

"Stained Glass" Leaf Window Art

In first-grade science, children spend lots of time learning to identify, group, and categorize natural phenomena around them. Not only is accurate grouping considered good science practice, but it is also a way for kids to actively appreciate patterns in nature. In this science craft activity, help your child practice his categorizing and grouping skills by gathering leaves and creating a beautiful and delicate window tapestry to preserve them!

Because of the abundance of various types of leaves, fall is an especially good time of the year to do this activity.

What You Need:

- Roll of ordinary household wax paper
- Fresh leaves—fall colors on trees like maple, oak, elm, sassafras, and poplar are recommended
- Plain, scrap paper
- Iron for pressing
- 9 x 12" construction paper in fall colors
- Stapler
- Black, permanent markers for labeling the leaves and writing a signature
- Tree Field Guide (optional)



What You Do:

1. Start with a nature walk. Take your child to a local wooded area where you can find lots of interesting tree leaves on the ground. Collect leaves of varying colors and shapes, and bring them home.
2. Spread the leaves on a clean table surface. Using a tree field guide or a similar resource, classify and identify each leaf. Help your child sort the leaves by type, and make a name tag for each pile on a piece of scrap paper.
3. Press the leaves. Pick several of the finest specimens of each type of leaf and lay them flat on a sheet of plain paper. Use another sheet of paper to cover this layer. Repeat the paper and leaf layers until all the desired leaves are placed. Put this paper-and-leaf "sandwich" pile under a big, heavy pile of books. After 3 to 4 days, carefully remove the pressed leaves.
4. To make the leaf window decoration, cut off a piece of wax paper about 2 feet long. Invite your child to lay the pressed leaves in any design she likes, being sure to leave a 1" border on the long sides of the wax paper and a 2" border at each end. Layered leaves do not usually hold, and each leaf needs at least 1/2" of a wax paper border around its edges for the best effect.
5. Carefully carry the wax paper design to an ironing board, lay it down, and place another layer of wax paper on top. Working quickly yet gently, use the iron to press the wax layers together. Remember that you'll only need a second or two for the wax to adhere.
6. The wax paper layers should stick well along the sides, but to secure the ends, fold some construction paper lengthwise, and cut it so that you have a 2" wide folded strip. Staple the strip to the top of your wax "sandwich" to make an attractive border. Make a second folded strip and attach it to the bottom of the wax paper strip. Help your child write the names of the tree leaves on one of the borders. Make sure she signs her masterpiece too!
7. Hang the design in a sunny window, and you'll have completely natural "stained glass" to enjoy for weeks.

