**Handout 3.2 - What can herbarium specimens teach us?**

Herbaria are a type of museum. They are permanent repositories for natural history specimens. Many herbarium records from museums around the world are now available online for everyone to see and learn from. In this activity, you will examine photographs of six herbarium specimens collected by Ynés Mexía during her travels. Because of her extensive collecting, many species were named after her in honor of her discoveries.

1. View the six specimen image files you have been provided with. At first glance, describe your thoughts about the images of the specimens listed below. How would you describe what you are seeing to a friend who has no idea what you are talking about?
2. Next, focus on the label information (generally in the bottom right corner of the specimen). For each specimen listed below, fill in the appropriate information.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. ***Saurauia* *mexiae*** | 1. ***Mexianthus mexiae*** | 1. ***Rudgea mexiae*** |
| **Plant family** |  |  |  |
| **Date collected** |  |  |  |
| **Location of collection** |  |  |  |
| **Plant description and notes** |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. ***Adiantum abscissum*** | 1. ***Palicourea flavifolia*** | 1. ***Euphorbia mexiae*** |
| **Plant family** |  |  |  |
| **Date collected** |  |  |  |
| **Location of collection** |  |  |  |
| **Plant description and notes** |  |  |  |

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1. Now that you have gone through and transcribed the specimen label information, read the following passage below. This is an excerpt from Mexía’s 1926 travelogue to Mexico entitled “Botanical Trails in Old Mexico — the Lure of the Unknown” that was published in the journal *Madroño* in 1929. This was her first solo trip collecting plants, and from August 1926-April 1927, she collected 33,000 specimens!



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1. Search the scientific name *Lactrodectus mactans.* What does the spider look like? Where is it found in the world?
2. Look at the provided herbarium specimen of *Euphorbia mexiae.* It contains additional ethnobotanical information on the label. What does it say?
3. Can you think of any other plants that might have ethnobotanical characteristics like this?

Does your chosen plant have any uses or significance you might include on its label?