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Title: Creating beautiful herbarium specimens that are also fit for purpose

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Dried plant specimens produced at the Wisley herbarium are internationally renowned not only for their research value, but also for their aesthetic quality. This poster outlines refinements and innovations in our specimen creation, namely specimens are methodically colour charted, flattened beneath dampened blotting paper and sponge/foam, and tension rods are added to the press for even pressing.

Although not necessarily practical for botanical fieldwork, these refinements mean that the quality of preservation of the material is ideal for the detail required for studying cultivated plants.

Ref: Bridson, D. & Forman, L. (1998). The Herbarium Handbook (3rd edition). Pp. 334. RBG Kew. ISBN 1 900347 43 1

Colour charting

There is inevitable colour loss/change on drying. Colour-charting is crucial as many cultivars vary only in colour. Out of direct sunlight or artificial light, and beside a north-facing window, the fresh material is compared to the RHS Colour Chart for a permanent colour reference.



Tensioning bars

Specimens within the press are separated by corrugates. When the press is filled, the straps are further tightened by the use of two tension rods. These are bevelled at one end and are slid under the straps to exert even pressure and further tighten the straps.



Sponge and dampened blotters

Once the specimen has been arranged on a double blotter it is covered with a single sheet of blotting paper which, especially in the case of lumpy specimens is sprayed with water on the outer surface to soften it. This ensures that it moulds around the specimen. Sponge/foam sheets are placed over the single blotter for the first 24 hours to flatten the specimen.

Pressing

Following the conventional methodology described in The Herbarium Handbook (and using a drying cabinet), we have made a few tweaks outlined (left) that result in visually spectacular specimens.