



Fluid Preservation: A Comprehensive Reference

By John E. Simmons

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Fluid Preservation: A Comprehensive Reference By John E. Simmons

Fluid preservation refers to specimens and objects that are preserved in fluids, most commonly alcohol and formaldehyde, but also glycerin, mineral oil, acids, glycols, and a host of other chemicals that protect the specimen from deterioration. Some of the oldest natural history specimens in the world are preserved in fluid.

Despite the fact that fluid preservation has been practiced for more than 350 years, this is the only handbook that summarizes all that is known about this complex and often confusing topic. *Fluid Preservation: A Comprehensive Reference* covers the history and techniques of fluid preservation and how to care for fluid preserved specimens in collections.

- More than 900 references on fluid preservation were reviewed for this project.
- An historical survey of preservative recipes provides guidance for museums with older collections (many fluid preservatives contain hazardous chemicals).
- Current standards and best practices for collection care and management are presented.
- Current and controversial topics (e.g., the preservation of DNA, alternatives to alcohol and formaldehyde) are discussed and fully referenced.
- Health and safety issues involved with caring for fluid preserved collections are discussed.
- The final chapter addresses fluid preserved specimens as cultural products and their use in art, literature, film, and song.

Although most fluid-preserved specimens are found in natural history and medical museums, it is not at all uncommon to find them in art museums, history museums, and science centers. In addition to animals, plants, and anatomical specimens, fluid preserved collections include some minerals and fossils and many other objects.

Fluid Preservation is an essential reference for:

- Natural history curators
- Natural history collections managers

- Conservators
- Medical and anatomical museum collections managers and curators
- Art and history museum staff who have fluid preserved specimens and objects in their care (e.g., works by Damien Hirst)
- Private collectors
- Researchers using museum collections as sources of DNA, isotopes, etc.
- Health and safety professionals
- Exhibit planners and designers
- Museum facilities planners and managers
- People interested in the history of science
- People interested in the history of natural history museums
- Museum studies students

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Fluid Preservation: A Comprehensive Reference By John E. Simmons Bibliography

- Rank: #2067058 in Books
- Published on: 2014-05-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.23" h x 1.21" w x 6.40" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 364 pages



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Editorial Review

Review

Preservation techniques for biological specimens have often been handed down by oral tradition rather than subjected to rigorous scrutiny and long-term evaluation. This volume is an overview of procedures, chemicals, and containers, not a how-to manual. The initial chapter provides an interesting review of the history of preservation of plant/animal specimens, ranging from ancient practices to modern DNA extraction and preservation, and summarizes knowledge about long-term/indefinite fluid preservation of organic materials. Simmons addresses the merits and drawbacks of various protocols, temperatures, preservation fluids, sealants, and container types in preventing postmortem changes in tissues. Post-fixation processing, specimen repair, transfer to newer containers and solutions, and health/safety concerns are also covered. The second half of this volume contains well-organized, extensive tables, including a copious review of the literature, ranging from DNA preservation techniques to cultural references. The largest table is arranged alphabetically by author, with columns for specimen type and helpful directions and comments. Updating much of the information found in earlier books, this well-researched volume will be a valuable addition not only for collections serving museum curators and preservationists but also botanists, zoologists, chemists, and chemical engineers. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All students, researchers/faculty, and professionals/practitioners. (*CHOICE*)

[This] book can be considered essential for all who are responsible for collections in liquid media. (*Brazilian Herpetology*)

Fluid Preservations is an astounding assemblage of what is knowable through the literature about the fine art - some say voodoo - of keeping organics preserved in chemicals. Simmons guides a reader through a history of best efforts, thereby acknowledging that readers will draw their own rational conclusions when developing best practice(s), while adhering to the caveat to always monitor, record successes and failures, and adapt if/when needed.... This is a compelling read.... (*SPNHC Connection: Newsletter of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections*)

This examination of the science behind the fluid preservation of biological specimens is essential reading for curators and conservators alike. There is a wealth of information in this exceptionally well-researched book which is worth buying for the comprehensive reference list alone! John Simmons has also collected anecdotes and misconceptions about fluid preservation which makes his book a suitable read for those outside the small world of museum professionals.

(Simon Moore, Conservator of Natural Sciences and Cutlery Historian, The National Trust, United Kingdom)

Filled with practical references and recommendations and a bibliography embracing sources from the very beginning of fluid preservation in the early 17th century to DNA preservation, this book summarizes the written knowledge on fixation, preservation, secondary interactions of preservatives and gives valuable information on collection care by exploring available literature far beyond Anglo-American sources. It is more than just a comprehensive reference, it embodies our knowledge of fluid preservation and conveys the most comprehensive practical advice that can be offered, from an author truly devoted to collection care. (Dirk Neumann, Ichthyology section, The Bavarian State Collection of Zoology, Munich, Germany)

John Simmons has created the ultimate reference on the science and mythology of fluid preservation.

Thoroughly researched and written with wry wit, it is an indispensable and highly readable resource.
(Catharine Hawks, adjunct faculty, Museum Studies Program, The George Washington University)

About the Author

John Simmons holds a B.A. in systematic ecology and an M.A. in Historical Administration and Museum Studies. In 1986, he completed the Collections Care Pilot Training Program (funded by the Bay Foundation) to become one of 30 people in the country to receive specialized training in conservation and collections care. He has spent a total of 30 years as collections manager in two of the largest collections of fluid preserved specimens in the United States (the California Academy of Sciences and the Biodiversity Research Center at the University of Kansas). He has published extensively on collections care topics and conducted seminars, workshops, and training programs in the US, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe on the care of natural history collections (his previous publications include the AAM standard reference on collections management policies).

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