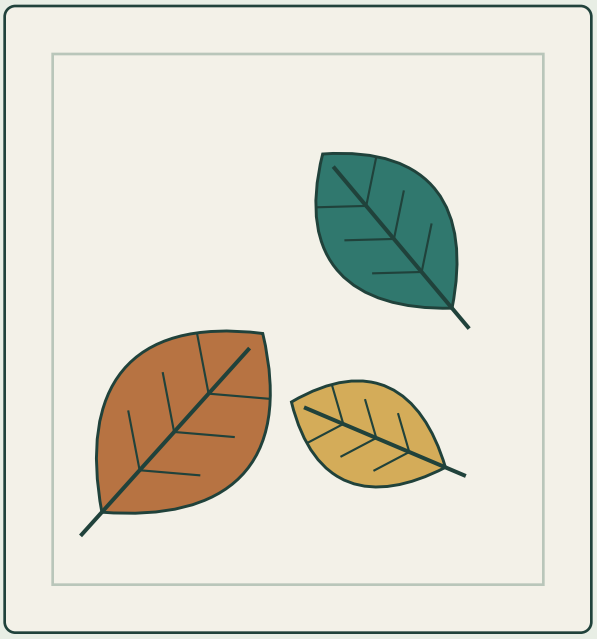
STEADLEAF PRESS

MAKE / BOTANICAL & NATURAL-MATERIAL CRAFTS

Make a Botanical Collage from Fallen Leaves



THREE LEAVES / ONE QUIET DIAGONAL

14 practical steps · Arrange · compare · mount

Original diagrams and two printable maker records

Illustrative plans — not physical test results

FREE GUIDE + PRINTABLES | STP-MAKE-F118

Before you start

A few well-chosen leaves can suggest a branch, a breeze or a quiet change of season without filling the entire sheet. This project uses three fully dried pressed leaves and a small paper panel to make an asymmetrical botanical collage. Work on a paper layout before introducing adhesive; a fragile leaf can rarely be repositioned repeatedly without damage. The finished panel is an indoor decoration, not a waterproof or archival-certified object. A photograph is a good alternative when the original leaf is unsuitable for mounting.

Materials: three to five known, clean, dry pressed leaves from a permitted source, a 150 by 200 mm piece of firm acid-free craft card, spare card, a suitable labelled water-based paper-craft adhesive, scrap pressed leaf of similar condition, scrap paper, pencil, ruler, soft dry brush or clean supporting card, and a clean flat work surface. Follow the adhesive label, ventilation and cure instructions; avoid spray adhesives, hot glue, solvent treatments and unknown finishes. Keep materials away from food, children and pets.

Plan the project

Use a portrait-oriented 150 by 200 mm card. A 15 mm margin leaves a 120 by 170 mm composition field; measure from the upper left corner. Place an imagined diagonal from about (25,145) to (125,45) mm within the card. This is a layout guide, not a cutting template: arrange a larger leaf near the lower left, a medium leaf near the upper right and a smaller leaf between or to the side. Keep each actual outline clear of the card edge. Leave open space between the shapes instead of hiding every gap. Avoid overlapping thick stems; a joint can lift the upper leaf.

The adhesive trial uses an offcut of the same card and a sacrificial dry leaf fragment. Apply only the amount and method permitted by the chosen adhesive maker. Compare any staining, wrinkling, curling, tackiness or lift after the stated drying or curing period. A successful scrap observation does not prove long-term preservation. Use the least adhesive that the actual compatible product requires, without saturating the plant material or sealing it under a wet coating. If no compatible mounting method is known, make a loose layout or print a photograph instead.

Steps 01–02

1. Choose permitted and fully dried leaves

Use leaves already lawfully obtained or collect a few identifiable fallen specimens where allowed; protected areas have their own restrictions, including Parks Canada rules. Do not use unknown or irritating plants, pest-bearing material, damp specimens or leaves with visible mould. The leaves must be dry before mounting. If they were recently pressed, consult the drying observations in your log rather than relying on elapsed time. Use three sound specimens plus one sacrificial scrap of similar material.

2. Prepare the panel and backing

Cut or buy a 150 by 200 mm firm craft card using suitable adult tools and a protected work surface. Choose a backing colour that contrasts gently with the leaves. Check that the card is flat, clean and dry. A thin sheet may buckle when adhesive is applied, so select card suited to the product and use an offcut of the same stock for the trial. Keep a second spare panel available for layout changes.

Steps 03–04

3. Draw the margin and reference diagonal

On a separate worksheet, draw the card rectangle and 15 mm margin, then the diagonal shown in Pattern 1. Measure from the same upper-left reference. Do not draw a heavy line on the finished face; small erasable pencil marks outside the eventual leaf silhouettes are sufficient. The example supports a three-leaf arrangement, but the exact positions should adapt to the real shape and size of each leaf.

4. Select a focal leaf and two supporting shapes

Compare the leaves against the background in ordinary diffuse light. Choose one distinct focal leaf and two supporting forms with complementary size, direction or colour. Do not choose specimens solely by colour if they are brittle or damaged. Hold each leaf on a supporting card rather than pinching a delicate stem. Set unused specimens aside in their labelled dry folder. Preserve a clear margin around each visible tip.

Steps 05–06

5. Make a loose composition before adhering

Arrange the three leaves on a clean dry paper mock-up, not on wet adhesive. Shift them by moving the supporting paper or gently sliding a card underneath. Try the lower-left focal leaf and upper-right medium leaf, then compare a more centred layout. Keep stems and tips from extending beyond the intended panel. Allow a few areas of empty background. Take a reference photo or sketch the actual outlines and order on Record 1.

6. Check thickness and the order of placement

Examine the proposed collage from the side. Avoid stacking thick midribs or covering a stem with a fragile leaf that cannot lie flat. The example uses separate leaves with no required overlap. If you choose a small overlap, check that the lower piece is sound and that the upper one can rest without bending; otherwise move it apart. Record the mounting order and a small label position outside the leaf field if desired.

Steps 07–08

7. Select and read the actual adhesive

Use a water-based adhesive explicitly suitable for the chosen paper and craft materials; read the label before working. Check its application, ventilation, drying and clean-up instructions. A product labelled acid-free is not proof of archival permanence or suitability for every leaf. Do not substitute school glue, a spray, solvent or hot glue blindly. If the adhesive instructions do not establish an appropriate method, use a different suitable product or stop at the loose composition.

8. Make a scrap trial and wait for the stated finish

On spare card, mount a sacrificial leaf fragment using the proposed small application and contact method. Follow the exact label regarding amount, open time, pressure and drying or cure. Avoid pressing adhesive out over the visible face. Observe whether the card curls, the leaf darkens or lifts, or the adhesive remains tacky. Record actual observations after the stated period; write NOT CHECKED if not complete. Do not use the finished panel until the trial supports the planned method.

Steps 09–10

9. Transfer the composition and mark attachment positions

Place the dry mock-up beside the final card. Mark only small reference points for the focal leaf and supporting leaves. Confirm the 15 mm margin and ensure any label area stays free. Remove the leaf from the final card before applying adhesive unless the chosen product specifically requires another sequence. Use a clean supporting card to transfer fragile pieces. Avoid rubbing eraser crumbs or loose fragments across the leaves.

10. Mount the first leaf carefully

Apply the compatible adhesive to the surface and places specified by its maker, using the amount selected in the scrap trial. Keep it away from unintended visible edges; do not soak the entire leaf. Set the focal leaf onto its marks once, supporting the blade rather than pulling at the stem. Seat gently as instructed without forcing a thick vein flat. If the piece shifts or wrinkles, stop and consult the product instructions rather than repeatedly peeling a fragile leaf.

Steps 11–12

11. Mount the remaining leaves and preserve the spacing

Apply the same verified method to the supporting leaves, following the recorded order. Compare each position with the loose layout. Keep the remaining tips and stems within the margin and leave a comfortable gap around the optional label. If wet adhesive spreads, follow the label for removal on scrap first; avoid wiping across a delicate mounted blade. When the layout no longer works, remake on a fresh card rather than forcing an overlapping repair.

12. Let the panel dry and inspect it

Keep the panel flat on a clean support in a dry ventilated place for the adhesive maker’s specified drying or curing period. Do not close it inside a frame or plastic while damp. Avoid direct heat, sunlight and stacking. After the prescribed period inspect from the front and side for lifted edges, staining, distortion or residual tack. If a problem is visible or the cure is uncertain, mark HOLD. Never treat a visually dry surface as proof of chemical cure.

Steps 13–14

13. Add an optional identification strip and display

Write a short title, season or known specimen name on a separate small paper label. Avoid claiming a species you have not identified. Attach the label outside the leaf arrangement with an appropriate paper adhesive. If framing, choose a suitable mat or spacer so glazing does not press against the leaves; do not seal in moisture. Display away from intense light and damp areas. Fading and brittleness are possible even with careful storage.

14. Record the final composition and care

Complete Record 2 with the actual leaf IDs, adhesive product and trial outcome, positions, cure status and condition. Mark DISPLAY READY, CHANGE/REMAKE or HOLD. A display-ready designation is a craft observation, not conservation certification. Inspect periodically for lifting, moisture, insects or mould; isolate and remove a suspect item without disturbing it. Preserve the sketch or photograph so the composition can be recreated without reusing a damaged specimen.

Fix, care and preserve

Leaf curls when mounted. Review dryness and adhesive compatibility; use a new trial and a flatter leaf.

Adhesive stains. Stop, allow the scrap to finish drying, and select a more suitable mounting method.

Panel buckles. Use stiffer compatible card, avoid saturation and remake if necessary.

Edges lift. Follow the product’s repair guidance on scrap; avoid forcing a fragile edge.

Mould or insects appear. Isolate; do not brush indoors or seal into a frame. Remove the affected craft safely.

Source & evidence boundary

Original Steadleaf English prose, calculations, vector artwork, diagrams and maker records. The following sources provide factual context, not certification of this design. Follow actual component instructions and local collection, disposal and plant-movement rules.

Parks Canada, Visitor guidelines
https://parks.canada.ca/voyage-travel/regles-rules

University of Missouri Extension, Drying Flowers and Foliage for Arrangements
https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6540

Canadian Conservation Institute, Caring for paper objects
https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/preventive-conservation/guidelines-collections/paper-objects.html

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Composition grid and margin

An illustrative 150 x 200 mm portrait panel with a 15 mm border, 120 x 170 mm inner field and three leaves on a loose diagonal. Transfer only visual positions; adapt the outlines to real specimens.

A / PORTRAIT PANEL: 150 x 200 mm

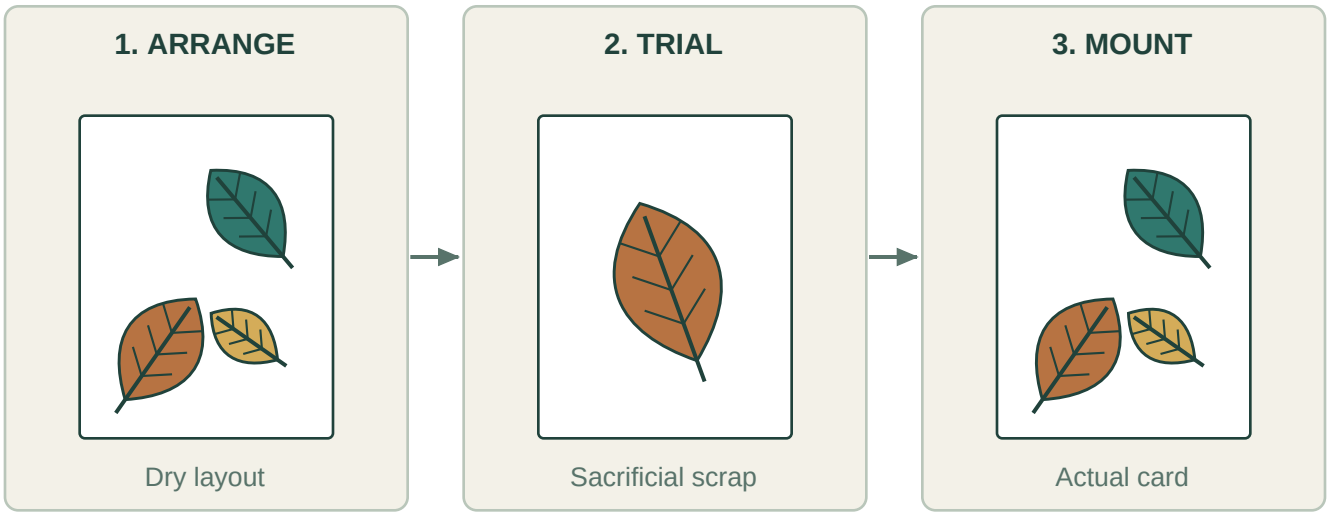


Position guide only; adapt to actual dried leaf outlines and thickness.

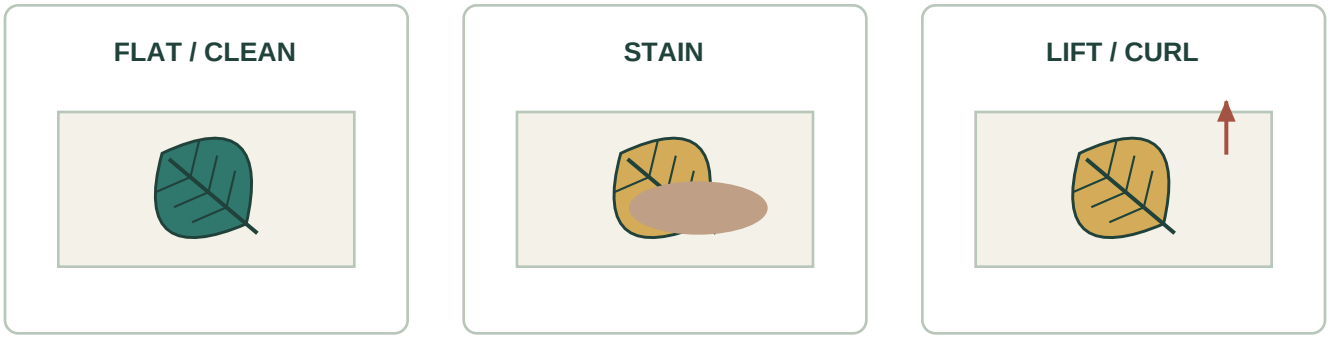
Mounting order and trial comparison

Three-step sequence: loose arrangement, sacrificial sample, final mounted panel. Compare clean dry scrap with curl, stain or lift; no physical trial is claimed.

A / WORK FROM A LOOSE ARRANGEMENT



B / SCRAP OBSERVATION AFTER LABEL-SPECIFIED CURE



Compare your actual sample. A neat appearance does not establish archival permanence.

Composition and scrap trial

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or preservation certificate.

Panel dimensions / card product

Leaf IDs / source and dryness records

Focal leaf and supporting leaves / order

Margin and layout coordinates / sketch

Adhesive product / label instructions

Trial application / drying or cure requirement

Actual trial observation / NOT CHECKED

Decision: PROCEED / CHANGE / HOLD

Final composition and care

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or preservation certificate.

Actual leaf IDs and placement

Mounting sequence / product used

Drying or cure complete? / date

Visual condition: stain / lift / curl / none observed

Label text / display location

Disposition: DISPLAY READY / CHANGE-REMAKE / HOLD

Care and inspection trigger

Date / reason