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## Collecting Plants Contents

### Plants: A Pressing Project

[Background](#)

[Materials/Procedures](#)

### Curriculum Connections

[Creating Field Guides](#)

[Cultivating Mentors](#)

### Growing Classroom Exchanges

[Pressed Plant Projects and Products](#)

### Resources

[Web Sites](#)

[Books and Field Guides](#)

[Botanical Field Press](#)

### Related Articles

[Petal Attraction: Weaving Wildflower Lessons](#)

[Flower Courtship](#)

### Pick with Caution!

Never collect or disturb any plant species that may be endangered or protected. Learn your state laws by contacting a natural resources agency. It's a good idea even with non-protected plants to use the following rule of thumb: never pick a plant unless you can see at least six in the area. Also, always get permission from the owner of any property on which you intend to collect plants.

**New for Teachers!**

## Curriculum Connections

### Creating Field Guides

Field guides are publications designed to help people identify living things outdoors. Plant field guides are typically arranged according to physical characteristics, such as flower type, size, and color; leaf arrangement; and plant height. (The nature and arrangement of flower parts are key factors in determining plant families.)

One way to engage students in organizing their plant guides is to have them determine categories that make sense given their observations and the intended use of the guide. For instance, they might organize plants by flower color, arrange them by the types of pollinators they attract, or sequence them to coincide with stops on a self-guided habitat tour.

### Finding the Key

Most published field guides use **dichotomous** keys, which include a series of questions with only two possible answers to choose from for each question. If you want students to try their hands at creating a dichotomous key, have them start by dividing their plant collection into two groups based on observable characteristics (e.g., *flowers/no flowers*). Next, they should take each pile and choose two new alternatives. If students select subjective qualities, such as *small/large*, encourage them to quantify their choices (*leaves < 10cm and leaves > 10cm*). The group should continue in this fashion until there is only one plant left in each category. Once they've created these keys, students can use their categories to write a series of questions for the beginning of their field guide (*Does the plant have flowers? No flowers?*) to help the user identify the plants.



### Making a Plant Database

Consider having students create a computer database to catalog their herbaria or field guide information. The database form might include the following: common name, scientific name, family, student discoverer, habitat, unusual features, and so on. They can also scan in their sketches or import digital photos of their subjects. Students can also add information based on observations made over time, such as how a plant moves from flower bud through seed and fruit.

Once the material is in the database, students can sort it in different ways, such as by plant family. Information from the database can be printed and bound and/or featured along with pressed specimens. (**Note:** This project offers a great opportunity to assess student thinking, grasp of concepts, and skills, such as observation and classification.)

### Cultivating Mentors

Invite your students to use what they've learned through their plant collection project to engage peers or younger schoolmates and teach them about the plants in the schoolyard habitat. This could include creating a scavenger hunt, helping youngsters observe the fascinating world of flowers, or showing them how to use your student-created field guides. If time allows, your kids might want to buddy up with younger ones and show them how to collect and press plants for an art project.



## Growing Classroom Exchanges

Consider finding classrooms in other regions of the country with an interest in swapping pressed plant collections by mail or by e-mailing digital scans or photos. Visit the [Garden in Every School Registry](#) to begin your search. (Also be sure that your [project is registered](#) so others can find you.) How do the plants of each region (or school garden) compare? Can students make inferences about their environment, climate, or local biome where their cyber-peers live based on their observations of the pressed collections? How might the latitude or average moisture affect the plant life typically found in a region? As students swap plants and experiences, fruitful discussions and perhaps even research projects may result.

## Pressed Plant Projects and Products

Once students have a collection of pressed plants, flowers, and/or other parts, they can use them to create art projects and gifts. To make gift cards, bookmarks, placemats, or framed wall hangings, students should use thinned white glue to attach flowers and other parts to a heavy paper, such as card stock and/or clear contact paper. (Colorful flowers mounted on black paper make lovely wall hangings.) You may want to cover the products with clear contact paper, although flower cards also look great when left as is. Instead of mounting plants for bookmarks, placemats, or mobiles on paper, consider placing them on waxed paper and covering them with contact paper, or sandwiching them between two pieces of clear contact paper. Once the plant sandwich is made, students can cut scalloped edges or shapes from the sheet.

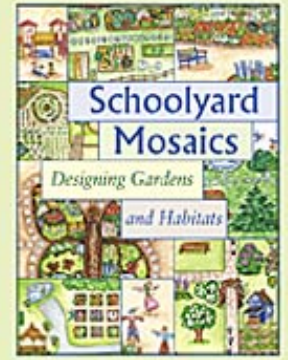


Another nice way to illuminate your precious flowers is to press them onto candles. You'll need a plain candle, a bit of glue, some extra paraffin wax melted in a double boiler, and a brush. Start by brushing some glue lightly on the candle and placing the flowers on one at a time. Put a light second layer of glue over the flowers to make sure they stick. When that layer is dry, paint a layer of melted paraffin over the flowers.

Consider raising money for your garden or habitat project by selling your pressed plant products at a harvest festival, plant sale, or other school or community event.



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