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HOW TO DRY PLANTS IN THE MICROWAVE OVEN

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Heidi Hopp, one of my students, has developed the following method to press and dry herbarium specimens in a microwave oven. I have experimented with various plants using Heidi's method and have found that it works most of the time. While this method works best with non-waxy thin foliage (i.e. Poinsettia) it does a fair job on juicy plants (i.e. African violets) and waxy ones (i.e. Pin oak).

Procedure:

1. Arrange plant flat between two layers of paper towel. Avoid towels with a raised pattern.
2. Put towels with specimen between two layers of ordinary cardboard and put in microwave oven.
3. Place five or six stoneware dinner plates on top for weight.
4. Use the defrost setting (25%-40% power) and set the timer for two to five minutes. You will need to experiment with each different plant. The variation in time is due to variations in the waxiness and juiciness of different plants.
5. Specimens will come out of the oven quite flat and limp. Allow the specimen to air dry for 30-60 minutes before mounting it.

For use in my plant collection assignment, these pressed and dried specimens are lightly glued to 5" x 8" posterboard, labeled, and covered with clear Contac brand plastic material. They maintain their shape and color for up to ten years when prepared in this manner.