

Guidance Note: Pressing Fleshy Bulbs and Flowers (e.g., *Narcissus*) for Herbarium Sheets

Fleshy flowers such as *Narcissus*, *Galanthus*, *Hyacinthus*, and other bulbous species require additional preparation before pressing to ensure they dry flat, retain diagnostic features, and avoid mould. The following steps outline best practice for preparing and pressing these specimens for long-term herbarium storage.

1. Collecting the Specimen

- Select a representative plant showing key features: bulb or basal plate, leaves, and at least one intact flower.
- Avoid collecting overly wet material (e.g., immediately after rain).
- Gently remove soil from the bulb and roots; retain enough structure for identification.
- Record field data immediately: location, grid reference, habitat, collector, date, and any colour notes (yellow shades often fade).

2. Pre-Press Preparation (Critical for Fleshy Flowers)

Fleshy tissues must be reduced in thickness before pressing.

Flowers

- Carefully split the perianth (corolla + corona) **lengthwise** with a scalpel or fine scissors.
- Open the flower so it lies flat like a book.
 - For *Narcissus*, cut through the corona and lay the two halves open.
- If the ovary is very thick, slice it longitudinally to reduce moisture.

Bulbs / Basal Plates

- Do **not** attempt to press a whole bulb.
- Trim the bulb vertically to produce a thin longitudinal section (approx. 3–5 mm thick).
- Retain one half for pressing; the other may be dried separately as a spirit specimen if required.

Leaves

- Flatten leaves by gently rolling them between sheets of absorbent paper before pressing.

- Long leaves may be folded in a “V” or “N” shape to fit the sheet, avoiding sharp creases.

3. Pressing Technique

Layering

- Place the specimen between **highly absorbent blotting paper** or newspaper.
- Arrange the split flower halves so diagnostic structures (stamens, style, corona shape) are visible.
- Position the bulb section with the cut face upward for clarity.

Ventilation

- Use ventilators (corrugated cardboard) between layers to improve airflow.
- Ensure the press is tightened firmly but not so much that it crushes delicate structures.

Drying

- Change blotters **daily for the first 3–4 days**, then every 2–3 days until fully dry.
- Keep the press in a warm, dry, well-ventilated space.
 - Avoid direct heat sources that may cause petals to brown.

4. Preventing Mould and Tissue Collapse

Fleshy flowers are prone to mould; prevention is essential.

- Ensure all thick tissues are sliced before pressing.
- Increase the number of blotters for moisture-rich specimens.
- If mould appears, remove affected blotters immediately and replace with dry ones.
- Silica gel drying can be used for delicate floral parts if pressing proves difficult.

5. Mounting on Herbarium Sheets

Once fully dry:

- Mount the specimen on acid-free herbarium card using archival glue or linen tape.
- Support fragile floral parts with narrow straps of archival paper.
- Include a small envelope for loose fragments (e.g., stamens, pollen).

- Attach a detailed label with:
 - Scientific name
 - Collector and number
 - Date
 - Location and habitat
 - Notes on colour, scent, or posture (these often change during drying)

6. Additional Notes for *Narcissus*

- Colours fade significantly - record colour notes in the field. Comparing the colours of fresh material with the RHS colour chart will give a permanent reference if you have access otherwise the online free resource such as <https://imagecolorpicker.com/>
- The corona shape is diagnostic—ensure at least one split flower shows this clearly.
- If multiple flowers are present, press one split and one intact (but flattened) for comparison.

Kevin Frediani
National Trust for Scotland
26/03/2026

Sources of further information:

1) <https://www.plantheritage.org.uk/media/1894/rhs-guide-to-making-herbarium-specimens.pdf>