

Hammered leaf and flower prints

by [BuildMakeCraftBake](#) on April 27, 2009

Table of Contents

intro: Hammered leaf and flower prints	2
step 1: Take a walk	2
step 2: Assemble your materials	2
step 3: Trim the flowers/leaves	3
step 4: Cover with a blotter	3
step 5: Plan your attack	3
step 6: Let the smashing begin!	4
step 7: Check your progress	4
step 8: The unveiling	4
step 9: Try different hammers	5
step 10: Try different leaves and flowers	5
step 11: Preserve your print	6
step 12: Admire your work	6
Related Instructables	7
Advertisements	7
Make Magazine Special Offer	7
Comments	7

intro: Hammered leaf and flower prints

The vibrant colors of leaves and flowers are easy to preserve by pounding them to release their natural dyes onto paper. I learned this fun and simple technique from my college roommate, Sarah, but it's been around a lot longer -- I hear that Cherokee women pounded flowers to decorate fabric.

With not much more than a hammer and some leaves, you can make beautiful botanical cards or prints and enjoy spring greenery year-round.

Who knew that venting your frustrations could have such aesthetically pleasing results?



step 1: Take a walk

Start by going on a walk or visiting your garden to find leaves and flowers to work with. You're looking for things with bright colors that aren't too juicy or too dry. It'll take a little trial and error to find good plants, so grab a variety and play around.

Be sure to ask for permission before snagging your neighbor's prized plants. Oh, and try to avoid things like poison ivy and nightshade, okay?

step 2: Assemble your materials

For this project, you'll need:

- flowers or leaves to print
- watercolor or other rough, acid-free paper
- selection of hammers (including ball-peen or cross-peen, if you have them)
- hard work surface (cutting board, slab of wood, etc.)
- paper towels
- scissors
- a pen
- tweezers or toothpicks
- tape (optional)
- acrylic finishing spray (optional)

Gather your materials and set up your work surface. You want a smooth, hard surface that you can hammer on and not worry about denting or getting messy. I used a plastic cutting board covered with a paper bag.

A note on safety: please help kids with hammering. Smashed fingers hurt! Safety goggles are a good idea, too.



step 3: Trim the flowers/leaves

Trim any chunky or squishy bits off of the plants and arrange them on your watercolor paper. You can tape them down if you like (I didn't and it worked out fine). Just make sure that the tape doesn't get between the plant and the paper.



step 4: Cover with a blotter

Cover the plant with 2-3 layers of paper towels. You can also cover it with another piece of paper, but the paper towels work better because they absorb excess plant goo.



step 5: Plan your attack

On the paper towels, sketch the borders of the area you'll need to hammer. Unless, of course, you want to vent some frustration and plant to hammer the whole thing.



step 6: Let the smashing begin!

Start by making small, even taps using the flat side of one of the hammers. This will set the flowers or leaves in place. Then go carefully over the entire area with a ball- or cross-peen hammer. Start by going in rows up and down (see the arrows in the previous picture), then do another pass from side to side. You'll need to hit every single bit of the plant, so be patient. It can take a while.



step 7: Check your progress

Peel back the paper towel to check your progress. If the pattern on the towel is filled in, then you're probably done. If not, replace the paper towel and start again.



step 8: The unveiling

Now peel away the leaf to reveal the print. If it sticks to the paper, just let it dry for a bit and you'll be able to brush it off.



step 9: Try different hammers

Note that different kinds of hammers can give different results -- I used a ball-peen hammer for part of this, and it left some round spots that I think are a little too smooshed and gray. The more natural-looking, red parts of this print came from cross-peen hammer action.



step 10: Try different leaves and flowers

Here's a sampling of the plants I tried this with today. The Japanese maple and periwinkle worked especially well. Some of the others would have worked with additional hammering.

You'll probably have to try several plants to find one that works for you. The quality of the print will depend not only on your hammering technique and the paper you use, but also on characteristics of the plant, such as its color, hydration level, the stiffness of its fibers, and whether or not it has an outer layer of wax.

You can layer the images, too. Start by hammering the flowers and leaves that will go in the background, then build up layers from there. Remove the smashed plant material before going on to the next layer.



step 11: Preserve your print

Once your print is to your liking, you can spray it with UV-protective acrylic spray to help keep the colors bright. Be sure to do this in a well-ventilated area.



step 12: Admire your work

Ahh, the beauty of brute force!

Enjoy this project -- it'll work with a lot more than just few plants I've shown here. Please feel free to link to photos of your prints in the comments area or on my blog, where I first posted this tutorial.

Now go get hammered!









Related Instructables

<p>Subscribe to MAKE and get 5 ISSUES for the PRICE OF 4! Build, Hack, Play, Make</p>	<p>SPECIAL OFFER FOR INSTRUCTABLES MAKE Magazine</p>	<p>BONUS ISSUE » Get a FULL YEAR plus a BONUS ISSUE for only \$29.95</p> 
---	--	--

Comments

[31 comments](#) [Add Comment](#)

-
-  **3frog** says: May 7, 2009. 6:35 AM [REPLY](#)
Could you do this and then use the paper as stationary?
-
-  **sycamore74** says: May 7, 2009. 5:37 AM [REPLY](#)
Thanks for your great tutorial! Can't wait to start on this project. Grow flowers grow!
-
-  **mshaiku** says: May 7, 2009. 5:30 AM [REPLY](#)
Thanks for the instruction. I'm going out to the yard right now :). I will be using clear mac tac to protect my print. Stay inspired!
-
-  **random-charm** says: May 7, 2009. 4:52 AM [REPLY](#)
This works well on tissue paper too.
-
-  **neuralstatic** says: May 5, 2009. 9:36 PM [REPLY](#)
your example is really beautiful, so i had to try it.
i just tried it with some rose petals on some drawing paper. the transfer is really minimal... maybe because i'm using the "corner" of a regular construction hammer. or maybe the petals are too dry (been sitting in a vase for a week, and were about to see the trash can, ready to wilt).
-
-  **BuildMakeCraftBake** says: May 5, 2009. 10:12 PM [REPLY](#)
Thanks, I'm glad you like it. I haven't tried roses before, but some flowers just don't show up very well. I've done this several times with a regular hammer, so I'm guessing the roses are more likely the problem than the hammer. Try it with different plants until it works -- even dandelions and grass are a good place to start.
-



catboo22 says:
that leaf looks suspiciously like Mary-Jane/pot

May 4, 2009. 4:03 PM [REPLY](#)



BuildMakeCraftBake says:
It's Japanese maple. I've never heard of purple pot...

May 5, 2009. 10:05 AM [REPLY](#)



kingalex1 says:
tha japanese maple does look similar to marijuana to the untrained eye... (like me before i saw a japanese maple last year...) it's leaves have five parts, its semetrical, the jagged edges on the leaves(although they aren't exactly the same).

May 5, 2009. 6:12 PM [REPLY](#)



Short One says:
Do you have to use water color paper? will printer paper, or thick paper work?

Apr 30, 2009. 9:12 PM [REPLY](#)



BuildMakeCraftBake says:
Definitely try this with whatever paper you have on hand before you go buy something special. The watercolor paper works well because it's absorbent and has a rough surface for the plant dyes to bind to, but you may get good results with plain paper, too. Give it a try and see. If you plan to make prints for framing, one thing to keep in mind is that regular printer paper may not be of archival quality.

Apr 30, 2009. 10:54 PM [REPLY](#)



Short One says:
Okay. When I try it, I'll let you know how it turns out.

May 3, 2009. 8:13 PM [REPLY](#)



benji_38 says:
I'm going to start keeping a journal of flowers now

May 3, 2009. 11:12 AM [REPLY](#)



WiggityWagner says:
is that cannabis?

May 1, 2009. 1:25 PM [REPLY](#)



BuildMakeCraftBake says:
Nope, it's Japanese maple. Can't say that I've ever heard of purple pot leaves...

May 2, 2009. 4:24 PM [REPLY](#)



raeraethejetplane says:
Everything I hammered turned into a bloody pulp. Could it be that the plants were too moist? Also, I tapped down on everything lightly like you instructed and I still had trouble with the items bouncing around when I hammered them.

May 2, 2009. 3:48 PM [REPLY](#)



BuildMakeCraftBake says:
Yes, it sounds like the plants were probably too moist. Try it with something fairly flat, like tree leaves or grass, and peek often to see what sort of hammer pressure you need to use to get a good image. You might also want to try using a little tape to hold stuff in place.

May 2, 2009. 4:23 PM [REPLY](#)

Hope it goes better the second time around!





LemonLily says:
This is cool! Its good for the environment too because its natural!


May 2, 2009. 2:07 PM [REPLY](#)

 **zamok** says:
japanese maple not canibis May 1, 2009. 9:16 PM [REPLY](#)


 **Uncle Kudzu** says:
cool!
you might be interested in the Anthotype Process: http://www.alternativephotography.com/process_anthotype.html Apr 30, 2009. 7:38 PM [REPLY](#)

 **BuildMakeCraftBake** says:
I hadn't seen that technique before. The results are beautiful. Thanks for sharing! Apr 30, 2009. 10:55 PM [REPLY](#)


 **mynameisjonas** says:
simply beautiful! This would make an awesome card for someone.
is it possible to do this with out the protective spray? or would it smudge and fade. Apr 28, 2009. 5:43 PM [REPLY](#)

 **BuildMakeCraftBake** says:
Sure, you can do it without the spray. It doesn't smudge once it's dry. It will fade over time, especially if it's exposed to sunlight, but some of the images don't fade too much. I have some cards I made with pansies maybe five or six years ago and they still look pretty good (but were stored in a box). Apr 28, 2009. 6:55 PM [REPLY](#)

 **thepelton** says:
I wonder how this would come out using either "crown of thorns" or pointsettia? Apr 28, 2009. 11:14 AM [REPLY](#)


 **BuildMakeCraftBake** says:
I think those might work really well based on what I can remember of their texture and water content. Apr 28, 2009. 2:07 PM [REPLY](#)


 **alex-sharetskiy** says:
that's beautiful!
try using a rubber mallet Apr 28, 2009. 7:22 AM [REPLY](#)

 **BuildMakeCraftBake** says:
Thanks! A rubber mallet didn't work as well for me, but your mileage may vary... Apr 28, 2009. 11:07 AM [REPLY](#)

 **sr1sws** says:
All I can say is AWESOME! Apr 28, 2009. 9:34 AM [REPLY](#)

 **gmjhowe** says:
Thats a lovely technique!
Great for mothers day also! Apr 28, 2009. 4:41 AM [REPLY](#)

 **ChrysN** says:
Awesome, I've pressed flowers before, but this looks much better, I'm definitely going to try it! Apr 27, 2009. 10:24 PM [REPLY](#)

 **BuildMakeCraftBake** says:
Yeah, this gives you results much faster than pressing flowers, although I find that pressing works with a wider variety. Have fun! Apr 27, 2009. 11:06 PM [REPLY](#)