

Creating a Leaf Collection

Collecting and preserving leaves is a great way to learn tree identification. It is also a method that can be used to document the different varieties of trees on your property or to inventory trees at a park or school campus as a class project. Below are some examples of how to make your own leaf collection book, either by the traditional method or digitally.



Collecting Leaves Traditionally

To make a traditional leaf collection, it is best to collect in late summer or fall. Follow these simple steps for the traditional method of collecting leaves:

- Ask permission to remove leaves from other people's trees.
- Be aware of thorns on trees such as honey locust. Also, poison ivy (which causes allergic reactions in some people and should, therefore, be avoided) may be growing on the ground or it may be growing on the tree that you are examining. Sometimes it may even appear to be the leaves on the tree. Familiarize yourself with poison ivy prior to collecting leaves. As a reminder, *leaves of three, let it be.*
- Before collecting leaves, observe the entire tree, branches, fruit, leaves, buds, and bark. It is best to collect a twig with a bud and all leaves on the stem as well as any flowers or fruits (may have to return several times throughout the year to get all of this).
- While collecting leaves, store the selected leaves between magazine pages, a phone book, or other similar-sized booklet. Place a number by the leaf and on a separate piece of paper write down the corresponding number and as much information about the tree and pertinent information on the location as possible.
- Keep records of corresponding numbers to the tree locations as well as other information that may help aid in identification (examples-wet area, dry hill, description of soil, exposure, etc.).
- Make sure you have the entire leaf, not just the leaflet; i.e., pecan, hickory, or ash have multiple leaflets comprising one leaf. Choose the best leaves that represent the tree.
- Preserve the leaves using the instructions that follow.

Preserving Leaves

- Depending on the size of the leaf, it will take about a week for the leaf to dry. The longer the leaf is allowed to dry, the better the final product.
- If a leaf press is not available, layer individual leaves between stacks of newspapers or in a phone book. Top with something flat such as a board to help keep the leaves from shifting and then stack books or other heavy objects on top.
- Once the leaves are dry they can be placed onto a heavy weight paper, sealed with clear contact paper, and stored in an album or three-ring binder. Design each page of the album the same: for example, place the leaf in the center and include an identification tag below.
- The identification tag should include the common name, scientific name, collection date, location, description, and name of the collector.

Collecting Leaves Digitally

If traditional leaf collecting and preserving does not meet your needs, then making a digital collection for a book of yard trees, school trees, or community trees, might be the solution. Follow these simple steps for collecting leaves digitally:

- Take pictures of the entire tree, branches, fruit, leaves, buds, and bark. Zoom in for a picture of a leaf. Make sure you have the entire leaf, not just the leaflet; i.e., pecan, hickory, or ash have multiple leaflets comprising one leaf. This will aid in proper tree identification.
- Keep records of corresponding photo numbers to the tree locations as well as other information that may help aid in identification (examples-wet area, dry hill, description of soil, exposure, etc.)
- Upload pictures to the computer and use either publishing software or an on-line photo album to design your book.
- Design each page of the booklet the same: example, a place for a large picture of the leaf, smaller pictures of the rest of the tree and an identification tag.
- At a minimum, the identification tag should include the common name, scientific name, collection date, location, description, and name of the photographer.
- Print out a copy of your book. For a more professional product, use a print shop, or order from an on-line photo shop.