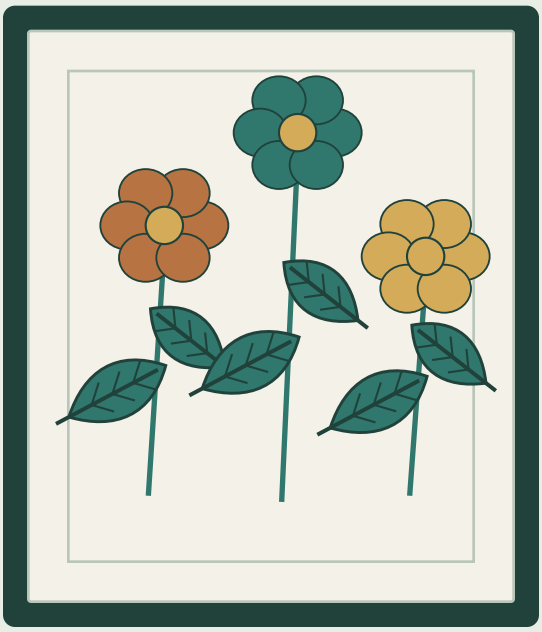
STEADLEAF PRESS

MAKE / BOTANICAL & NATURAL-MATERIAL CRAFTS

Arrange Dried Flowers in a Flat Shadowbox



DRY FLOWERS / CLEAR GLAZING GAP

14 practical steps · Measure · arrange · mount

Original diagrams and two printable maker records

Illustrative plans — not physical test results

FREE GUIDE + PRINTABLES | STP-MAKE-F122

Before you start

A shallow frame can turn three pressed flowers into a quiet botanical picture. Unlike a conventional picture frame, a shadowbox gives the fragile surfaces room behind its glazing. This guide builds a simple removable backing panel, not the frame itself. Use only known, already fully dried, relatively flat craft flowers. A sealed box cannot dry a damp flower; avoid enclosing material if its dryness remains uncertain.

Materials: a manufactured shallow shadowbox with intact glazing, a removable rigid acid-free craft backing suited to the frame, three sound pressed flowers with short stems, matching sacrificial scraps, narrow paper strips, compatible labelled water-based paper adhesive, pencil, ruler, scissors, clean supporting card and a lined tray. Use a frame with a secure closure and suitable manufactured stand or mounting system; do not make or alter glass or mounting hardware. Work away from food, children and pets.

Plan the project

Measure the actual clear panel opening and usable depth from the installed backing's face to the inside of the glazing; account for clips, lips and spacers. Example: an opening of 150 by 200 mm accepts a 148 by 198 mm backing if the frame allows a 1 mm clearance on every edge. Within that panel, a 15 mm border leaves a 118 by 168 mm composition field. Put stems near the lower third, with their heads staggered above. Adjust to the actual flowers, not to an imposed silhouette.

Example depth budget: 12 mm clear depth above the backing, minus 5 mm maximum total flower-and-mount height, leaves a nominal 7 mm front gap. Measure the highest point including strips and any dry adhesive. Never use this example as a minimum clearance standard; verify a comfortable gap throughout the actual box without pressing the glazing against the material. Secure stems with loose paper straps whose ends adhere to the backing, not to fragile petals; support the flowers horizontally before closing. If unsuitable, display a photograph instead.

Steps 01–02

1. Select a permitted source and three dry flowers

Use locally supplied pressed flowers of known appropriate identity, or specimens already lawfully obtained. Verify site rules before collecting; Parks Canada prohibits taking natural objects from its protected places. Avoid unknown, toxic or irritating plants, visible mould, insects and loose seeds. Choose relatively flat, sturdy forms rather than thick blossoms that need compression. Record each flower ID and drying history if known.

2. Examine the frame without the specimens

Lay the empty shadowbox flat on a protected table. Read the maker’s opening and closing directions. Check glazing, corners, retaining clips and supplied support for cracks, distortion and looseness. Do not remove broken glass, drill into the frame or improvise hangers. Set aside any damaged frame and choose an intact one. Keep the glazing covered while making the backing.

Steps 03–04

3. Measure the clear backing opening

Measure width and height where the removable panel actually sits, not the outer frame or the advertised picture size. In the example a 150 by 200 mm opening accepts 148 by 198 mm, leaving 1 mm at each edge. Adjust for the actual retaining system; the backing must sit flat and be removable without bending. Record the dimensions.

4. Determine the usable depth

With the original frame assembly in its intended configuration, determine the clear space between backing face and glazing, including the narrowest region. Use a ruler and an empty-frame side view or maker specification; avoid pushing a ruler into glazing. Do not count the full external frame depth. If depth cannot be established, choose a documented deeper frame or use a flat paper image.

Steps 05–06

5. Prepare the backing and composition field

Cut or obtain a backing panel of the measured size. Use scissors only for suitable thin card; buy a pre-cut rigid board if necessary. Mark a 15 mm border on a separate sketch. For the example 148 by 198 mm backing, the inner field is 118 by 168 mm. Leave the clips and retaining edges unobstructed. Check fit in the empty frame.

6. Arrange three staggered stems

On a dry paper mock-up, position a taller flower near the upper centre and two lower heads to the left and right. Keep all tips within the field and leave negative space near the bottom for a label. Move specimens on supporting card rather than pulling stems. Do not overlap thick heads or stems. Photograph or sketch the actual layout.

Steps 07–08

7. Plan the non-crushing paper straps

Choose sound stem regions, not petals, for two narrow straps per stem where feasible. Cut trial strips about 5 mm wide. Each strip spans the stem with a small amount of slack and two flat ends resting on the backing; adjust the actual strip length to the stem and its height. Mark both adhesive landing areas. Do not use tight loops, wire, staples or adhesive directly on petals.

8. Try the mount on sacrificial material

On spare backing use a similar dry scrap stem and the selected strips. Read the paper adhesive instructions. Apply adhesive only to the paper ends, leaving the bridge over the stem free. Allow full label-specified drying or cure. Inspect whether the scrap remains supported without pinching or sticking to adhesive. If the material crumbles, moves freely or the board curls, change the layout or use a photograph.

Steps 09–10

9. Mount the flowers on the removable backing

Transfer the recorded arrangement to the final panel. Support each stem while setting the pre-shaped strips across sound sections. Adhere the ends to the backing with the method supported by the scrap trial, keeping adhesive off the flower. Let each strip retain a little clearance rather than pulling tight. Do not try to rescue broken stems with adhesive. Keep the backing flat while the adhesive dries.

10. Measure the completed mount profile

After the required cure, measure the highest point above the backing, including flower heads, stem curves and straps, without touching delicate parts. A straightedge supported on blocks beside the specimen can help compare heights; never rest it on the flower. In the example 12 mm minus 5 mm gives 7 mm nominal clearance. If the actual gap is uncertain or too small, use a deeper frame.

Steps 11–12

11. Install and close the shadowbox

Follow the frame maker’s directions with the box horizontal. Support the backing as you seat it; no loose parts should slide behind it. Close slowly and observe the space in front of each flower from the side where possible. If the glazing or clips could contact a specimen, reopen and change the design. Do not force or tape shut a poorly fitting frame.

12. Review the intended display orientation

Support the closed frame and move it only as its maker permits. If intended for upright display, slowly bring it upright while observing whether any specimen shifts or drops; keep the frame over a padded table. If the mount cannot retain the flowers in that ordinary orientation, return it flat and remake or choose a horizontal display. This is a limited craft observation, not a retention or impact test.

Steps 13–14

13. Choose a dry protected location

Use the manufacturer’s stable stand or documented mounting method on a suitable surface. Keep away from strong sunlight, radiators, damp exterior walls, kitchens and bathrooms. Monitor for condensation, visible mould, pests or loose fragments. Do not open or brush a suspect specimen in the living area; isolate and seek appropriate advice. A box with intact glazing is not a humidity guarantee.

14. Record the completed arrangement

Write the actual frame dimensions, backing size, height budget, mounting materials, cure status and display orientation in Record 2. Mark DISPLAY READY, CHANGE/REMAKE or HOLD based on observations. Retain a photo and specimen IDs. Fading and brittleness can still occur; use a reproduction for valuable material. Do not claim archival preservation, pest freedom or certified mounting strength.

Fix, care and preserve

Glazing touches a flower. Remove the panel and select a deeper frame or thinner specimen. Never compress petals.

Stem shifts under its strap. Remake using suitable slack and landing zones, or use a photograph.

Backing does not sit flat. Check the actual frame opening and use a compatible pre-cut panel.

Moisture appears. Isolate the box and assess the source; do not seal in residual water.

Glazing or clips are damaged. Stop using the frame and replace it rather than improvising a repair.

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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Backing layout and staggered stems

Illustrative 148 x 198 mm panel, 15 mm border and 118 x 168 mm inner field. Three flowers remain clear of frame edges and each other.

A / BACKING PLAN



15 mm border

118 x 168 mm field

Stagger flower heads

Keep stems clear

of frame hardware.

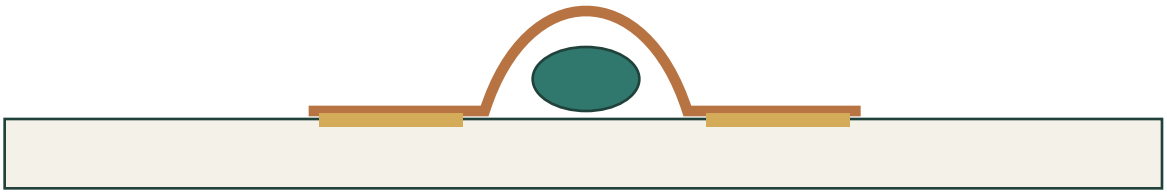
Illustrative backing size; measure the actual frame opening.

Mounting straps and depth budget

Paper strap bridges a sound stem; adhesive lands on the backing only. Example: 12 mm usable depth minus 5 mm mount profile = 7 mm nominal clearance. Measure actual depth and highest point.

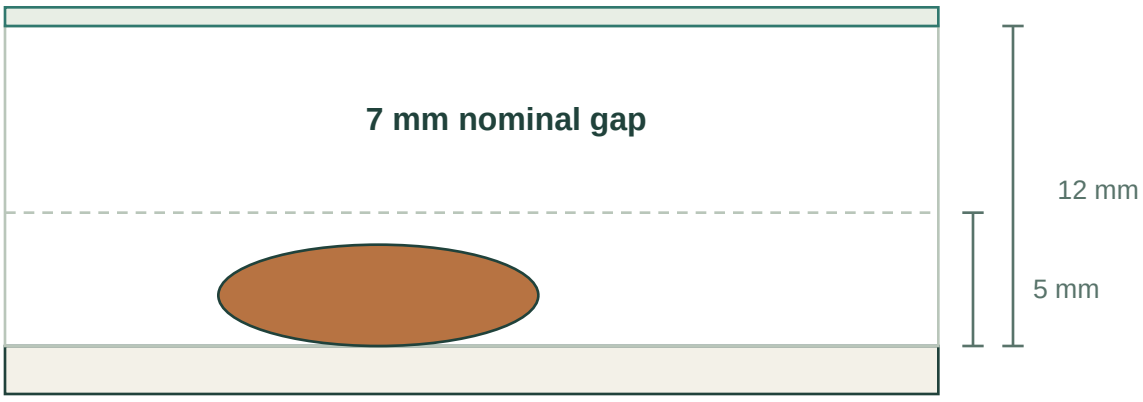
A / PAPER STRAP BRIDGES THE STEM

Loose bridge — no adhesive on stem



Adhesive lands on backing only

B / ILLUSTRATIVE DEPTH BUDGET



12 – 5 = 7 mm; verify actual height and depth.

Frame and mount plan

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

Frame model / actual clear opening

Backing width and height / fit clearance

Specimen IDs / source / dryness

Layout and strap locations

Usable depth above backing

Adhesive / scrap observation / cure instructions

Highest planned profile / available clearance

Decision: PROCEED / CHANGE / HOLD

Final shadowbox 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 backing fit / closure condition

Flowers and strap positions / condition

Adhesive cure complete? / date

Measured depth / highest point / remaining gap

Orientation observation / actual support

Disposition: DISPLAY READY / CHANGE-REMAKE / HOLD

Display location / light and humidity

Date / follow-up trigger