Indoor Gardening

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Creating Plaques from Dried Materials

INTRODUCTION

Many easily obtainable dry materials can be glued to an inexpensive backing to form a decorative plaque. Use such plaques as part of your room decorations, or as gifts.

The following information will enable you to assemble pleasing plaques at little cost. Plaques formed in a shadow-box are especially attractive. All the materials needed can be found in or around your home. Dried materials can come from leftover seed, gardens, roadsides, and fields. Always be on the lookout for usable dry materials.

Activity requirements

1. Assemble three or more plaques on a background at least 5 inches by 7 inches. Use more than one design.
2. Record your work in 4-H Project Record R-7-3.
3. Exhibit your plaques at State Fair, if possible.
4. Turn in a picture of your plaques with your record sheet.

NOTE: Check with your leader for project requirements.

Equipment for the activity

To assemble plaques of dried materials satisfactorily you will need:

Backings or Background

- Picture frames (with wooden backing)
- Squares, rectangles and circles of plywood (five inches by seven inches and larger)
- Old wooden trays
- Wooden or plastic salad bowls
- Wood shingles
- Masonite
- Styrofoam
- Burlap
- Pre-finished panelling

Wood and metal are suitable for backgrounds. Backing materials may be left natural or may be painted before a design is glued to them. Shadow-box effects can be made with old fashioned shadow-boxes, painted cigar boxes, tin pie plates or cake tins.

After sanding backing materials smooth, use shellac or lacquer to preserve natural backgrounds. Natural wood finishes are also very effective. If you are using a frame with backing, use one of a number of good color combinations to paint the frame and background. Metal backgrounds are usually painted. Good background color combinations are:

- Two tones of brown
Gold and black
Brown and yellow
Gold and light green
Brown and gold

Cement

A quick drying model airplane cement is best for dried materials. Household cement or glue is also good, but is slower to dry.

Dry materials

You have an endless choice of substantial dried materials for plaques. Avoid feathery grasses or shedding seed stalks. Below are lists of good dry materials.

Seeds

Cucumber
Melon
Squash
Corn
Beans
Peas
Bayberry
Wheat
Oats
Barley

Seed Pods

Iris
Tulip
Narcissus
Poppy
Lily
Peony
Daylily
Gladiolus
Locust
Wisteria
Catalpa

Nuts

Acorns
Horse chestnuts
Hazel nut
Walnut
Hickory nut
Pecan
Black walnut
Brazil nut
Beechnut

Nuts

Milkwheed
Teasel
Witch-hazel
Okra
Lilac
Maple
Ash
Swamp alder
Ostrich fern fronds
Leucothoe
Trumpet vine
Sensitive fern fronds

Dried flowers

Strawflowers
Globe amaranth
Blue Salvia
Tansy

Dried Foliage

Magnolia
Oak
Beech
Mullein

Cones

Spruce
Fir
Pine
Hemlock
Larch
Juniper
Arborvitae

Dried branches

Larch
Scotch broom
Dogwood
Witch hazel
Oak branches with acorns

Types of materials

Dried materials are divided into groups according to form or habit of growth. Long spike-like materials, such as cattails and branches, are used for height and width. Round shapes, such as pine cones, are used toward the center of the arrangement. Small circular forms, such as acorns, may be arranged in a line to give a spiky effect. Small spiky forms, such as long melon seeds, may be placed to create circles.

Designs

You can create endless designs from dry materials. The last sheet of this leaflet gives you some ideas. From these you may wish to choose your first design. Using your dry materials, you may work out your design directly on the background.

Brushes

If your frame and backing are to be painted, you will need narrow paint brushes, one-half to one-inch wide.

Sandpaper, Steel Wool

Sandpaper is used to put a smooth surface on wood backing. Fine steel wool is used on cake tins if they are to be painted and used for a shadow box effect.

HOW TO MAKE DRIED PLAQUES

Select a design that will allow you to use the materials on hand and is suited to the background shape you have chosen. A rectangular background is suited to any design.

After you have chosen a design, rough out your selection in full size. Lay long materials, or materials to be laid in lines, on your background. Work from top to bottom. The largest materials and strongest colors are low and toward the center. The greatest mass, which is either one large or several closely grouped small pieces, is at the center of attention or focal point.

After your materials are satisfactorily placed and checked, you are ready to glue them into place on your background.

After the glue is dry, you may wish to shellac the entire plaque. A slightly shiny finish can be obtained by spraying the finished plaque with clear plastic spray. This is available in pressurized cans.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Creating dried plaques is an excellent activity for members to demonstrate. The finished plaque should be displayed, and duplicate materials used for a step-by-step demonstration of how the plaque was assembled.
Some basic designs for dried plaques
The lines for an L-shaped design are placed first. These are twigs of winged euonymus.

The focal point is added. Here it is an acorn with hickory nut shucks.

A frame and a smaller design in the upper right corner are added to complete the plaque.

This plaque follows the fan design. It is made from just two materials — strawflowers and sterile fern. A plaque does not need a large number of materials to look good.

Bittersweet vine makes the lines, a hemlock cone and seed corn form the center of interest. Single lilac seed pods fill in around the vine. The round capsules are a weed seed pod.

The line of this L is made of maple seeds. Scales from a pine cone and an acorn form the center of interest. Bits of bark form the transition from maple seed to pine cone scales.

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