

Activities from the Archives: Flower Pressing with Sarah Bennett Walker



One of Sarah Bennett Walker's botanical specimen pages, located in Archives & Local History's collections.

Now that it's springtime, Coloradans are beginning to notice [blooming wildflowers](#), like columbine, larkspur, aster, and primrose, to name a few.

In the 19th century, many women took up the pastime of flower pressing. Artfully arranging these preserved flowers, women created botanical albums, cards, or framed their work to hang on walls. Their collections were known as *herbariums*.

Douglas County's own Sarah Bennett Walker created one album of flower pressings for her husband, Willard, on his birthday. Sarah (1860-1921) was an expert on Colorado's wildflowers, exploring the state to collect and preserve specimens, as well as experimenting with planting them in her Denver and Sedalia gardens.

Despite booming interest in the natural sciences, women were not encouraged to participate. Instead, flower-collecting was considered a suitably feminine activity. And yet,

Sarah became an internationally renowned authority on Colorado's flora, even winning the Chicago World's Fair's first prize for her wildflower collection.



Inside Sarah Bennett Walker's workroom. [2018.351.0015, Sarah Bennett Walker Research Collection.](#)

Make Your Own Pressed Flowers

Flower pressing is a very easy activity, and you can use them in lots of crafts. You can glue them to candles, frame them, laminate them in bookmarks, make a Mother's Day card, or keep them in your own *herbarium* so you can study them later.

What you'll need:

- Blotting paper (newspaper or printing paper works fine)
- Flowers, leaves, grasses, or ferns*
- Two flat pieces of cardboard
- Heavy, flat books

**Picking wildflowers and plants on state and federal lands is illegal. When collecting your specimens, remember to pick from legal locations, and to take only what you need. Leave plenty behind – otherwise they won't bloom next year!*

1. Place your first piece of cardboard and your first paper on a flat surface where they won't be disturbed for a few days.
2. Carefully arrange your flowers on the paper so that they aren't overlapping.
3. Place your second piece of paper and your second piece of cardboard on top of the flowers, then stack heavy books on top.
4. Check on your flowers every few days until they are completely dry. You may need to carefully replace your blotting paper if it is still wet.
5. Use tweezers to arrange your pressed flowers however you like. They will be very delicate. You can glue them to some surfaces (like paper or plastic) and protect them with a craft grade varnish. You can also frame them in photo frames or between two pieces of glass.

To access more recipes from Archives & Local History's cookbooks collection, visit the Philip S. Miller Library from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or reach out with any questions to LocalHistory@dclibraries.org.

You can also learn more about Colorado's wildflowers in these books:

[Ecology of Colorado Mountains to Arizona Deserts](#) by Helen Moehnke

[Vanishing Colorado: Rediscovering a Western Landscape](#) by Joe Verrengia

[Colorado Flora, Eastern Slope: A Field Guide to the Vascular Plants](#) by William Weber