Leaf prints are a fun introduction to 4-H Forestry

Source: Laurie Thomas, extension forester

We may think more about trees in autumn as we watch their colorful displays, but trees provide so many more benefits to us than just fall color. Converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, helping lower our energy costs, serving as a wildlife habitat and playing a crucial role in Kentucky’s economy are just some of the many benefits of our state’s trees.

4-H can help young people learn more about nature through projects, clubs and events. Leaf prints are one of the first projects that 4-H’ers can complete, and they are perfect to do this time of the year.

To make leaf prints you need leaves, a stamp pad, newspaper, magazine, cardboard, rubber bands and paper. Start by finding leaves that are intact and free of blemishes, cracks and insect damage. Choose leaves from as many different trees as you can find.

You will need to press the leaves to make them flat so you can make prints. Take a magazine with you when you go leaf collecting and place the leaves into separate pages to begin flattening them. Further flatten them by sandwiching the magazine between two pieces of cardboard and wrap the package lengthwise with a rubber band. Allow them to sit for an hour.

When you go to purchase a stamp pad, bigger is better, as it will allow you to get full coverage of the leaf with less movement. Coat the underside of the leaf with the stamp pad, because this side of the leaf shows the most detail. You may have to move the leaf along the pad to get full coverage. If you choose, you can coat the underside of the leaf with oil paint instead, but you must paint the leaf quickly to ensure it does not dry before you make the print. Lay the leaves on newspaper to keep messes to a minimum.

Once your leaf is coated with ink or paint, place it underside down on white paper. Use your finger and rub along the leaf to make sure the print fully transfers to the paper. Only put one leaf print on a page and place in a two-or three-ring flexible, notebook or cover. If you plan to enter this project in the county fair, you will need to list the tree’s common and scientific names, most common purpose, the county where it was collected, month and year when it was collected and the area where it was found growing.

Leaf prints are just one way to participate in 4-H Forestry. If you are interested in learning more, contact your (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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