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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

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Have you ever strolled through a yard or tree covered land and picked a leaf or two? Then did you notice how in a relatively short time the leaf began to lose its color and shape? Then in only a very few days it was dry, brittle, and crumbled into many pieces when you tried to bend it - its beauty lost forever. This kind of experience should not discourage you from collecting leaves because there are ways to preserve their beauty and usefulness for great lengths of time. In fact, there are leaf collections that are more than 100 years old, and they are still in excellent condition in some of our museums.

Leaf collecting and pressing is not a difficult or expensive hobby. You simply must follow the proper procedure if you expect your efforts to result in something that is pleasing to you. A leaf exhibit may even reflect the concerns and attitudes of the person who made it. An attractive exhibit begins with proper collection and the use of an adequate press to accomplish a good drying job.

### Plant Presses

Plant presses are light and easy to carry. They may be purchased or you may make your own. Whichever type you choose, whether you make it or buy it, you will find that a leaf press will enable you to do a much better job of leaf preparation.

As you make your collection, you should identify the tree, label each leaf, and place it directly in the press. To avoid damaging the leaves, do not handle them any more than absolutely necessary.

One type of press is very simple to make and requires a minimum of materials. It consists of two pieces of hardboard or light plywood 9 inches by 12 inches. This size will accommodate a tabloid size newspaper if folded twice. Strong rubber bands or pieces of inner tube will hold it together and apply a minimum amount of pressing pressure. If it is used for the complete pressing job you should add extra weight such as books or bricks to hold the leaves completely flat. This size press will hold most tree leaves, but you will need a larger size for the extremely big leaves.

# Leaf Presses and Collecting Hints



Regardless of the type of press, it is a good idea to insert a piece of corrugated cardboard between every two or three tiers of paper to allow for passage of air. This will help the leaves dry more quickly. Generally, the quicker a leaf dries, the better it will retain its natural color.

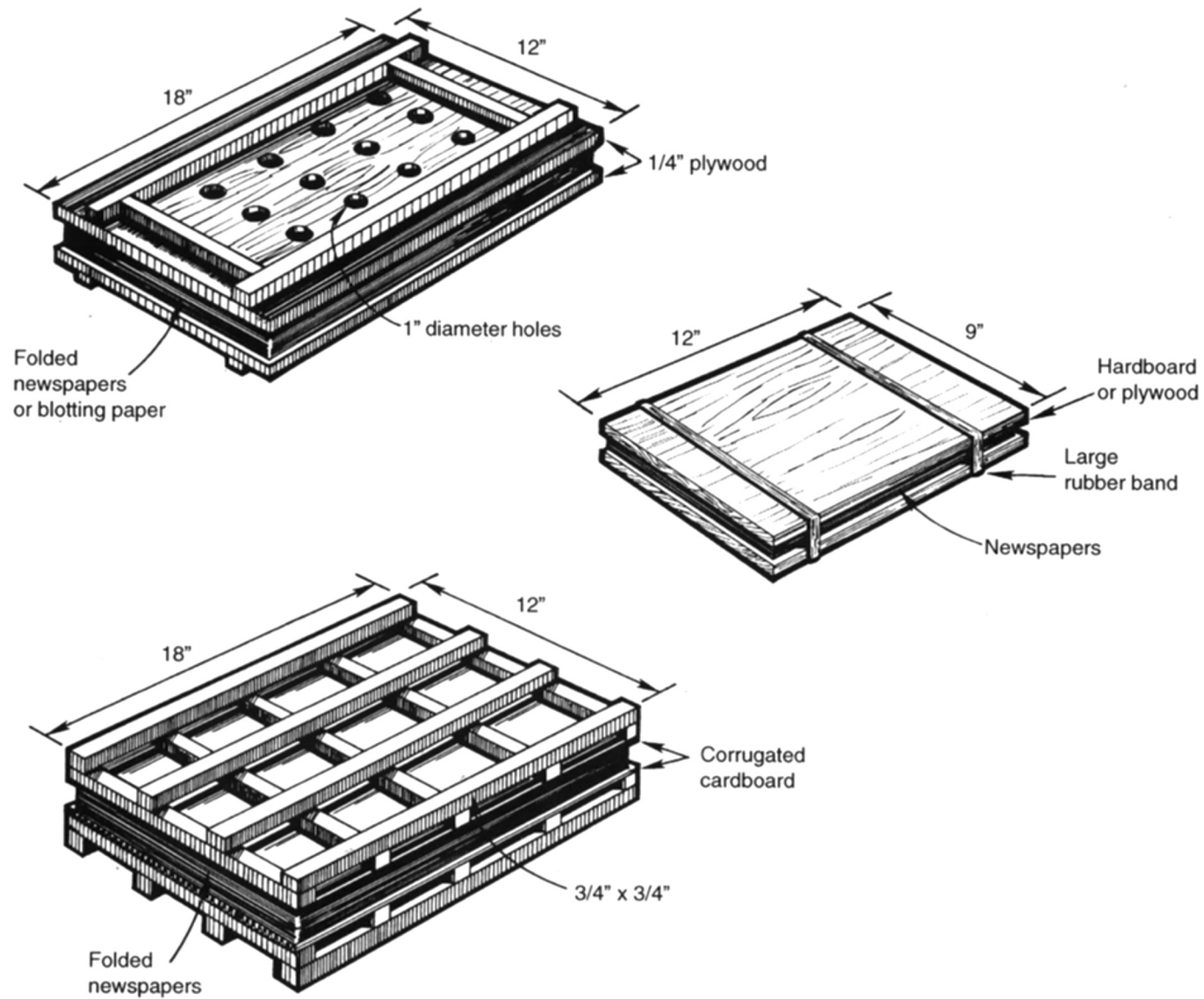
For instruction on how to place the leaves in the press and care for them, refer to 4-H Lit No. 236, "Collecting and Exhibiting Tree Leaves."

Those who are enrolled in both 4-H Forestry and 4-H Woodworking might want to pursue the two projects together. For example, you could make a leaf press as a woodworking activity—then use it to collect and press your leaves for a forestry exhibit. Your leaf press could also be entered in fair competition in the miscellaneous category of the woodworking project.

By following the detailed instructions in this fact sheet you can make a leaf press that will prove very useful and beneficial in your 4-H Forestry project.

### Tips for Collectors

- Respect the property of others—never collect on private property without asking the owner's permission.
- Cut the leaves from as near the branch as possible with a sharp knife, or pruning shears - clean cuts heal quickly while breaking or tearing leaves from the branches usually results in damage both to the specimen and to the branch.



- Do not be greedy — take only what you need — remember that when you remove leaves you are reducing the food manufacturing capacity of the plant.
- Select leaves carefully so that you do not alter the natural appearance or the shape of the tree.
- Be sure to take your identification manual with you on each collecting trip.
- Identify and label each specimen as soon as you collect it, identification is much easier when you can see the entire tree rather than just a few leaves.
- Record the date of collection and the location on the label.
- Handle the leaves carefully.

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