



MAKE YOUR OWN HERBARIUM!

Sir John St Aubyn: The Secret Life of a Collector

A touring exhibition from Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

WHO WAS SIR JOHN ST AUBYN?

Sir John St Aubyn was born at Golden Square, London on 17 May 1758. He served as High Sheriff of Cornwall (at the age of 23), and went on to become a Fellow of the Royal Society, a Fellow of the Linnean Society, a member of Parliament, Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians, Fellow of the Geological Society of London, Fellow of the Society of Arts and Provincial Grandmaster of the Freemasons.

Clearly he was a very busy man!

WHAT IS A HERBARIUM?

A herbarium is a collection of carefully-dried plants. St Aubyn's herbarium gives us a fascinating glimpse into the botanical world in the 18th century. It contains not only plants that have been collected locally, but also specimens which have been collected from early plant nurseries and important gardens.

Why not make your own herbarium and preserve plant specimens from your garden?

To start your own herbarium you will need:

- a pile of old newspapers
- four sheets of corrugated cardboard
- two or three old bricks or other heavy weights
- Small pieces of card, and pencils
- scissors for cutting samples of leaves
- A4 sheets of thin white cardboard, or heavy paper
- PVA glue
- A folder or lever arch file
- a guide book to local plants

Before you collect anything, it's very important to know about what you can and cannot collect. In Britain many wild plants, including wildflowers, mosses, algae, fungi etc, are protected under the **Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981**. Before you pick anything **you must get permission**, so it is probably a good idea to stick to plants growing in your garden, or better still, buy some seeds and grow your own plants and flowers. If you're not sure, ask a parent or guardian to check for you.

TIME TO START COLLECTING!

Try one specimen first.

Watch your garden plants and trees carefully to see when their leaves and flowers become fully grown. See if you can identify which species you are selecting with a book such as **RHS Encyclopedia of Plants and Flowers**, which you might be able to find in your local library.

When the flowers or leaves look good, it's time to collect a sample. Be sure to ask permission before cutting or breaking off any plants, and if you use a scissors, get some help from an adult. *Make sure you can fit the sample on your A4 page!*

For each sample, write down the date, the kind of plant, the location and your name on a piece of card or paper, and keep it with the sample. Again, make sure this label fits on your page along with your specimen!

You can see that I have chosen to collect a specimen of *Buddleja davidii* from the museum garden.



DRY, DRY, DRY YOUR PLANTS...

Once you have a specimen, you will need to dry it.

Buddleja davidii grows wild everywhere in Plymouth, but I have still only taken a small piece as the bees and butterflies love it!

Find a safe place on a shelf or bench to leave your specimen for a couple of weeks to dry. The area should have good air circulation to carry away moisture.

Place two layers of corrugated cardboard on the shelf or bench, and then spread out some old newspapers on the cardboard. Put your specimen between about 10 layers of newspaper, and remember to keep your information label with it. Add two more layers of cardboard, and put your bricks or weights on top of that.

After a week, have a look at your specimen. If it feels very dry then you're ready to mount the leaves on the white cardboard. If not, repeat for another week or so.



STICK 'EM UP!

Once your specimen is very dry, you are ready to stick it to your A4 card or paper sheet.

Use PVA glue to attach the specimen to the sheet, carefully choosing how to position it so you can add your information label. Usually these are placed in the bottom-right corner of the sheet, but you can do it however you like.

*Make sure you cover the **back** of your specimen with the glue; you don't want to have to start all over again!*



*Herbarium of the Learning Team,
Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery*

Name:

Buddleia (Buddleja davidii)

Location:

Learning Team garden, Plymouth City Museum and Art
Gallery

Date Collected:

Friday 31st July 2009

Description:

Dark green leaves, bright purple flowers.
Many flower heads per plant. Growing from top of stone wall

PROTECT YOUR SPECIMEN

Once the glue is dry, your plant will last for years and years on the sheet. St Aubyn's amazing herbarium sheets were made over 200 years ago – there is no reason why yours shouldn't last that long either. Try making more sheets using other plants from your garden – even grasses are interesting!

Keep each species, or kind, of plant in its own file folder, and store in a place where they will stay cool, dry and flat. This is where placing your label in the bottom-right corner becomes useful, as you can turn the pages in your folder without damaging the specimen.

Remember that your dried specimens are still plants, and so if they get moist they can rot, or if they are found by insects or mice they might get eaten.



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All school visits are **free of charge**, but need to be booked in advance.
To book a visit, please email museumvisits@plymouth.gov.uk, or alternatively
call 01752 304774. Please have some potential dates for your visit ready
when you call.



ADMISSION FREE

Drake Circus, Plymouth,
PL4 8AJ, 01752 304774,
www.plymouthmuseum.gov.uk

Open: 10am-5.30pm Tuesday to Friday,
10am-5pm Saturdays & Bank Holiday Mondays



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