



How To Make A Leaf Skeleton

You will need these things:

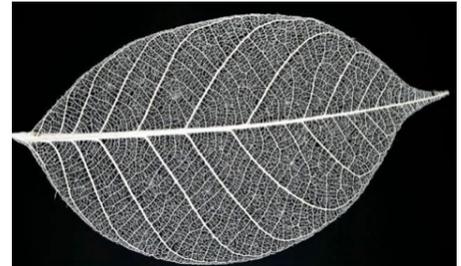
Fresh green, waxy leaves (Maple, aspen, magnolia, etc.)

Washing soda (aka Arm & Hammer Super Washing Soda)

Large pot

Shallow baking dish

Small paint brush or soft toothbrush



Steps:

1. Put the leaves in a large pot and add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup washing soda (sodium carbonate) and 4 cups water. You may want to wear gloves while handling the washing soda.
2. Heat the water to boiling in a metal pot. DO NOT use aluminum. Then reduce the heat to simmer. Make certain that the water continues to cover the leaves even with evaporation. Simmer for about 1 hour 45 minutes–2 hours. You can tell when you need to remove the pot from the heat because it will look like your leaves are disintegrating.
3. Remove the leaves carefully from the pot and place them into a shallow glass baking dish pre-filled with cool water.
4. Lift the stem with some tweezers and gently tap the top of the leaf with the toothbrush or blunt paintbrush to loosen the flesh, which you can then gently brush away. Work from the stem end using short gentle strokes to brush the tissue toward the ends and outer edges of the leaf. Turn the leaf over and repeat the process. Be patient!
5. If you prefer your leaf skeletons to be pure white, you can soak them for about 20 minutes in a bowl of bleach. You can also dye them with food coloring at this stage.
6. After cleaning and/or bleaching, rinse the leaves very carefully under cold water and transfer to some napkins to dry. I recommend pressing the leaves between two sets of napkins as they dry so they will be flat.
7. Once they are fully dried you can enjoy your work!

What do you end up with?

A leaf skeleton shows the leaf's veining system, which provides food and water to the rest of its parts and cells. Only the largest veins survive this process.