



# **Making and Using a Flower Press**

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# Introduction

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Pressing and drying flowers is one of the oldest, simplest, and best ways to preserve the beauty of the garden. During the Victorian era, ladies transformed the pressing of flowers into an art form, creating personalized floral embellishments on stationery and other decorative household articles. The Victorians' passion for gardens and their love of elaborate decorative arts found the perfect outlet in flower pressing. Since then the art has continued to thrive, and with new methods and materials available, it continues to grow in simplicity and popularity.

In Japan, where the art of pressing and using pressed flowers is called *oshibana*, practitioners create lovely objects ranging from intricate landscape "paintings" of dried botanicals to simple chopstick holders decorated with dried flowers.

Although we might not recognize it, most of us have had some experience in pressing flowers. Remember the first time you received flowers from someone you loved? Did you select one of the flowers and press it between the pages of a thick book? You might have reopened the book years later and rediscovered the faintly fragrant flower, now dry and brittle but still lovely. Pressed flowers preserve the beauty of flowers and foliage long after that special bouquet is gone, and long after the brilliant blooms of spring and summer have passed.

But pressing flowers is only part of the process. Once you have pressed a few flowers, you will discover that there are hundreds of ways to use them. From picture frames and cards to stationery, place mats, wall hangings, greeting cards, and even bookmarks, you will delight in creating beautiful things with your pressed flowers.

Whether you are about to press your very first flower or are ready for advanced design ideas, this bulletin offers something for you. I will begin by presenting plans for building the flower press, and then move on to gathering the flowers. I'll discuss the best plants for picking and pressing, and the best methods for using and storing your pressed flowers. Then I will offer some pressed-flower projects to delight you. I trust that you will find the entire process to be thoroughly relaxing, enjoyable, and rewarding.

# Making Your Flower Press

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A flower press is a simple tool used to flatten and dry flowers and foliage. As I noted, in a pinch you can just tuck a blossom or two into a thick book. But presses are very easy and inexpensive to make, and, because they apply even pressure, you will get better results than you will by using a book. All flower presses work the same way: They flatten the botanical materials in them, and they use paper or other absorbent material to help dry the flowers you are trying to preserve. Once the flowers are dried you will be able to remove them from the press and store them for use in your projects.

You can purchase a flower press from a craft store. But commercially available presses tend to be quite small and lightweight, which limits the types and numbers of botanicals you can press. You might want to use a purchased press as your portable field press, and build one of the models here for your main press.

## Basic Flower Press

*Plans by Lowell Tukua*

This is a reasonably large and very sturdy flower press. It is versatile, with lots of space for pressing many flowers.

## MATERIALS

- 2 12" × 12" × L"-thick pieces of plywood (you can use other wood, such as pine shelving, if it is available)
- 4 6" × ¼" carriage bolts (rounded head for flush mounting)
- 4 1" flat washers with G" hole
- 5 ¼" wing nuts (large wings for easy tightening)
- 2 1" × 2" × 12" boards

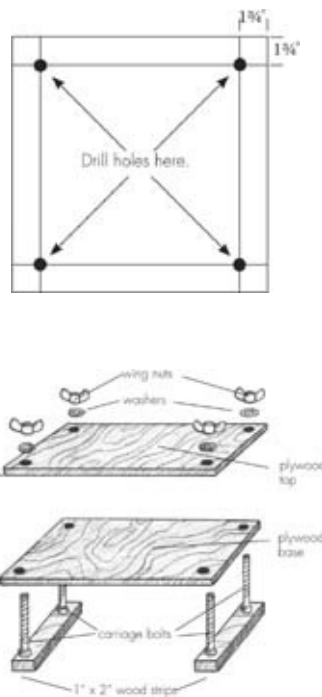
## ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

1. On one of the 12" × 12" pieces of plywood, measure in along each side of the board 1¾" and mark with a pencil. Using a straightedge and your measurements, draw a line along each side of the board at your 1¾" markings.

### *Tools*

- Pencil
- Straightedge or metal ruler
- Drill
- Hammer
- Nails or screws

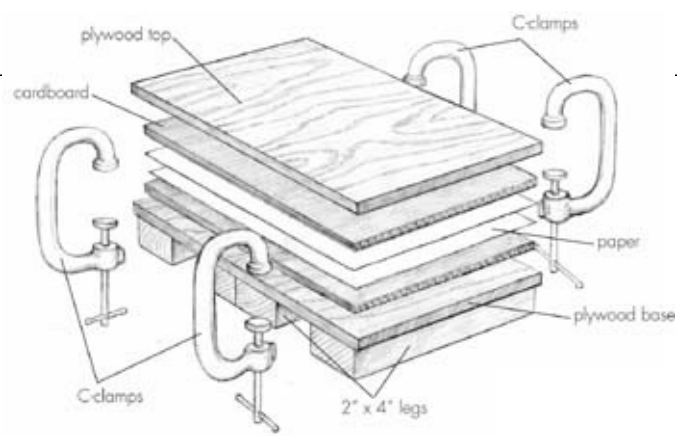
2. Place and align the marked board on top of the other 12" plywood board. Drill a 5/16" hole at the four intersections of your drawn lines. Drill through both boards, then set aside the unmarked one.
3. Insert two of the bolts through the holes in the marked board. When only the head of the bolt is visible, use a hammer to drive the head into the wood until it is flush with the board. Repeat with the other two bolts.
4. Nail or screw (predrill the holes for screws) the 1" x 2" pieces of wood over these bolts to hold them in place. This will serve as the base of the flower press.
5. Turn over the baseboard with the bolts facing up and place the unmarked 12" x 12" board over the holes. Put on the flat washers and wing nuts, and your flower press is built. Brush on a coat of polyurethane and let it dry completely before using. carriage bolts



## Variation: The C-clamp Flower Press

*Plans by Lowell Tukua*

Here's an easy variation of the previous flower press. Using C-clamps instead of bolts and screws allows you to use every inch of space in the press.



## MATERIALS

- 2 12" × 16" × ¾"-thick pieces of plywood
- 1 4' -long 2" × 4", cut into four 1' -long pieces
- 4 3" C-clamps
- 16 2" -long wood screws (plasterboard screws work best)

### *Tools*

Wood glue  
Screwdriver  
Ruler  
Pencil  
Polyurethane  
Brush

## ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the plywood and boards according to the specifications on the materials list. The two pieces of ¾" plywood will serve as the top and bottom of the press.
2. Glue and, after the glue has set, screw the four pieces of the 2 × 4 to the bottom of one of the pieces of plywood (see illustration). These will serve as legs, while also providing gaps where the C-clamps will be positioned. Set the first 2 × 4 strip about ¼" from the edge. Set the second strip parallel to the first, but about ¾" away from it. The third strip will fit tight up against the second, with no space between. Then leave another ¾" space between the third and final strips, which should be about ¼" from the edge of the board.
3. Apply at least one coat of polyurethane to protect the wood of your flower press. Let this dry completely before using.
4. When you use the press, the C-clamps will fit in the two gaps between the legs of the press.

# Using the Flower Press

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With a few tips to help you get started and some basic supplies, you can begin using your new flower press immediately.

## *Tools and Materials*

**Blotting paper or newsprint.** The easiest and least expensive paper to use in your press is newsprint. In fact, many people begin pressing using newspapers or pages from an old phone book. While this kind of recycling is always a great idea, you may run into problems with the ink staining your flowers. Instead of using printed paper, call or visit your local newspaper. They often have roll-ends of unprinted newsprint that are too short to use on the press. They sell or give these away (our local paper gives them away for educational use and otherwise sells them for a very reasonable fee). If you do get a roll, you will have to trim or fold the paper to the size of your press. But even a short roll will last you for many seasons of flower pressing. You can also buy newsprint pads in craft, hobby, and office supply stores. If you buy pads, you can get the size you need and save yourself the task of trimming. If you are eager to start, try using the old telephone book until you get unprinted paper. You will need to change the paper in your press frequently, so an ample supply of paper is a very good idea.

**Cardboard.** You will also need four to six rectangles of cardboard cut to the dimensions of your flower press. They can be cut from cardboard boxes or purchased from craft and hobby stores. Lay one sheet directly on the inside base of the press. Then add four to six sheets of paper, and then another piece of cardboard. Repeat as often as necessary for the amount of materials you will be pressing, but always end the stack with a piece of cardboard and then the top of the press.

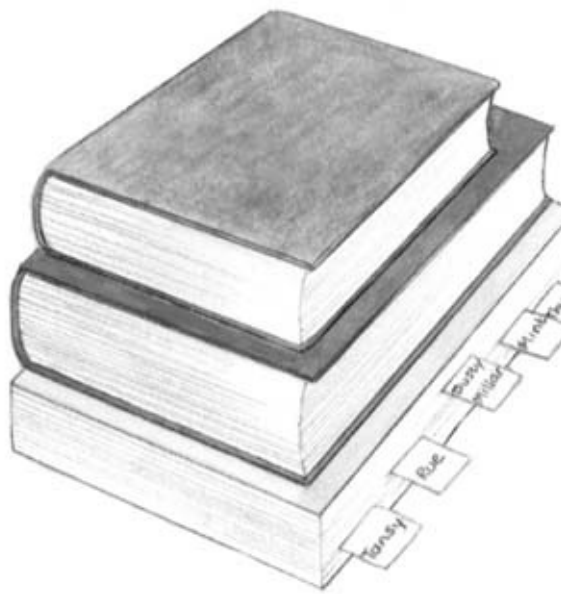
## **A Portable Flower Press**

Although both of the flower presses I've just discussed can easily fit into your car, neither is suitable for carrying into the field. Because you should press your flowers as soon as they are picked, you might consider buying or making a more portable field press to use until you can get your plants home to the big model.

Some ideas for portable presses are:

- A large telephone book or an outdated encyclopedia will suffice as a temporary press. Simply place the botanical materials in the book and secure with string or elastic bands. Add weight by stacking books.
- For smaller pressing projects, you can use a pair of paperback books with their covers removed. Place your flowers between the books and secure with strong elastic bands. If the books are thick, place materials every 20 to 30 pages inside the books as well as between them and secure.





- A handy portable press can be made from four pieces of cardboard cut to 8½” x 11” dimensions (or 5” x 7”, if you prefer a smaller temporary press). Place several sheets of blotting paper or some paper from an old telephone book between the cardboard pieces. Wrap twine around the outside length and width of the cardboard and tie firmly in a bow.

**Tweezers.** Both before they enter the press and after they are dried, your plant materials are fragile and easily damaged. And some of them will be quite small. You should get into the habit of handling them with a good pair of tweezers. The kind I prefer have a long, curved gripping surface; they came from a dentist. Try your local drugstore or medical supply store for a pair you will be comfortable using.

**Boxes and paper for storage.** Unless you will be using them as soon as they come out of the press you will need to store your pressed flowers. Some projects require a large quantity of botanicals; you may have to store some while pressing others. The best way to store them is to lay them on construction paper or newsprint in flat boxes or shallow drawers. You can stack dried flowers and foliage, separating each layer with a layer of paper. Flowers should retain their color for two years. They will keep longer, but colors will start to fade.

# Pressing Flowers

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The basic procedure for pressing flowers is very simple. You will pick what you want to press (see pages 14–15 for a list of plants), place it carefully between two sheets of paper in your press, date the sheet the flowers rest on, and seal the press. But there are some guidelines that will improve the quality of your pressed flowers.

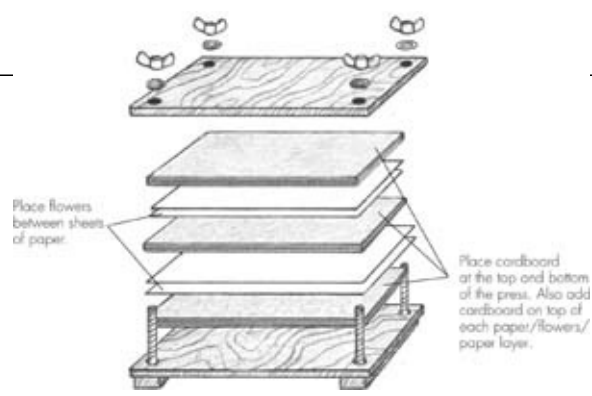
Using tweezers, place your flowers, leaves, or stems into the press directly on the newsprint. Allow space between flowers so that none touch. If any overlap, they will probably stick together. For convenience in sorting and to aid in organizing, place like flowers on the same sheet of paper. If you're pressing a variety of botanicals, place flowers and foliage of similar thickness on the same sheet. Press flower stems on one section, leaves on another, and so on. If you want to press blooms with thick layers of petals, it is best to separate the petals from the stems and dry the petals separately. Also, flowers with thick, round centers are best separated; dry the petals on one sheet and the flower centers on another. (Later, you can arrange the petals in a design similar to their original appearance.)

## Microwave Presses

At least one company sells a microwave flower press. Made of plastic, it works the same way traditional presses do, with absorbent paper and pressure, but uses the microwave to speed the process. People who have tried this microwave technique say that the colors stay truer and that the microwave-dried botanicals are not as brittle as traditionally dried flowers. Drying times in the microwave range from 20 seconds to 4 minutes, depending on the materials used. If you want to try microwave-drying, try using two heavy, microwave-safe plates with paper towels between them. Sandwich the flowers between paper towels on one plate, making sure they do not touch or overlap. Place the other plate on top. Start drying in 20-second increments on the high setting. The thinner and more delicate the flowers, the less time they should spend in the microwave.

On the edge of the paper, use a pencil to note the date that the flowers entered the press. Also, write the name of the herb or flower or leaves on that sheet next to the date. If you have separated the stems, leaves, petals, and centers of a flower, make sure you note which plant each part came from. You don't want to assemble a purple coneflower for a project and accidentally use the leaves from an ivy!

After one sheet of paper has been filled and labeled, lay two sheets of paper on top. If the flowers are relatively flat and thin, such as pansies, these two sheets are all you'll need; just add more flowers and more paper on top, then a cardboard divider. If the plants are thicker, cover them with a sheet or two of paper and add a piece of cardboard. Then lay a sheet of paper on the cardboard, add more plants, and repeat. Make sure that there is always a piece of cardboard against both the wooden base and the top of the flower press, with ample blotting paper between each cardboard divider. Both of the presses described in this booklet can hold up to five cardboard divider sections with paper and plants sandwiched between.



Place flowers  
between sheets  
of paper.

Place cardboard  
at the top and bottom  
of the press. Also add  
cardboard on top of  
each paper/flowers/  
paper layer.

Finally, make sure that each of the four bolts (or clamps) of the flower press is tightened evenly. Equal pressure is key to getting good results with your press.

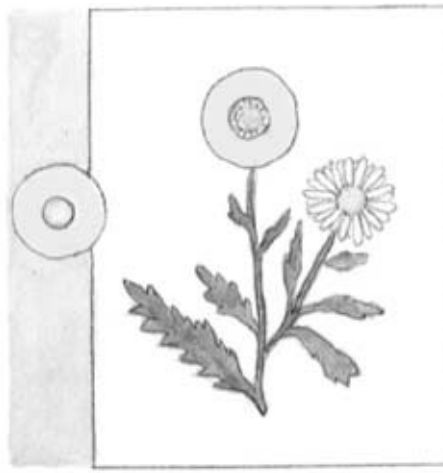
Check your flowers the day after you put them into the press. If the paper shows any signs of dampness, you will need to change it; use tweezers to transfer the plants to fresh paper. Check them again the following day. If moisture is again present, change the paper again. If the paper and flowers do not remain absolutely dry, then some or all of the flowers may mold in the press, spoiling others nearby. If this happens, you will need to discard the moldy plants and paper; restock your flower press with clean, dry paper and fresh flowers; and start the procedure again.

### **The Thick and Thin of Pressing**

If you do not want to separate the thinner parts of your plant from the thicker parts, here are a couple of ideas to help you press the entire plant successfully.



*Place pads of blotting paper over the thinner parts of your flower to even up the pressure in the press.*



*Cut pieces of foam slightly larger than the thin part of your plant. If you have a flower with a thicker center, cut a hole in the foam and lay it over the flower.*

Allow botanicals to press for four to six weeks before removing. You may check them periodically while they are drying, but do not move them unless necessary.

### ***Storing Pressed Flowers and Foliage***

Remove your pressed flowers the same way you put them into the press: with tweezers. Pressed flowers, herbs, and foliage can be stored until you have accumulated the desired quantity and variety. Store in a dry place, away from direct sunlight.

Check stored flowers periodically for mold and mildew, especially if you live in a humid area. Promptly discard anything with a trace of mold or mildew to avoid losing the remainder of your stored botanicals. In humid regions, consider placing a packet of silica gel (you can purchase this at a craft store) in the box with your botanicals. Also, try to store the boxes in a well-ventilated area to prevent damage from moisture.

# What to Press

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The botanicals best suited for pressing are flat and have a low moisture content. Luckily, some of the best-looking pressed flowers are also the easiest to grow. Pansies, daisies, impatiens, dogwood blossoms, ferns, ivy, and most leaves are among the easiest and best selections to press, especially for the beginner. Other flowers, such as purple coneflowers, are trickier, because they have very thin leaves and a thick, moist center. If you wish to press these, you might need to pull the petals away from the center and dry them separately. After all parts are dry, you can reassemble the flower. Some flowers simply have too high a moisture content to press well — daffodils are a good example. But it costs nothing but time and a bit of blotting paper to try, so don't be afraid to try to press anything. If it doesn't work, you've still learned something.

## The Secret to Pressing lovely rosebuds

When you're working with a rosebud, detach the bud from the stem and press each separately. You may also choose to remove the leaves and press them separately. If the leaves on your stem are not all perfect, simply pick perfect leaves of similar sizes and press them instead. Discard those with brown spots or holes. Press only the freshest and closest to perfect. When you use the rosebud, you will simply reconstruct it from the best leaves and stems you have pressed.

Using a sharp pair of scissors or a utility knife, cut the rosebud in half vertically. Then lay the two halves in your press, cut-side down. This reduces the thickness and moisture of a bud and, at the same time, doubles the number of rosebuds available for your projects.

If you press and then use many flowers each year, you might consider planting a pressing garden. Use the list on pages 14–15 as a guide, and remember not to limit your plantings to perennial flowers. Many trees, vines, shrubs, ferns, annuals, and wildflowers are well suited for pressing. And keep a list of desired botanicals in your wallet to refer to during visits to garden shops. Add a pressable plant or two to your landscape whenever possible. If you have a terrace, a patio, or even a window box, you can begin potting or planting flowers for the purpose of pressing them.

What you choose to put in your new flower press will be determined by the project you wish to undertake and the available botanicals. You need not limit yourself to those flowers that grow in your zone or region. Florists and garden centers often have a wide array of plants with pressing potential. To expand your choices further still, try purchasing directly from a wholesale floral distributor. If you do select from a florist or distributor, be warned that the flowers may be very moist, because they probably have been standing in pots of water. Check them the day after you put them into your press to make sure they are not too wet.

As you learn and experiment more, you might consider keeping a small notebook or your own chart listing flowers that you have worked with. Note the time it took to dry them, and any problems or ideas for changes the next time you try pressing them. Also carry a field guide to North American wildflowers as you look for specimens for pressing. It will help you identify what you find, as well as giving you ideas for interesting flowers to try.

**A word of caution:** Picking wildflowers along major interstates and in state and national parks is generally prohibited. Always seek permission from property owners before you pick flowers or foliage to press. And take no more than you will need. Never pick endangered species; never pick the only one of a flower or plant. And know what you are picking. Some plants, like poison ivy, have leaves that are

very attractive but also highly irritating. Other plants, like monkshood, foxglove, and oleander, are lovely, but even a tiny portion is extremely poisonous if accidentally eaten. To be safe, do not press these plants. And if you do, store them in locked, clearly labeled boxes out of the reach of children.

## ***Getting the Best Results***

Flowers that grow from bulbs generally have a high moisture content and therefore do not press well. Examples include daffodils, crocuses, amaryllis, and tulips. Of course, there may be other flowers that you will not have success in pressing. An experienced flower presser may be able to press the most difficult flowers, like calla lily, while a beginner might fail. But don't be afraid to experiment, even with some of the flowers listed above. If you fail, you have still learned something, and all you have lost is a couple of sheets of paper and some time.

There are ways to help ensure success, however. Follow the basic guidelines below for the best results.

- Until you become experienced, try to use freshly picked flowers, not those taken from a florist's bouquet: Most of the latter are full of water, and this increases the likelihood of mold or mildew. If you do use purchased flowers, check often in the first few days to make sure they are not too wet in the press.
- Pick flowers in dry weather, just after the morning dew has evaporated. Never pick flowers to press right after a rain.
- Pick flowers and foliage without blemish (no brown spots or insect damage). Preferably, pick the newest, youngest, freshest-looking blooms.
- Press all specimens immediately upon picking. This is especially crucial in hot weather. When you're in the field, carry along a temporary press. Otherwise, your flowers may wilt before you return to your press. If you're gathering plants from your lawn or garden, lay them in a basket.
- Unless it's a windy day, try placing your specimens in the press while on the porch or patio to keep cleanup to a minimum.

**PRESSABLE FLOWERS, FOLIAGE, AND HERBS****Flowering Trees, Shrubs, Bushes, and Vines**

| <b>Common Name</b> | <b>Color(s)</b>                         | <b>Zones</b> |
|--------------------|---|--------------|
| Azalea             | White, pink, purple                     | 3-9          |
| Catalpa            | White with yellow stripes, purple       | 4-9          |
| Crape myrtle       | Pink, white, purple, red                | 7-10         |
| Flowering dogwood* | White, cream, pink                      | 5-8          |
| Elderberry flowers | White                                   | 6-8          |
| Hydrangea          | Blue, pink, white                       | 4-10         |
| Ligustrum          | White                                   | 3-9          |
| Pinxter flower     | Pink                                    | 7-9          |
| Redbud*            | Purple-red                              | 5-9          |
| Weigela            | White, pink, red                        | 4-9          |
| Wisteria           | White, purple,<br>pink with purple tips | 6-9          |

**Garden Flowers, Wildflowers, and Flowering Herbs**

| <b>Common Name</b> | <b>Color(s)</b>               | <b>Zones</b> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Aster              | Pink, yellow, white           | 3-10         |
| Begonia centers    | Yellow flower center          | All          |
| Buttercup          | Yellow                        | 4-8          |
| Catnip             | White with purple spots       | 3-7          |
| Chickweed          | White                         | All          |
| Clover             | White, magenta                | 4-9          |
| Curly dock         | Red                           | All          |
| Daisy varieties*   | White, yellow                 | 3-8          |
| Dandelion          | Yellow-gold                   | 5-7          |
| Dianthus           | Red, pink, white              | 4-10         |
| Fire pink          | Red                           | 3-8          |
| Fleabane           | White, pink                   | 2-8          |
| Goldenrod          | Yellow                        | 5-9          |
| Impatiens          | Various                       | All          |
| Indian blanket     | Red with yellow tips          | 2-10         |
| Johnny-jump-up*    | Yellow, white, and purple mix | 4-8          |

|                    |                            |      |
|--------------------|----------------------------|------|
| Lantana            | Various                    | 8-10 |
| Lavender           | Lavender                   | 5-10 |
| Lobelia            | Blue-purple                | 4-10 |
| Mullein            | Yellow                     | 5-9  |
| Pansy*             | Various                    | 4-8  |
| Phlox              | Red, pink, lavender, white | 4-8  |
| Pickeralweed       | Purple-blue                | 3-11 |
| Plumbago           | Blue                       | 4-9  |
| Purple coneflower  | Purple                     | 3-9  |
| Queen Anne's lace* | White                      | 7-10 |
| Rose varieties     | Various                    | 2-9  |
| Salvia             | Red                        | 5-10 |
| Skullcap           | Blue                       | 5-8  |
| Statice            | White                      | 8-9  |
| Sunflower          | Yellow                     | 5-9  |
| Viola              | Various                    | 6-9  |
| Violet             | White, purple              | 4-9  |
| Wood sorrel        | Rose-purple                | 3-10 |
| Yarrow             | White                      | 4-8  |

### *Greenery and Foliage*

| <b>Common Name</b> | <b>Characteristics</b>        | <b>Zones</b> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Artemisia          | Striking silver leaves        | 3-7          |
| Bottlebrush        | Thick green leaves            | 10-11        |
| Carrot tops        | Lacy                          | All          |
| Elderberry         | Long, slender leaves          | 6-8          |
| Galax              | Turns red in fall             | 5-8          |
| Gardenia           | Dark, shiny green             | 8-10         |
| Ivy*               | Cascades of leaves            | 5-10         |
| Maidenhair fern*   | Green, lacy fronds            | 3-11         |
| Redbud             | Heart-shaped leaves           | 5-9          |
| Wisteria leaves*   | Clusters of slender leaves    | 6-9          |
| Wood betony        | Small, fernlike leaves        | 5-8          |
| Yarrow             | Fernlike, soft-toothed leaves | 5-7          |

\* easiest to press



# Getting Started

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Now that you have pressed your first flowers, it is time to use them in projects. The key to a successful project is to lay out your design first, arranging it exactly as you want it. When you have it just right, then begin gluing it down. Even the most experienced designers work this way.

## ***Gluing Basics***

Once you have laid out your design, you are ready to glue it to the chosen background. Begin by squirting white glue into a bottle cap. You will need very little glue, but it must be applied carefully so that it doesn't leak out around the edges of the flowers. Keep a supply of toothpicks handy.

Start with the layer of flowers you positioned first. For example, if you are reassembling a flower you took apart to press, start by gluing down the petals as you want them. Then glue the center over the petals to hide their inside ends.

Carefully lift each piece with tweezers. Dip the flat end of a toothpick into the glue and gently dab a small amount onto the back of each flower as you are ready to apply it to the background. Be careful not to apply too much glue, and try not to get it on your tweezers. It's a good idea to keep a damp cloth handy in case of accidents.

Work from the bottom layer up, gluing your botanicals to their base, overlapping where your design dictates. When you are finished, either throw away the bottle cap or wash it to keep for the next project. If you are using plastic toothpicks, you can wash and reuse them. Wooden toothpicks should be thrown away.

## ***Gluing Tools***

*Much like pressing, affixing flowers to a background requires few tools; more important are a steady hand and patience. Still, the following will come in handy:*

Bottle caps

Plastic party toothpicks

Tweezers (same as the ones used for pressing)

White glue

# Simple Projects for Beginners

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If you're eager to start working with pressed flowers, the first two projects I describe below are quick to compose and don't require an abundance of tools or materials. To help you get started quickly, these projects are made with materials pressed for only a few days. They are temporary projects meant to be enjoyed for a short time and then thrown away.

## Fresh-Pressed-Flower Plates

The next time you have a dinner party or feel festive, you can create unique dinner or serving plates. You will need two clear glass plates for each place setting or serving plate. They should be of the same size and design. You will also need some ferns and some flowers in full bloom. They can be used fresh for this unique project, because the glass plates will serve as a temporary flower press.

Lay down one glass plate and arrange some greenery on the surface. Select one large flower for the center, or several smaller blooms to rest on top of the greenery. When you've arranged them the way you want, simply press another clear glass plate on top to sandwich them under glass. Trim off any greenery that overhangs the edge of the plates.

The plates can be made up to half a day ahead or the night before and stored in the refrigerator until needed. If you are making multiple place settings, you can stack them in the refrigerator. But remember to remove them about 20 minutes early to give any frost a chance to clear from the glass plates.

*Variation.* Cover a cardboard circle larger than your dinner plates with autumn leaves, taping them in place at the center and completely covering the cardboard at the edge. Place dinner plates over the bases for a festive autumn table.

## Place Mats

### MATERIALS

1 12" × 17" piece of burlap

1 piece of muslin or other fabric 2"–4" smaller than the burlap Spray adhesive

### Decorated Gift Soaps

Start with a bar of either homemade or purchased soap and some small dried flowers. Simply moisten the surface of the bar and apply the chosen dried flowers or leaves. If your design consists of multiple flowers that overlap, melt a little paraffin or beeswax and brush gently onto the underside of each botanical. Press into place on the soap according to the design. Let the bar dry completely; then cover with plastic wrap.

Tweezers

Pressed flowers, greenery, and leaves (for this project, they need be pressed for only a day or so, just until they are flat and dry)

White glue

Plastic toothpicks

Clear contact paper

Scissors or pinking shears

1. Glue the muslin to the burlap using a spray adhesive and let dry. This will give you a stiff background to compose on.
2. With the tweezers, lay out your pressed flowers and foliage on the fabric until you are satisfied with the design.
3. Glue the botanicals to the fabric and let dry.
4. Remove a couple of cross threads on all four sides of the burlap to create a slight fringe effect.
5. Cut two pieces of contact paper to the same dimensions as the burlap. Apply one piece to the bottom of the burlap mat, then cover the top with the second, being careful to apply smoothly without any creases or bubbles in the surface. Trim around the perimeter of the place mat with pinking shears or scissors. Your place mats are ready to delight everyone at mealtime!

### ***Ideas for Theme Place Mats***

**Nature-walk place mats.** Take the family or friends on a nature walk, collecting materials to press. Allow each participant to press his or her own botanicals on a separate sheet within the flower press; write the artist's name on the paper. Once the drying is complete, remove the materials from the press and allow each person time to come up with a nice design for the place mat. After the gluing is done, use a marker or calligraphy pen to write *spring*, *summer*, *winter*, or *autumn* in the lower right-hand corner, along with the artist's name, if you wish. If you'd like the mat to be an educational tool, add the plant name near each item on the fabric backing.

**Twin turkey handprints.** You will need two additional tools for this project: a black permanent marker and an inked stamp pad, preferably red. This pressed-leaf project is a favorite of young children. Press a child's left hand against the inked pad. Then lay the hand flat against the muslin and press to make a clear imprint. The thumb should imprint at the center of the paper. Repeat with the right hand. After the ink has been washed off the hands and put away, select long, slender pressed leaves such as those found on sumac, pecan, hickory, and walnut trees. Position them between each finger of the handprint. (Try to select leaves that are similar in length to the child's fingers.) These will serve as the turkey's back feathers. Place a drop or two of glue on the back of each leaf and glue into the arranged position. Place a group of leaves (about three) in a cluster pointing downward toward the center of the hand. Glue into position. Make stem and leaf legs and feet. For the head, I use one yellow leaf cut in half to form a pointed beak, and a long slender red leaf to serve as the wattle (the bumpy skin on the turkey's neck). Use the black marker to dot on an eye. In the bottom right-hand corner of the fabric, write the date; an older child can write his or her name. Seal according to the directions above.

**Animal leaf place mats.** With a little creativity and lots of different-shaped leaves, you can create many animals with leaves. Here's one idea to get started. To make a butterfly, select two large, heart-shaped leaves and place them on your background with the points touching. Use a long, slender leaf for the body. Then select and cut thin stems, positioning them as the antennae. To add color, cut two ovals and two kidney shapes from contrasting-colored leaves and glue on top of the wings. And there you have a butterfly, all ready to glue down.

# Intermediate Projects

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One of the most common and loveliest ways to use pressed flowers is to frame them, either alone or as decorations on the matting surrounding artwork.

## Miniature Framed Flowers

Look for small, pretty picture frames in brass, gold, silver, or wood tones and shaped in circles, ovals, or squares. Some square mini-frames also have heart-shaped centers. With small frames, start by trying a single-bloom display. One mini-frame is often used to display a large pansy. Select a simple background fabric such as linen, muslin, or shantung in a solid color and mount the fabric on the cardboard piece that comes in the frame. Tape the fabric to the cardboard on the back. Find the center of your frame and mark it lightly with a pencil as a general reference for applying your bloom. Select your bloom and glue into place. Place in the frame after the glue has dried. These look especially great displayed in a group.

### **Variations:**

**Mini-collage.** Use tiny flowers that you have collected and dried. After you have covered the back of the frame with a solid, neutral-colored fabric or heavyweight paper, lay the frame on top and lightly mark the inner four corners. There is no need to cover the whole piece of fabric with flowers, only the portion that will be visible when framed. Just make sure that the flowers completely cover the pencil markings that you made on the backing. To plan your design, start close to the center and overlap flowers in an appealing arrangement. Once the area within the markings has been covered, begin gluing flowers into place on the backing. Remember to glue the bottom layer of flowers first.

**Topiary shapes** are very popular and can be easily re-created in frames. Simply sketch a circle, star, heart, or other shape on the backing and fill it in with flowers. A mini standard rose is a good idea, but any topiary shape will work. Simply use a stem or thin leaf for the trunk and flowers or a paper pot at the base.

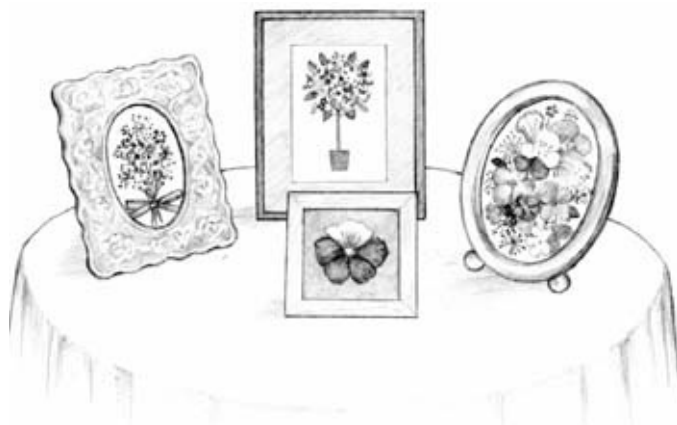
**Bouquet.** The flowers in this project are designed to resemble a bouquet of fresh flowers. For a romantic look, select a cream-colored ceramic frame and background fabric for this lovely bouquet of flowers. A 3½" x 5" ceramic frame sets off a bouquet of small blooms to perfection. Matting is not necessary; indeed, it would detract from the soft, romantic look of the ceramic frame. Start by taping a piece of cream-colored fabric to the cardboard insert that came in the frame. Arrange all flowers with stems pointing downward to mimic a bouquet. It's okay, however, if the flowers used in this bouquet design do not all have stems attached; feel free to take artistic license by borrowing thin stems from other botanicals. The base of the bouquet is where the majority of the stems should appear, as they would in a real bouquet. When your design is finished, carefully glue the botanicals to the backing. For a nice finishing touch, tie a bow of thin ribbon and glue it across the flower stems as if the tied bow were actually holding the bouquet together.

**Embellishing matting.** This is an easy way to add a personal touch to standard matting. Any of the materials that you have successfully pressed and stored can be used to embellish matting. First determine how the matting will be used — to frame a photograph, watercolor, print, charcoal drawing, or the like. Then select pressed botanicals in a range of colors that complement the picture. For balance, decorate around all four corners, in an L shape around the bottom corners, or along opposite sides. As always, lay out your design with the print or photo underneath first, to get a preview of how the finished product will look. After you are satisfied with the design, glue it down. Allow the glue

used on the botanicals to dry completely before you place the matting in the frame.

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## Decorating candles



It's a simple matter to embellish tapered or pillar-style candles with pressed flowers. Choose the candles you wish to work with, and select from your pressed materials flowers compatible with the candle colors. Arrange the materials until you are happy with the design. When embellishing tapers, try using one simple flower and a couple of leaves. If you're working with chunky pillar candles, create a band of daisies or pansies around the base.

Pour a little glue into a bottle cap or jar lid. Using the toothpick or a very fine artist's paintbrush, apply glue, covering the entire back of each botanical. Press onto the candle. If any glue shows on the candle, wipe it clean with the tip of a damp sponge or cotton swab, making sure not to wet the flowers. When you're working with tapered candles, you can seal the flowers with paraffin if you wish; this will make the decorations less fragile.

Care should be taken when burning candles, especially narrow tapers, that have dried-flower decorations added. As the candle burns down to the level of the dried materials, make sure the flame does not touch them. For this reason, it is often best to decorate only the base of tapers. When the candle burns down to the level of the decoration, it's time to replace the candle anyway. With pillars and wider tapers, the flame does not come close to the outside of the candle, so the fire danger is minimal.

## Embellishing Wooden Boxes

Any box with a flat lid is suitable for this project. A trio of floral-embellished Shaker-style boxes in graduated sizes would make a lovely accent to any room in the home. Dogwood blossoms, baby's breath, and Johnny-jump-ups are ideal, because they are flat. The box you select will need to hold glue, so avoid highly polished or lacquered boxes. To ensure that the glue will adhere to the wood, lightly rub a piece of fine sandpaper only within the area that will be covered by the decoration. Then select your pressed materials and lay them out, gluing when the design is complete. If any glue seeps out from under the pressed flowers, immediately wipe it off with a damp cloth, being careful not to wet the pressed flowers.



To protect the flowers on the lid of each box, spray two or three even coats of sealer across the arrangement, allowing the sealer to dry between applications. Most craft and art supply stores stock spray sealer.

## Bookmarks

The flattest of foliage and flowers is necessary for this project. When a protective film covering is applied, bulky materials will cause uneven lumps on the surface. Bookmarks can be made on ribbon or stationery paper or a combination. Choose a width of ribbon to complement the flowers you will be working with, but generally, a bookmark should not exceed 2" in width and 8" in length.



To make a bookmark, select a 1"- to 1½"-wide satin ribbon and cut to a length of 16". Fold in half. At the bottom of the ribbon, opposite the folded end, cut an upside-down V no more than 1" deep. Apply a thin bead of glue across the notched bottom to hold the two ends together. Decorate with delicate dried botanicals like ferns and Queen Anne's lace, gluing these to the ribbon. Seal with clear contact paper or laminate. If you are new to working with laminates, or if you have trouble getting a smooth seal, practice before attempting the final project. One effective method is to peel off the backing slowly, working from the top, rather than peeling off the backing all at once and trying to apply the entire piece of laminate.

For different looks, try using different materials. Ribbons come in an amazing variety of fabrics, from gold to calico. Different colors and different flowers create moods that range from elegant to

rustic. Or you can use paper instead of ribbon: Decorate stiff paper or poster board with dried flowers and seal. Tie a complementary yarn string to the top to dangle out of the book. You could even try affixing your dried flowers directly to the laminate or contact paper back, sealing with the top piece of laminate to create a stained-glass bookmark.

## Stationery Items

With the right paper products, you can create attractive gift tags, place cards, greeting cards, note cards, and other stationery. Most of these items need to be either hand-lettered or printed first from a personal computer. If you use a computer, there are many software programs that will help you lay out gift tags and cards; many office supply stores also sell lovely colored or patterned paper to use in your computer. With a computer, you must print out everything before adding flowers.



To embellish place cards (also referred to as table tents) and gift tags, arrange small flowers in the upper left corner and add foliage that extends both out and down. Another design idea is to place one flower at the bottom center of the card, with a small bit of fernlike foliage extending to its left and right sides. This will leave plenty of room to print a name centered directly above the flower. Place cards for the table should be folded in half before you affix the floral to ensure proper placement. After the pressed-flower design and calligraphy are completed on a gift tag, use a hole punch in one corner and add thin ribbon or raffia to attach to the package.

You can embellish single sheets of stationery paper as well. When planning your design, make sure that all pressed floral work appears at the top of each sheet, so it will not be damaged as the letter is written.

For folded note cards, the spectrum of design possibilities is limitless. The area is like an artist's canvas. You can make your own or purchase blank cards from a craft or art supply store. For a truly personal set of stationery note cards, try a monogram design. Acquire a stencil or template in the capital letter desired and lightly trace it onto the blank card with a pencil. Cover with a collage of tiny flowers. (Don't forget to press some of those tiny flowers growing within the weeds in your yard. It is amazing what you will start to notice growing around you when you begin selecting botanicals to press!) Here's another design idea: Form a wreath on the front of the card. Start with a circle template, lightly tracing it onto the card. Then cover over the pencil marks with ivy or other green foliage. Tie a small bow with red ribbon and glue it to the wreath at the 5 o'clock position, and you have an impressive holiday greeting card!

# Advanced Projects

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Once you are comfortable working with pressed flowers, you might want to try some more complex projects. Although these projects tend to be more expensive to make than those I've described above, the flowers will be highly protected, which means they will last longer.

## Fern and Pansy country Heart Tray

### MATERIALS

Fabric

Antique tray with glass

Hardboard backing

Tape

Maidenhair fern

Heart template (optional)

Glue and bottlecap

Tweezers

Party toothpicks or a small artist's brush

Pansies

A couple of smaller flowers (optional): one blue and one



white, such as Johnny-jump-up or violet, and chickweed or aster

Spray sealer

Duct tape or veneer pins

2 screws, and picture-hanging wire (optional)

1. Select a color and type of fabric that will complement the flowers you are using and cut the fabric in a rectangle that is at least 4" larger than the antique tray.



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