

5th Grade Language Arts - Extra Credit Project

Making Pressed Flowers



To go along with our poetry unit, you may do this project for extra credit for Language Arts. The pressed flowers will be placed in your poetry journal. The number of flowers you choose to do is up to you, but it is not a good idea to do more than a few. The only thing you will need to do at home is the pressing of the flowers. The arranging and gluing of the dried flowers will be done at school.

Information excerpted from "Pressed Flowers from Riverhaven" (<http://www.riverhaven.com>)

Background Information

Preserving flowers by pressing dates back to earliest recorded history. Specimens have been found in Egyptian tombs and between the pages of old books. In most instances, the presser wanted to preserve a flower associated with a special occasion, a valentine bouquet, a wedding, or, yes, a funeral. In modern times, flower pressing has flourished in England. Young ladies brought home from a holiday or a walk in the country, flowers gathered on that happy occasion and pressed them between the pages of books. The flowers were often too bulky to give up their moisture before mold developed. Sometimes the pressed material was later arranged in a frame, and sometimes it was forgotten, left to be discovered by a future generation.

Some very elaborate valentines, decorated with pressed flowers, were made in Victorian times and still exist today. If the card was saved between the pages of a book, hidden from light, it probably is still in good condition. Queen Victoria was an enthusiastic flower presser. Reportedly she pressed most of the flowers from her beloved Albert's funeral.

What Do I Need?

You will need: (Almost everything you will need to press your first flowers can be found in the home)

- An old phonebook to be your press
- Scrap computer paper between which to press flowers
- Gallon jug of water, well stoppered, for a weight
- A tray or board to place between the phone book press and water jug
(to distribute the pressure evenly)
- Tweezers for handling pressed material

Note: A good pair of tweezers is very important. When a flower has been pressed, it is as fragile as a thin sugar cookie; handling with tweezers is less likely to cause damage than fingers might.

What Kind of Flowers Should I Use?

Most small flowers will be fine. Here are some suggestions:

buttercups	violet	forget-me-nots	pansies	asters
fruit blossoms	geranium	daisies (small)	delphinium	larkspur
poppies (small)				

Simple flowers, ones that can be pressed whole, are best. (Some complex flowers need to be taken apart to press successfully.) What you find growing will depend on season and where you live. Keep in mind the size of your book pages when selecting flowers to press.

You don't need to know the flower's name to press it. Looking is half the fun. Flowers that still have their yellow pollen are freshest; fresh ones give the best results. Some flowers can be pressed with their stems attached; others are best pressed separately. It is your choice for whatever you are using.

For every blossom, Nature uses many greens: leaves, stems, tendrils, ferns and grasses. You will need some of these as well as flowers to create a picture.

How Do I Actually PRESS the Flowers?

Flowers may be pressed either face-up or down. Arrange them on computer paper, spaced so they do not touch. Cover with another sheet and place in phone book press, allowing 1/4 " thickness of phonebook pages between "sandwiches."

Use a zip-closure plastic bag to gather your material to press. When closed it will retain the natural moisture. If you cannot press as soon as you get home, store the closed bag in the refrigerator. Do not add water. It is always best to press promptly, but when necessary, the refrigerated flowers will last a couple of days. Always carry a zip-closure bag in your pocket in case you find something interesting while outside.

Many flowers do not have useful stems, but you can pick extras of those that are good. Buttercup stems are wonderful and I have used them on many flowers that need better ones than their own. You will find others.

When Will the Flowers Be Ready?

Most specimens will be ready in five to seven days, but some take longer. A pressed flower held by its stem will stand upright if it is completely dry. Flowers that are not yet dry can be damaged easily by handling. Take care when testing for readiness.

From the moisture squeezed out onto the computer paper during the pressing, flowers will sometimes stick. Try scratching the back of the paper with a fingernail (at the spot where the flower has adhered) to release it. This usually works. If your tweezers are thin enough, often they will slip beneath the flower to ease it off.

Always press extra flowers in case one becomes damaged.

When pressed material is completely dry, store in its "computer paper sandwich" in an extra phone book until needed. When you are ready to bring it to school, put the "computer paper sandwich" in a textbook.

Good Luck!