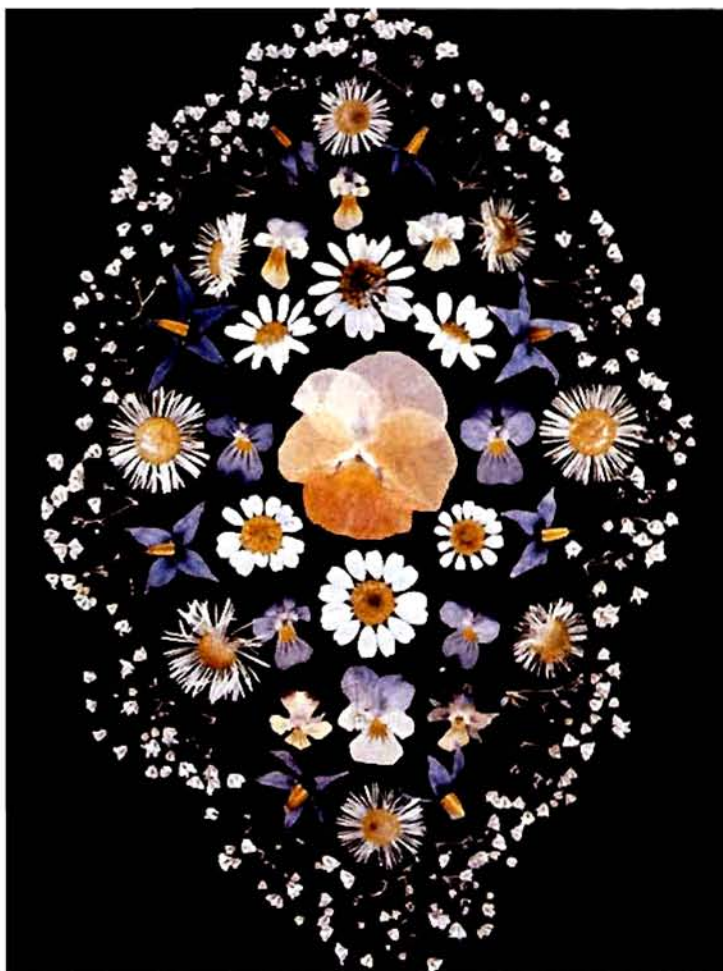

Pressed-Flower Pictures

by Ann Hossenlopp and Ernest Schaufler



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Nature's long-lasting beauty

will brighten your home when you frame your own pressed flowers.

The art of making pressed-flower pictures began over three hundred years ago in England during the sixteenth century when botanists decided to record plants by pressing and mounting them. From this historic, scholarly beginning, interest in making pressed-flower pictures has grown, and they have been made by artists and creative hobbyists in many countries throughout the world. Easily assembled from readily available material, pressed-flower pictures give highly satisfying results and make long-lasting, lovely decorations.

This bulletin explains the procedures involved in selecting appropriate plant material and drying it properly, describes the six basic types of dried-flower picture designs, gives you step-by-step directions for making your own attractive pictures, and offers suggestions for making the pictures as a group activity.

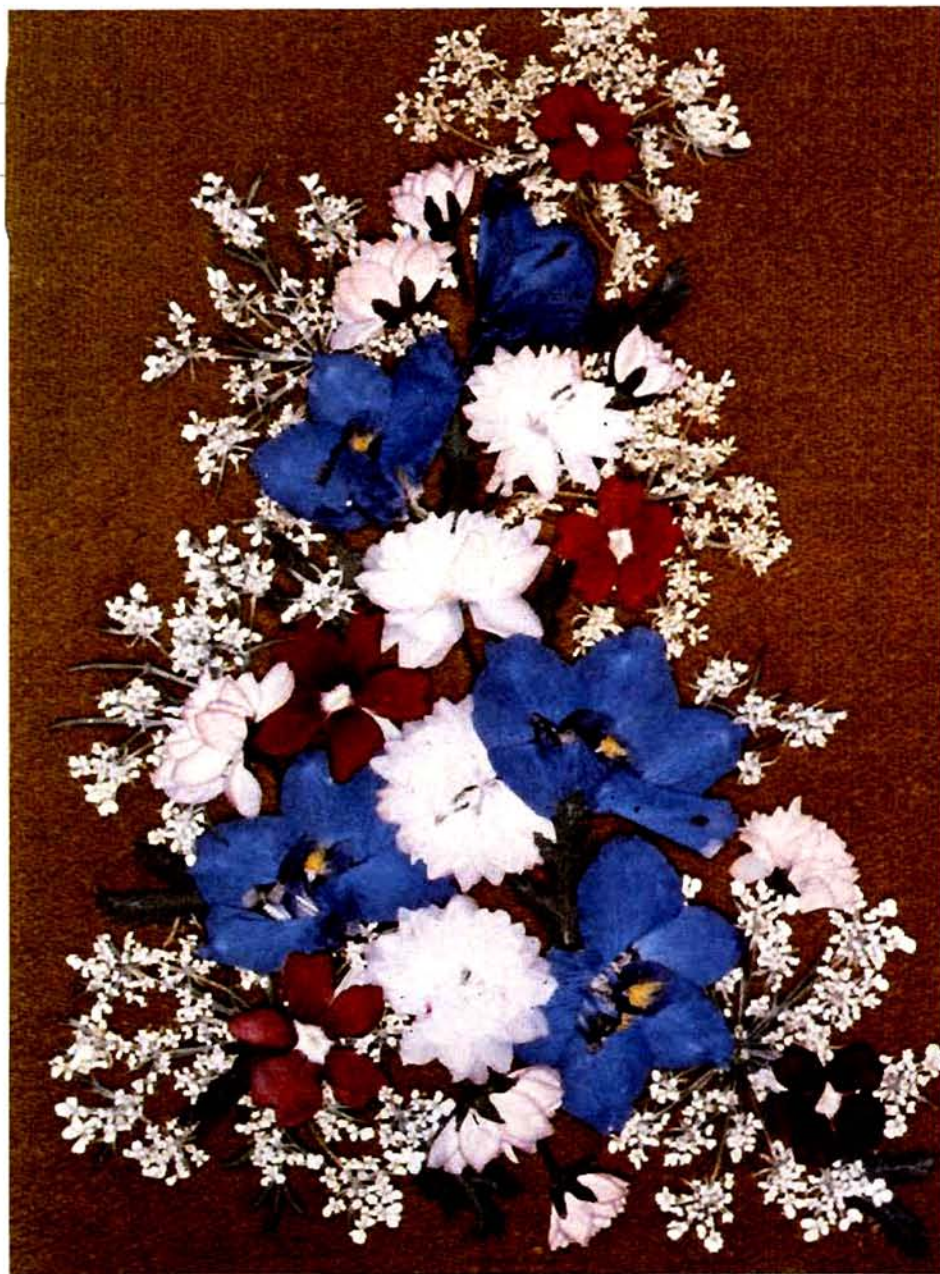


Figure 1. Typical triangular flower arrangement

Necessary Equipment

1. Picture frame with glass and stiff backing, preferably 5 × 7 inches.
2. Background. Velveteen is the most satisfactory material. Its pile adapts to accommodate pressed plants of varying thicknesses. Thinner fabric or stiff paper limits you to the use of absolutely flat plant material. Background color choices depend on the colors of the pressed plant used.
3. Tweezers to handle and place the brittle dried material.
4. Household glue to hold the larger pieces and also to secure fabric tautly to stiff picture backing.
5. Small scissors to cut plant material to size and to clip out bulky areas in which material is overlapped to create depth in the design.
6. Toothpicks to apply small spots of glue to flowers.
7. Several sizes of artist's brushes to clean specks and dust from the finished design, especially when velveteen is used as a background.
8. An assortment of pressed flowers and leaves collected during the growing season to furnish a good selection of color and a variety of shapes.

Preparing a Press

To make attractive pressed-flower pictures, you will need a way to flatten your plant material evenly and firmly. If the plants are not under enough pressure as they dry, they will pucker and will not lie evenly under the glass when they have been framed. Two common methods of flattening plants are by using books and by using presses.

Book Method

Thick books that are weighted down with other books or a concrete block are frequently used for small-scale pressing. Flowers and leaves should be sandwiched between sheets of facial tissue or construction or blotting paper to speed drying and placed directly into the book before the weights are added.

Plant Press

Plant presses are useful for large-scale pressing. They are easy to make and well worth the effort involved. A press can be made with two pieces of plywood one-quarter to one-half inch thick. You can determine the outside dimensions that will make your press most convenient. Presses are frequently 12 by 18 inches, but you may find that a press 9 by 12 inches is handier if you are working with small plants. The materials to be pressed should be folded between sheets of absorbent paper and then placed between sheets of cardboard the same size as the press to facilitate air circulation. After the plant material, absorbent paper, and the cardboard are placed inside the press, it is subjected to pressure generated by weights such as bricks or cinder blocks, or by straps or ropes that can be pulled tightly around it.



Selecting and Pressing Plant Material

Select thin plants. Multipetaled flowers such as zinnias and marigolds will not lie evenly under the glass of your picture. Plants with a single or double layer of petals such as delphiniums or pansies are ideal. Pick the plant material to be pressed in the afternoon when it contains the least moisture. Do not pick until at least one day after a rain.

When you have assembled the plants, it is time to prepare them for pressing. If you are using a plant press, place a layer of six to eight sheets of folded newspaper on top of one of the pressing frames. Sheets of facial tissue or unembossed table napkins or paper towels should be placed just under and over the plants for faster drying and to cushion items of varying thicknesses such as daisies and flowering shrub blooms attached to stems.

Put your flowers on the layer of absorbent paper with about one inch between them to ensure fast drying. Most flower heads should be placed face down. Daisies and pansies are particularly attractive if positioned this way. You can press some flowers on their sides to add variety to your flower compositions. Phlox florets lend themselves to this

placement. Clusters of line-type flowers such as lilacs and goldenrod must have some of their back florets removed so that they will lie flat. This also gives them a lighter look.

After the plants have been positioned on the sheet of absorbent paper, cover them slowly and carefully with several more layers

of absorbent paper and another layer of six to eight folded newspaper sheets. You can add more layers prepared in the same way as long as the total stack is less than one foot thick to ensure proper pressing. Inserting pieces of corrugated cardboard every two or three layers as well as on both sides of the whole stack increases air circulation through the press. After the last layer has

Plant Materials That Can Be Pressed Successfully

Garden Flowers and Shrubs	Useful Part	Color When Pressed
babysbreath	stem and flower umbels	white
coralbell	stem with flowers	red
cosmos	singly	white, pink
delphinium	florets	blue, purple
hydrangea	florets	white, pale green
larkspur	florets and spike	pink, blue, lavender
pansy	singly	blue, yellow
salvia	spike	blue
most common flowering shrubs	florets and stems	
Field Flowers		
birdsfoot trefoil	cluster	yellow, orange
buttercup	singly and with stem	yellow
cinquefoil, 5-finger	leaves singly	yellow
field asters	singly and on stems	white, yellow centers
field daisies	singly	white, yellow centers
goldenrod	cluster, stems	yellow
pink and white clover	singly	pink, white
sweet clover	spikes	white
wild carrot (Queen-Annes-lace)	flower head	white
Leaves		
artemisia		gray
columbine		light green
hawthorne		green
ivy		green
Japanese maple		scarlet
wild geranium		light green
wild raspberry, underside		white



Figure 2. An oval design



Figure 3. A diagonal drift design



Figure 4. A Hogarth curve design

Basic Types of Pressed-Flower Pictures

been covered, place the other pressing frame on top and secure your press with ropes or weights. If your stack does not exceed one foot in thickness, it may be opened at any time to receive additional layers. Store the stack in a dry place with good air circulation.

If you are using the book method, place your plants between layers of absorbent paper and put them in a book. Add weights and store it in an out-of-the-way place.

Most material will be dried completely in about two weeks. Since prolonged pressure will damage some colors, remove pressed material as soon as it is completely dry and store it in stiff folders or between cardboard layers, in a dry place.

The following designs are basic types, but you can develop many others. Remember that the most important factor is that your designs be decorative, pleasing, and balanced with good scale and color harmony.

1. The typical flower-arrangement design for pressed-flower pictures uses crescents, circular or oval masses, *L* or *S* shapes, and triangular patterns with equal or unequal sides. Figure 1 shows an asymmetrical triangle design.
2. An oval grouping of materials is visualized in the open bouquet of figure 2. The main grouping is toward the bottom, with stems extending beyond this point. Stems usually make up about one-quarter of the total length of the design. Leaves and small sprays of drooping material soften this division.
3. The drift design follows a graceful, curving main stem or vine as in figure 3.

4. The *S* or Hogarth curve is shown in figure 4. The flowing *S* curve has its center of interest in the middle of the design and tapers to a point in either direction. An *L* design is more angular.

5. A symmetrical triangular approach is worked out in figure 5. Notice how all the stems of the materials used point toward the large flower near the bottom, or center of interest.

6. Symmetrical designs radiate outward from a main grouping placed exactly in the middle of the picture. The medallion design on the cover is such an example.

Making the Flower Picture

Get Ready

1. Carefully wash the glass that will be laid over the design in the frame. Put it aside between two layers of paper to keep it clean and dust free.

2. If you are using a cloth background, cut it to size, run a narrow band of glue around the edge of the stiff backing, and carefully lay the cloth on it. Then run your hands over it from side to side to be sure it is held smoothly and tautly. No ripples should show in the cloth.

3. Next, choose the flowers you will use from your storage folders. Fine flowers such as Queen-Annes-lace and goldenrod should be used in the outer part of the design. Weightier flowers such as delphiniums are appropriate in the center and at the bottom of the design. Daisies, asters, and other small flowers can be used between these areas. Leaves give added interest and contrast.



Figure 5. A symmetrical triangle design

Group Activity Tips

Design Your Picture

1. If you are making a basic flower design, lay out the materials for the dominant line on the background. When the placement pleases you, dot glue in several spots on each dried piece. (Put the glue on the heavier parts of the pressed material, not on the thin petals.)

2. Using tweezers to handle the pressed material, place some larger flowers in the center of interest. When you have finally chosen the position for each flower, spot glue on their centers.

3. Place filler plant material where it is needed, leaving small open spaces between flowers. Insert leaves where they add to the interest or balance of the design.

4. If you have planned a symmetrical design in the middle of the picture, place the large central flowers first. Arrange the lighter outer flowers around them, leaving room for the placement of medium-sized flowers. Since a symmetrical design usually does not have as many overlapping planes as a floral arrangement, it is an easy style for a beginner.

5. Other designs use either of these approaches or a mixture of them depending on the pressed materials selected. All designs need trial and error to form the most pleasing arrangements.

6. When everything is in place, brush off any unwanted specks. This is especially important if you are using velveteen as a backing.

Frame Your Picture

1. Take glass from between storage sheets with your fingertips on the cut edges so that you do not leave fingerprints. Gently lay the glass over the design. Slip the frame, to which a hanger has already been attached, in place.

2. Holding everything together tightly, turn your picture over and secure the frame. Be sure to check the fit of the glass against the design. If it is not tight enough, the edges of the pressed flowers will curl. Insert a piece of cardboard or stiff backing cut to size to obtain the necessary tension.

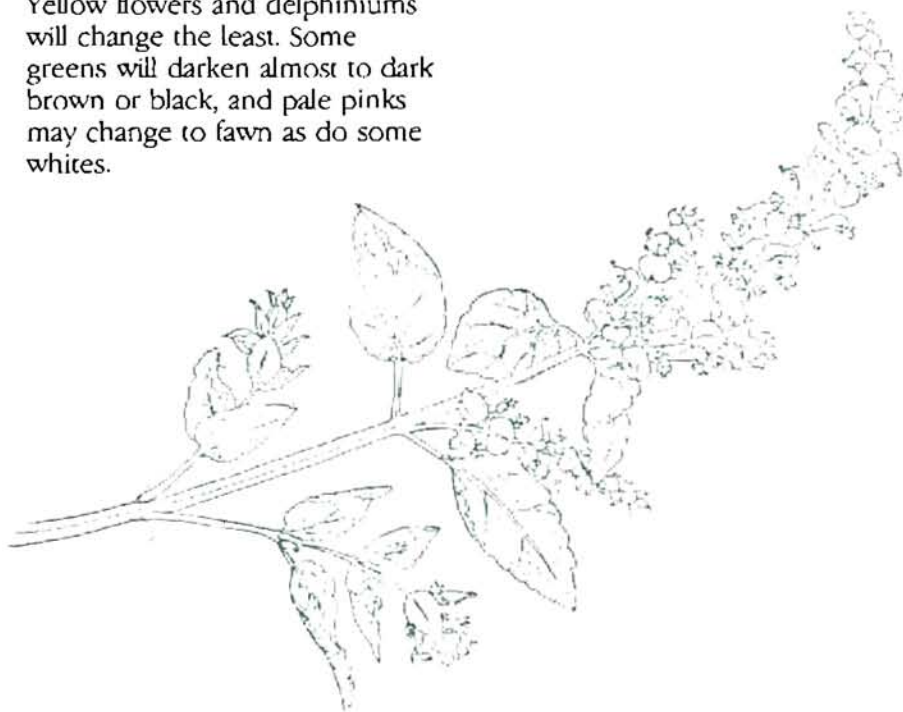
3. Thoroughly seal the space between the edges of the backing and the frame with masking tape. The tape will prevent a fine film of grime from seeping into the picture.

4. The pictures should be hung on walls away from sunlight to retard fading. Some color change will occur even if your picture is hung away from direct sunlight, but it will not spoil its beauty. Yellow flowers and delphiniums will change the least. Some greens will darken almost to dark brown or black, and pale pinks may change to fawn as do some whites.

Making pressed-flower pictures is an ideal group activity because you can involve all the members in advance preparations, and the attractive end product will give the members a feeling of satisfaction and achievement.

When making pressed-flower pictures as a group activity, it is usually best to gather and press the plant materials during the growing season preceding the project. Plan the pressing as part of the project, assigning several plants to each member. (Be sure to obtain a full range of material from throughout the growing season.) If you have several sets of pressing frames, they can be rotated among the members.

Many are likely to enjoy helping with this project. The finished pictures will be sure to please the group members and can be displayed proudly or given as attractive, unusual gifts.



e COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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