



## Classroom Activity

**Grade Levels:** All

**Objective:** Thanking your garden volunteers and donors is as important as maintaining healthy garden soil because a garden can't grow without them! This lesson exercises students' skills in English, science, and art. Plus, it's an opportunity for them to grasp the importance of showing appreciation to those who contribute their time and resources to the garden.

**Time:** 2 weeks

**Materials:**

- Plant press or heavy phone books
- Heavy paper or card stock
- Flowers and leaves
- Craft glue
- Decoupage glue, a laminator, or clear contact paper

**Laying the Groundwork:**

Begin your lesson by asking students to recall all the people who donated time, money, or supplies to your garden. Ask, *When you help someone out, how do they respond? Does their expression of thanks make you feel good, and make you glad you helped out?* Discuss the importance of showing appreciation, then ask students to make thank-you cards for the special people who helped out in the garden.

## Pressed Flower Thank-you Cards

**Exploration**

1. Introduce the practice of pressing flowers as both a science and an art. Before the invention of the camera, botanists needed a way to catalog the new plants they found on their global travels. Sometimes they collected seeds or cuttings, but there was always a chance these would rot before they returned home, so early botanists drew pictures of "new" plants and pressed plant samples.

Pressing is a process of compacting plant parts between sheets of paper to wick away moisture and preserve a dried specimen. Reduc-

ing moisture in the plant parts slows decay, and the flattened specimens are easier to catalog, store, and maintain. Pressed plants are lightweight compared to live specimens and seeds -- a great benefit to those early botanists who traveled long distances on foot!

After botanists press plant parts they paste them onto sheets of paper. They make notes on the paper about where they found the plants, the plant's name (if known), and any other important facts. Next they catalog and save the sheets in a herbarium -- a library where sheets are stored flat in cool, dark conditions to preserve them as long as possible.

2. If you still have flowers and green leaves in your gardens, take your class outside and have students carefully pick some samples. Some plants are more easily pressed than others, and some may rot before they dry. To ensure success, choose a variety of plant material and collect more samples than you think you'll need.





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If you don't have the option of picking your own, ask a florist to donate some 'seconds' or even some discards for your project. If you have a garden fund, spend a little to buy some flowers for the project (your volunteers and supporters are worth it).

3. Back in the classroom, place the plant material in a plant press. If you don't have a press, improvise by placing the specimens between sheets of tissue paper and inserting the sheets between the leaves of a large phonebook. Lay the press or phonebook on a flat surface. (If your press is a phonebook, place a few heavy books on top of to make sure that the samples dry flat.)
4. Wait at least two weeks before checking on your samples. Flowers and leaves contain different amounts of moisture so drying time will vary and some may need to stay in your press longer. After two weeks, if the flowers feel dry to the touch and easily separate from the tissue, they are ready to use. If plant parts still look fairly fresh and stick to the tissue, they need more time to dry.
5. Give each student a piece of paper to fold into a greeting card. Suggest that before they glue the pressed flowers and leaves to the card that they lay out the parts in different designs to decide where to place them. When they're ready to attach them to the cards, have them apply the glue to the paper and stick the flowers on top.
6. Once students are finished with the cards, choose one of these methods to help preserve them:
  - Coat the plant parts with decoupage glue immediately after completing the design. Apply it very gently so that you don't tear the flowers; or
  - Let the cards dry completely and then cover them with contact paper; or
  - Laminate them.
7. Show students the proper form for writing a friendly letter, and ask them to compose special notes of thanks to the volunteers and donors. When the cards are complete, address the envelopes and mail them.

### **Digging Deeper**

- Brainstorm other garden crafts you can make for garden supporters in the coming year, such as bouquets, salsa, herbal sachets, wreaths, steppingstones, and so on.
- Plan a garden event for your supporters, such as a special reception or awards ceremony. Invite everyone who has contributed to garden efforts.
- Design a sign to display in the garden that recognizes all contributors to the garden effort.

*This lesson plan developed by NGA staff*

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