

VSC General Instructions for Proper Handling of Herbarium Specimens

Each specimen sheet is irreplaceable: It is a permanent voucher record and should be handled accordingly.

Specimen sheets and folders should be handled carefully, i.e., when carried always held parallel to the ground.

Never turn specimen sheets or folders upside down.

Avoid holding specimen sheets and folders at an angle more than 30°.

Avoid leafing through folders like pages of a book.

When working through a folder of specimen sheets, place the folder on a flat surface, open the folder, and go through the sheets one at a time; move the top sheet to an open area to the right or left of the original stack, then place each subsequent sheet on top of the one previously moved. When finished with the stack of specimen sheets, simply reverse them one-by-one to return them to the order in the original stack.

If you find specimens or folders out of order, you should carefully place them in proper order. *If you are not sure, then ask the curator!*

Specimen sheets are normally organized in folders alphabetically by state, then alphabetically by county within each state.

A—Z folders are used for species for which there are fewer than three sheets: The specimen sheets are organized first alphabetically by species, then alphabetically by state and county within each species.

In many cases, the folders labeled by species or A—Z are numbered sequentially, with the full range for that set being distributed in order within the numbered series of folders.

Specimen sheets should be carefully placed in folders, squarely aligned with one another and with the folder.

Genus folders should be placed on the cabinet shelf, squarely aligned with one another and with the shelf.

When loose fragments are discovered, and they can definitely be associated with an individual specimen sheet, carefully use forceps or a small brush to retrieve them and place them in a fragment packet.

If the specimen does not already have a fragment packet and it needs one, select a packet of an appropriate size and neatly glue it to the herbarium sheet.

Loose fragments that accumulate in the common fold of the genus folder and **cannot** definitely be associated with an individual specimen sheet should be discarded. *If you are not sure, then ask the curator!*

When you remove a folder from the herbarium cabinet, mark the location with a piece of scrap paper in order to insure the folder is returned to its proper position in the cabinet.

Keep doors of herbarium cabinets closed, except when removing specimens and returning them to the cabinet.

If you notice insects or evidence of insect damage on herbarium sheets, inform the curator immediately.

Very rarely you will encounter specimens marked “poisoned.” These were acquired through exchange, and they should be handled carefully, and each placed in a separate species folder within the appropriate genus folder.

Always wash your hands with warm soapy water before and after handling specimen sheets.

Never consume food or drinks – including water – while working with specimen sheets.