

INVERTEBRATE SPECIMEN PRESERVATION

The easiest way to preserve these animals is to use alcohol. However, you need to be aware of which kind of alcohol you are using as each requires a different concentration.

- **Isopropyl alcohol**

Isopropyl alcohol is relatively cheap and easy to obtain. It is rubbing alcohol and can be found in the health and beauty section of your local retailer. There are different strengths available (70% and 90%), so if you use isopropyl you want to *dilute it to a 40% alcohol solution*. Isopropyl alcohol can be hard on the specimens and tends to make them brittle over time. You can buffer it with a few drops of glycerin and a pinch of calcium carbonate antacid tablets (crush the tablets to a powder and add).

- **Ethyl alcohol**

The better solution for long term storage of invertebrate specimens is in an *80% solution* of ethyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohol can be found in the painting supplies, though it may not be specifically labeled as ethyl alcohol. It may be labeled “denatured alcohol” and should list ethyl alcohol, or ethanol, or methanol in the contents. This product can also be used for thinning shellac, cleaning glass and metal and as a clean burning fuel for marine stoves. You should also buffer the solution with the glycerin/antacid tablets.

- **Liquid hand sanitizer**

Another method you may wish to try is liquid hand sanitizer. It is best to kill the bugs in an alcohol solution then transfer them to the hand sanitizer for preservation. Many of these products use ethyl alcohol as the sanitizer and have a moisturizer added. The high alcohol content preserves the bugs and the gel consistency keeps the animal suspended making it easier to view the critters in a vial. The gel will break down over time and become liquid, so you may need to occasionally replace the gel solution.