

New Flora of the Isle of Man

Pressing specimens of plants

In case of need to preserve plant specimens for later identification or inclusion in a herbarium.

Quite simply, specimens can be pressed between folded sheets of newspaper which are in turn held between covers of hardboard or similar. The hardboard covers can be tightened to press the specimens inside with the help of a couple of belts or straps, or you can just use piles of books!

Be sure to collect enough of the plant to allow identification. In most cases this will involve a flower spike, including stem and stem leaves, and leaves, including those at the base of the plant which are often differently shaped. If they are available, include a fruiting body or seed head or two as well. **Be careful not to collect specimens which may be protected by law** (see below). Take a photograph, and detailed notes on location instead so that someone can check the plant later if necessary.

Arrange the specimen in the press to show as many features as you can, carefully folding over long stems or large leaves to make them fit. You can rearrange plant parts to a certain extent after a few hours of pressing if necessary.

Be sure to label the plants you take for pressing. As a bare minimum, record the following:

- Where the specimen was collected from, including (at least) a six-figure grid reference
- The date the specimen was collected
- Who collected the specimen

The following should also be included if possible:

- Name (or provisional identification) of plant
- Name of tetrad
- Habitat
- Abundance

Temporary labels should be attached to the specimen itself, or at the very least secured by means of plastic paper clips to the folded newspaper page the specimen is contained within.

If you collect specimens that are particularly fleshy, woody or bulky, use rolled kitchen towel or newspaper as padding while pressing. Any seeds that are in danger of escaping can be separately enclosed in a paper packet which is kept with the parent plant specimen.

Change the newspaper in the press after a couple of days. Fleshier plants may need a second or even a third change, otherwise they will go mouldy. Keep the press in a warm, dry place until you are ready to mount the specimens properly or pass them to an expert or to the Museum.

Herbarium specimens are usually mounted on standard size acid-free paper (conveniently roughly the same size as a tabloid newspaper page). There are several acceptable methods of attachment, but the Kew Herbarium method is to glue the whole of the specimen to the paper using water soluble (starch based) glue. This is quick and easily reversed if required. The label is also glued to the herbarium sheet. Finished herbarium sheets are stored in 'genus folders' in classification order.

Plant collecting and the law

The Wildlife Act 1990 (section 12) states that it is an offence to intentionally pick, uproot or destroy any wild plant included in Schedule 7. The Act has recently been amended to include as an offence anything done to harm protected species or ASSI *recklessly*. In other words, it is not so easy to argue that an offence has been committed in ignorance of the law!

For the purposes of the Flora surveying, if you are signed up as a volunteer surveyor, you will be regarded as authorised to collect a limited amount of protected plant material should it prove to be necessary. However, please refer to your copy of 'Guidelines for Botanical Surveying' for further advice. Always take care to collect non-destructively, ie only take a small sample of the necessary parts, and do not uproot entire plants, whether protected or not. Report collection of any protected plant material to the Wildlife and Conservation Division of DAFF.

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