

Friends of NCTC Program Activity

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**Leaf It!**

Age 5 and older

*Leaves are important parts of trees because they make food for the tree AND they provide oxygen for animals. Leaves are differently shaped, depending on the type of tree. That's one of the best ways we can identify trees.*

**Background**

Leaves are important parts of trees. They make food for the tree AND they provide oxygen for animals. Leaves come in different shapes based on the type of tree they grow on. The shape of leaves is the easiest way we can identify trees. Some leaves are flat, but shaped differently, and some are like needles. Deciduous trees have leaves that usually fall off the tree in the fall after they change colors. Trees with needles are called “evergreen” because the needles do not fall off at one time, but gradually, and the tree stays green. Let’s get outside and discover the variety of leaves. These activities will help children notice the change in leaves and experiment with ways to preserve leaves and use them for decorative projects.

**What You Will Need for This Project (materials and supplies)**

- >For older children (ages 9+): a notebook and pen/pencil for recording observations.
- >(Optional) digital camera/phone .
- >A notebook or heavy paper and glue for mounting leaves.
- >Paper towels, newspapers, large books or other heavy items for laying on top of leaves to press them.
- >Wax paper and electric iron (optional).
- >Glycerin (available at pharmacies, health food stores, online).
- >Drawing paper or regular copy paper will do, but kids love to have larger sizes for drawing.
- >Crayons in different colors with the paper removed.
- >Trees field guide, with good pictures of leaves.

**What to Do**

> As fall arrives, you probably notice that the leaves are changing color. Watch and decide if this happen all at once or over time? Leaves are found in so many shapes, but these shapes are ways that we can identify the tree they come from.

>Look around and find one or more trees that you like. Examine the leaves—are they the same shape or different? Are there veins (lines) in the leaves or is the surface smooth? Are they the same color or are they beginning to change to different colors? Take a picture of leaves that you like and/or collect some to save.

>Make a leaf rubbing. Put the leaf on a flat surface with the underside facing up. Place a piece of plain paper over the leaf and hold it securely. Then, using broad strokes, rub the flat side of a crayon over the leaf several times so that the outline of the leaf, the veins, and the stem begin to appear. Be sure to hold the leaf in place so a double image doesn’t happen. Using different colors of crayon will deepen the leaf design and using different shapes of leaves together will create a true work of art!

>Start a leaf collection! All you need to do is collect leaves, press them, and save them in a scrapbook. Then you can identify them. Leaves do not have to be “perfect” (without holes or marks), but fresh leaves can be pressed more easily and effectively. To press leaves, lay them flat between paper towels or newspaper and press them between a couple of heavy books for several days (up to a week). You can stack two or three layers, each between paper, if necessary.

>You can collect multiple leaves from the same tree over a time-period to watch if the leaves will change color. It’s fun to guess, or hypothesis, 1) if the leaves will change colors, 2) when the change will occur, 3) what color will they become, and 4) if they will change all at once. We encourage curiosity so feel free to come up with your own questions.

>It is possible to put a leaf between 2 sheets of wax paper, cover with a sheet of plain paper, and iron with a warm iron. (The plain paper protects the iron surface and keeps the leaf from getting too hot.) Once cooled, the leaf shapes can be taped up in a window to mimic stained glass. Using multiple leaves in larger sheets of wax paper, can create a leaf mosaic.

>You can do some really cool things with these pressed leaves! To mount leaves, put a few dabs of Elmer's white or yellow glue on the back, then flip the leaf over and use your fingers to smooth it out. (Putting wax paper over the mounted leaf and closing the notebook, with a weight on top for an hour, will give the glue time to dry and keep the papers from being glued together.) You may want to write notes on the page: common name, scientific name, date, location, shape, or something personal are ideas.

>Frame your mounted leaves or use them to decorate a blank greeting card and send them at birthdays or as a friendship card. You can also make different leaf animals by using your imagination and differently shaped leaves. The book "Leaf Man" might give you some ideas.

>Glycerin Leaves will keep leaves supple and colorful. Mix solution of 1 part glycerin to 2 parts hot water. Layer the leaves in the bottom of a pan. Cover completely with glycerin mixture. Make sure leaves are completely covered. If they are overlapping, swirl the mixture a bit to make sure the leaves are covered. Put a second pan on top to weigh down the leaves. Allow them to soak for 3-4 days or more. Remove leaves from solution, blot with a paper towel.

>Older kids may be interested in preserving the color of leaves. There are three different ways here:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Preserve-Leaf-Color>

### **Helpful Hints for Adults (books to read, other websites, links)**

>*Leaf Man* by Lois Ehlert

>*Fletcher and the Falling Leaves* by Julia Rawlinson

>*Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf* by Lois Ehlert

>*We're Going on a Leaf Hunt* by Steve Metzger

>*A Tree is Nice* by Janice May Udry is an older, classic story.

