

Getting To Know your Local Plants

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If you are able to identify plants on your property and in your local area, it will help you to distinguish between native and introduced species; recognise what plants grow best where; ensure that appropriate species are selected for revegetation; use this guide more effectively in planning for revegetation; and be able to monitor regeneration.

1 Keeping a herbarium (pressed plant collection) for easy reference.

Collecting specimens

- Using secateurs, take specimens that will fit onto an A4 sheet. Include a good representative sample of leaves (look for variation in shape and size), flowers, buds and fruits if present.
- In a note book record: any name that you know the plant by (e.g. Hickory Wattle/Light wood, *Acacia*); flower colour; details of the bark (e.g. smooth, stringy); where it grows (e.g. along creek, on rocky hill); location; and date. These details will all help to identify the plant.
- Label specimens with a tag (jewelers' tags are available very cheaply at stationers and newsagents), giving them a number that is cross-referenced in your notes.
- Specimens that you are unable to press immediately can be kept fresh in a plastic bag for several hours – but press them as soon as possible.

Pressing specimens

- Spread out and lay between sheets of newspaper with each specimen separated by a thick wad of paper and/or cardboard. Ensure wads are thicker between more succulent plants, water plants or plant parts that contain a lot of moisture (e.g. flowers and fruits).
- Place a heavy weight on top (e.g. books, bricks). Alternatively make up a simple plant press composed of two wooden frames (the size of a sheet of newspaper), with spaced cross-slats to support the specimens. Place the specimens in the newspaper between the frames and hold together with rope or belts. Apply as much pressure as possible.
- Keep the press well-aerated in a warm, dry location. (A wooden press allows air to circulate around the specimens.)
- Change the paper every few days (more often for succulents and water plants) to allow quick drying. Keep pressed for at least 2 weeks or until the plants are completely dry.
- Don't press bulky dry fruits (e.g. large eucalypt capsules) – rather, label and store separately.

Mounting and storing specimens

- Mount specimens on A4 sheets of card, using sticky tape or glue. Label the sheets with the botanical and common name when identified, and store in plastic ring binder envelopes in a file.

2 Alternative forms of plant collections

- Mount smaller pressed specimens on index cards kept in plastic envelopes or covered with a clear, plastic, self-adhesive film. These are more robust for taking out into the field.
- Pressed specimens can be photocopied. Much of the detail is lost in the process but it does provide a general outline of the plant. Again this type of collection is easier to handle in the field.
- Colour prints of specimens 'scanned' into a computer show excellent detail with good 3D effect. Unfortunately this is only economically feasible if you have your own computer and scanner.
- A photographic record of plants. Close-up photos of flowers, leaves, buds and fruits, with a photo of the whole plant would be ideal.

3 Identifying specimens

- This guide provides descriptions of many local plants.
- Other useful field guides and contacts to help you identify plants are listed in Appendix 9 - Further Assistance and Contacts, and Appendix 10 - Native Plant Field Guides.
- Make use of other people's knowledge at field days, wildflower walks and field naturalists clubs.