Preparing Plant Specimens for Identification

USDA Bureau of Plant Industry, 1919

Selected pages from Directions for the preparation of plant specimens for identification.

A botanist?s short guide to choosing plant parts, pressing a specimen and recording details for identification.

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United States Department of Agriculture,

BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY,

Office of Economic and Systematic Botany,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF PLANT SPECIMENS FOR IDENTIFICATION.

Among the thousands of specimens of plants sent for name to the Bureau of Plant Industry every year, a large proportion are so imperfect that their identification is impossible or can only be made with great uncertainty. Frequently roots only are sent for determination, but correspondents should realize that even if the root is the part of the plant which is of economic value it is usually impossible to name it definitely without the leaves and flowers or fruits as well. Correspondents can greatly assist the work of the bureau by complying with the following directions for the preparation of specimens.

Roots.—Roots should be taken from the ground entire, washed to remove superfluous dirt, and afterwards dried for at least a week, to prevent mold in transit. They should then be wrapped loosely in tissue paper and mailed in a pasteboard or wooden box or in a small tin can. In all cases they should be accompanied by leaves and flowers or fruits, which may best be sent under separate cover.

Leaves and flowers or fruits.—In the case of herbs less than a foot high, the whole plant should be collected, being bent once or twice if necessary when it is placed in the drying papers. In the case of larger herbs and shrubs or trees, a piece of stem at least 5 or 6 inches long, with leaves and flowers or fruits, should be taken. The specimen should be placed between blotting papers or folded newspapers and subjected to pressure for a week beneath heavy books other weights. The papers should be changed at the end of each day for the first two or three days, in order to secure a well-dried specimen free from mold.

Sending specimens.—Specimens so prepared may be sent in an ordinary envelope, but are less liable to damage if inclosed between

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sheets of cardboard in a letter or placed between the leaves of a magazine and sent as merchandise.

When more than one specimen is sent, the sender should tie to each specimen a small piece of paper bearing a number and retain a list of the numbers for himself, with a set of duplicate specimens, or if the plants are sent between the leaves of a magazine the numbers can be written on the pages. In this way the information desired can be obtained with a minimum of inconvenience.

A pamphlet containing more detailed information for those wishing to prepare specimens for themselves has been issued by the bureau and will be sent free on application.

Specimens sent for identification should be addressed to the Botanist, Bureau of Plant Industry, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

SIDNEY F. BLAKE,
Assistant Botanist.

Approved:
WM. A. TAYLOR,
Chief of Bureau.

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