

# Leaf Pressing and Identification: Turn Your Fall Walk Into a Science Project

Nature | Fall | Ages all-ages

Last October, we grabbed a paper grocery bag and walked around Loose Park. The goal? Collect leaves and actually figure out what trees they came from instead of just calling everything 'that orange one.' It worked. The kids got into it, we learned some tree names, and now we have a weird little leaf collection pressed between wax paper in a binder.

## What You Need

- A bag or basket for collecting
- Heavy books (phone books work great if you still have one, or use a stack of hardcovers)
- Plain printer paper or newspaper
- Wax paper or parchment paper (optional but helpful)
- A field guide or your phone for tree ID (we use the iNaturalist app)
- Tape or a notebook if you want to keep them

## How to Do It

Walk around your neighborhood or hit up a park. Swope Park and Shawnee Mission Park both have great tree variety. Look for leaves that are still somewhat fresh — not the brown crispy ones that have been on the ground for weeks.

Pick different shapes and colors. Grab a maple, an oak, maybe that weird spiky one you've been wondering about. Five to ten leaves is plenty.

When you get home, lay each leaf flat between two sheets of paper. Stack them in a heavy book. We use old textbooks, but a couple novels stacked together work fine. Put something heavy on top — a cast iron skillet, more books, whatever.

Wait three to five days. Check them midway through and swap out the paper if it's damp.

## The Identification Part

Once they're pressed, this is where it gets fun. Open up iNaturalist or grab a tree guide from the library. Look at the leaf shape, the edges, how the veins run. Is it lobed like an oak? Does it have smooth edges or jagged ones? Count the points if it's a maple.

Kansas City has a solid mix — silver maples, pin oaks, Bradford pears (yes, those smell terrible in spring but the leaves are pretty), sweetgums with their star shape, and those massive sycamores down by the creek paths.

What Actually Works Don't overthink the pressing. They don't need to be museum-quality. Slightly curled edges are fine.

Skip leaves with holes or major damage — they're harder to identify and don't press well.

Let your kid arrange them however they want in a notebook. Our youngest just tapes them in randomly with crayon labels. Our older one made a whole classification system. Both are fine.

## Keep or Toss?

We keep ours in a three-ring binder with plastic sleeves. Some families frame their favorites. Others do the project, learn

the trees, and compost the leaves after. There's no wrong answer.

The point isn't a perfect collection. It's slowing down enough on a fall walk to actually notice what's around you. And maybe finally learning that the tree dropping all those helicopters in your driveway is a silver maple.

