

To press flowers for a personal herbarium, arrange fresh specimens between absorbent sheets of paper, apply steady pressure, and let them dry completely. Then mount each specimen on a sheet and add a label with details about where and when you found it.

Choose and collect your flowers

Pick flowers that are fresh and dry, ideally after any dew has gone. A specimen with a flower, leaves, and a short section of stem will tell you more about the plant than a flower head alone. If the plant is large, choose a piece that fits your paper without crowding it.

Collect only where you have permission, and check local rules before taking plants from public land. Avoid rare or protected species. You can also press flowers from your garden or use stems that have already fallen.

Keep your specimens out of direct sun and press them as soon as you can. Make a note of the location, date, and growing conditions while they are still fresh in your mind.

Press and dry the specimens

You need absorbent paper, such as uncoated newspaper or blotting paper, and a flower press or a stack of heavy books. Smooth paper is useful because a strong texture can leave marks on delicate petals.

1. Lay a specimen on a sheet of absorbent paper. Spread the petals and leaves so their shapes can be seen, and turn one leaf over to show its underside.
2. Cover the specimen with another sheet of paper. If you are pressing several plants, give each one its own pair of sheets.

3. Place the paper inside a flower press, or sandwich it between flat pieces of cardboard and put heavy books on top.
4. Leave the press in a dry place. Check the paper after a day or two and replace it if it feels damp, taking care not to move fragile petals.
5. Continue drying until the specimen feels crisp and no part feels cool or damp. Thin flowers may dry in a week or two, while thicker specimens can take longer.

Mount and label each plant

Use a sturdy sheet of acid free paper for each specimen. Arrange the dried plant before attaching it, leaving room for a label. Small strips of archival paper tape can hold stems and leaves in place. Handle the specimen gently, since dried flowers can break easily.

On the label, record the plant name if you know it, the date collected, and the location. Add useful details such as the habitat, flower color before drying, and your name as collector. If you are unsure of an identification, leave it blank or note your uncertainty rather than guessing.

Store your herbarium

Keep finished sheets flat in a folder or box, away from moisture and direct sunlight. A sheet of clean paper between specimens can help protect delicate flowers from rubbing. Check the collection occasionally for signs of insects or dampness.

Give each plant enough space to be seen, and let your notes make the collection useful as well as lovely to look through.

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