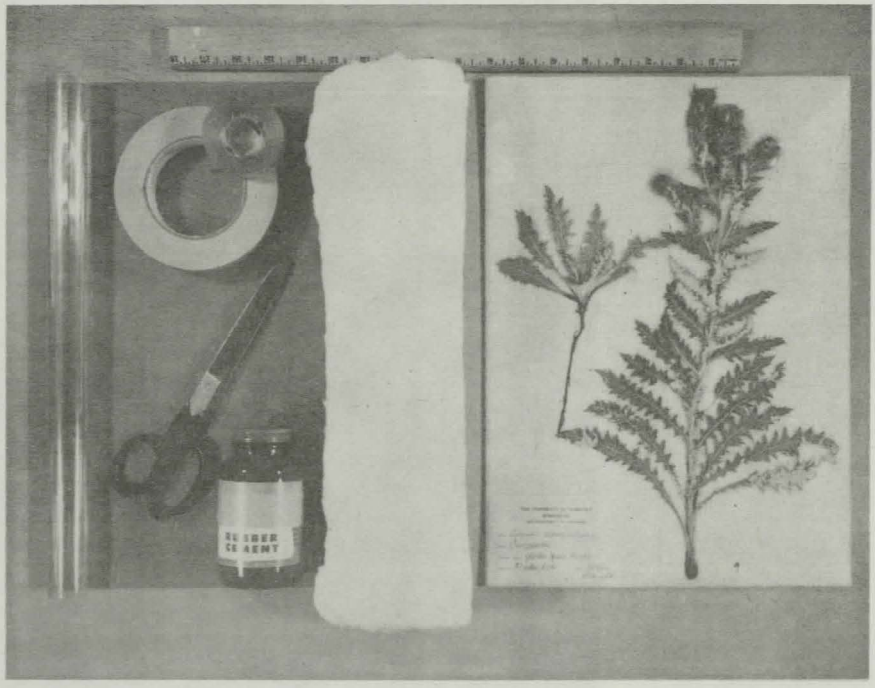

Figure 2. Equipment and materials needed to construct plant mounts.

Arrange the plant specimen in the desired position on the mount and carefully press it into the cotton. Place the identification card in the lower right corner. Cut the acetate or clear plastic cover about one to two inches wider and longer than the back, so that an edge sufficient for pulling and taping to the back remains.

After placing the acetate cover on the mount, carefully turn the entire mount and specimen over and place plant side down. Pull and tape one side of the acetate cover to the back. Pull the adjacent side snug and spot tape at each end and the middle.

Now turn the mount over and inspect to assure that the plant is properly adjusted. Then seal the mount by taping down all four sides of the acetate to the mount back. Figure 3 shows a good plant mount.

Figure 3. A good plant mount including stem, roots and leaves of seedling, juvenile, and mature plant. The seed sample is glued to the cotton batting. Reference card is available for a quick study.

The identification card, placed under the acetate in the lower end of the mount, should have information such as common name, botanical name, collection date, location and type of area from which the specimen was collected, collector's name or initials, and any other pertinent facts

neatly printed or typed on it. This record provides a permanent reference and will always be available with the mount for future study.

Store the mounted specimens in a cool, dark, dry place to prevent spoilage or loss of sample color.

The cost of materials for a 12 by 16-inch mount on 300 weight pressboard backing and using the suggested list of materials is 50 to 75 cents. The greatest expense is time and labor spent on collecting and mounting. All materials may be purchased from hardware and office equipment suppliers.

## Summary of Pressing and Mounting Procedures

1. Place specimen between newspapers or blotters and straighten leaves, stems, and roots.

2. Press specimen (change newspapers daily for 2 to 3 days to prevent discoloration of sample, or supply hot, dry air).

3. Cut desired thickness of cotton batting to correct dimensions.

4. Place glue around edges and down the center of pressboard backing.

5. Place cotton batting on pressboard back and trim as needed.

6. Firmly press sample into cotton.

7. Cut acetate or plastic cover 1 to 2 inches larger than the mount so that it may be taped to the pressboard back.

8. Tape down one side of acetate cover, and check the sample before finishing the taping.

9. Insert identification card.

10. Seal sample by taping down the remaining three sides of acetate.