



Zilker Botanical Garden Activity Guide

Making Art with Pressed Plants

Ages: All

Objective: To introduce folks to the practice of pressing and preserving plants for use in scientific collections and art.

What is a Plant Press?

A device used to flatten and dry plant material using two firm pressing boards layered with absorbent paper and corrugated cardboard (and sometimes sponge for pressing fruit). Pressure is usually applied through straps. Botanists use plant presses to preserve plants for studies of taxonomy and ecology. Not only are pressed plants used by scientists, but also folks who use pressed plants to create art.



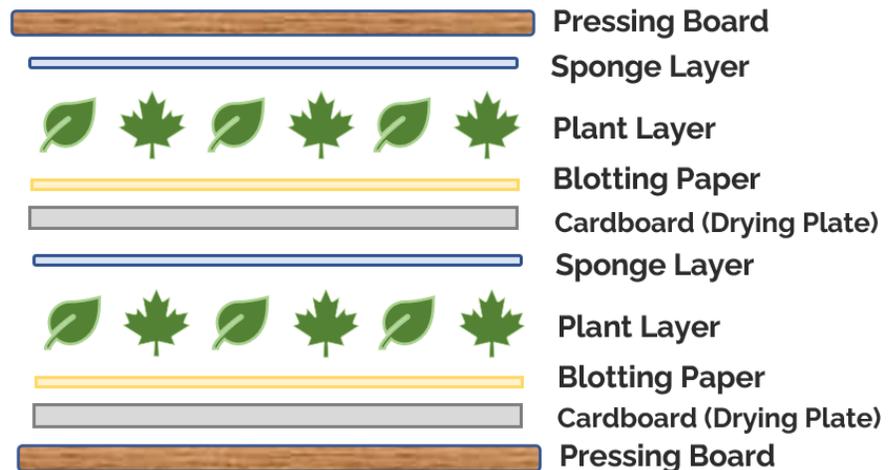
The Layers of a Plant Press

- **Sponge Layer:** Used to buffer pressure between layers, mostly useful when pressing fruits or succulent tissues.
- **Plant Layer:** Leaves, flowers, stems, and fruits can all be pressed. Group like-thicknesses of plant materials in the same layer (i.e. thin leaves in one layer while thicker stems in another layer).
- **Blotting Paper:** absorbent paper that directly interfaces with the plant materials. Place flowers face down on blotting paper for the best press.
- **Cardboard Layer:** specialized absorbent cardboard that acts as the main support for the press.
- **Pressing Plate:** the outer layers of the plant press that apply even pressure throughout the layers

Instructions:

- 1) Obtain a pressing board
- 2) Place cardboard (drying plate) on top.
- 3) Place a piece of blotting paper on top of the cardboard.
- 4) Place plant material on top of the blotting paper. Be sure to group plant material of similar thickness. Place flowers face down on the blotting paper for best results.
- 5) Apply a sponge layer on top of the plant layer. If pressing fruits or succulent tissues, be sure to place a sponge layer on top of the blotting paper, then add the succulent tissue, then add another sponge layer.
- 6) Repeat steps 2-5 as many times as required or until you run out of space or pressing materials.
- 7) When you have completed adding layers, apply straps or belts to the pressing boards. Be sure to apply as much pressure as possible.
- 8) Store the plant press in a dry place. After 5-7 days, the plants should be pressed!
- 9) Using tweezers or forceps, carefully remove the pressed plants.
- 10) Arrange artfully and adhere the plant material to paper with glue. For enduring art, use acid-free paper and acid-free glue.

Diagram of Plant Press



Tips:

- Materials can be reused, but the blotting paper is the most likely to be altered by plant material. Blotting paper can be replaced by printer paper or flat newspaper. Note that the ink from the newspaper can transfer to the plant material if moisture is high enough.
- The cardboard (drying plates) will absorb moisture from the air. For best results when reusing, microwave for 5 minutes on low power. Additionally, corrugated cardboard can be used.
- If sponge sheets get dirty, simple handwashing with soap and then drying will make them good as new.