

This is an excerpt from the book

Creative Surface Design

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stamping

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TAMPING IS A SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD TECHNIQUE: Paint is applied to a stamp, then the stamp is pressed onto a surface to transfer the image. The technique is easy to master, fun to do, and an inexpensive way to add immediate interest to both furniture and garments. Stamping leaves the lightest impression of the techniques covered in this book. However, its impact is anything but light, as you can see from the projects shown in the Stamping Gallery on pp. 100–119.

You can stamp with just about anything, from found objects to homemade stamps to commercial stamps. For those of us who are “drawing challenged,” using commercial stamps will provide instant gratification. With the wide range of styles and types of stamps available, there is something to please everyone. Plus, the same stamp can be used in many ways; each use is unique to the artist and to the project.

In addition to providing basic stamping techniques, I’ve included information on how to make your own stamps, how to use variegated colors, and how to use metallic paint on velvet—a unique stamping variation that produces spectacular results.



Use one of the many commercial stamps available or carve one of your own to transform a simple garment into a simply stunning one.

MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

The supplies required for stamping are few. You'll need a stamp or other object to imprint the design onto a surface and a way of applying paint to the stamp. Beyond this, the specific tools you'll need will depend on your particular project and your preferences. If you would like to make your own stamp, see *Making Your Own Stamp* on pp. 92–93, for a list of additional supplies you may need.

Stamps

Stamping is a popular technique, and there are many companies that make wonderful stamps. One of my favorite commercial stamps is Pelle's See Thru Stamps™, which are made of a polymer material mounted on clear acrylic blocks. The clear acrylic makes it possible to see exactly where the image is positioned—a big advantage. My favorite supply sources for stamps are listed in the Sources listing on p. 138. If you want to make your own stamps, refer to *Making Your Own Stamp* on pp. 92–93.

Images stamped on coarse or loosely woven material (left) will not have the same crisp detail as images stamped on smooth, tightly woven material (right).



For most home decorating and clothing applications, it's best to use stamps with deeply cut images and limited detail, because small detail does not reproduce well on wood and fabric surfaces. The rougher the surface, the less detail that will register, as seen in the two samples in the photo above. The cotton sample on the right is more tightly woven than the linen sample on the left and produces a more crisp image.

Brayer (roller)

Stamping requires only a few tools. One of these is a 4-inch, dense sponge brayer (inking roller), which will evenly distribute paint on an inking plate. The brayer can also be used to apply paint directly to the stamp itself. If you

buy this tool, be sure to purchase a sponge brayer because hard rubber brayers do not work as well for this technique.

Inking plate

Clear acrylic inking plates are versatile tools that can be used as paint palettes or to check image placement. To learn how to use an inking plate for design placement, see Stamping Idea File on p. 99.

Stamp pad

Stamp pads (also called inking pads) are washable foam pads set in a plastic container. Paint is spread evenly on the foam, then the stamp is pressed into it. This method provides even coverage and produces a good, clear image.

Sponges

Sponges have a variety of uses. Compressed sponges and high-density sponges can be used to create stamps. Small 1-inch sponge brushes can be used to dab paint directly onto the stamp.

STAMPING TECHNIQUES

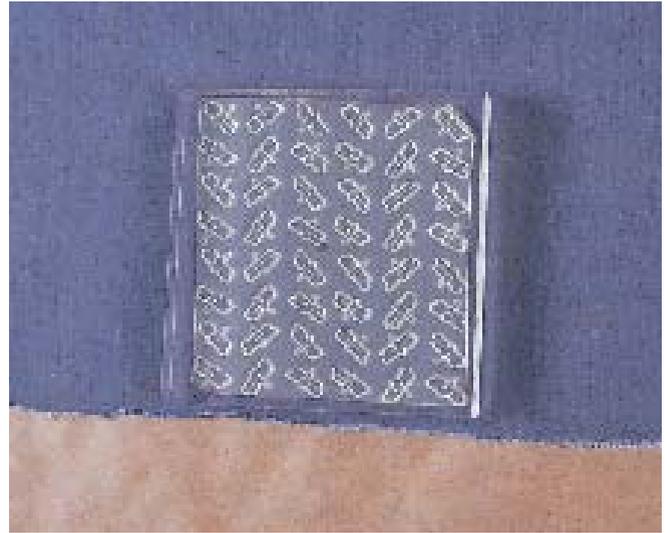
Read through the information below to learn basic decorative stamping techniques and to discover intriguing variations that are fun to try. Perfect your technique by practicing on paper or fabric scraps. Then, when you're ready to tackle a project, just select some paint, grab a stamp, and get started.

Preparation

Whether you're stamping on fabric or on wood, you'll need to prepare the surface as you would for any painting project (see chapter 2, pp. 27–29).

If stamping on fabric, pad the prepared fabric with paper or muslin to absorb excess paint and prevent bleed-through onto other surfaces. Secure the fabric to an easel or a work surface with pins or staples to prevent the fabric from moving and smearing the image.

For knits such as cotton T-shirts, iron the shiny side of freezer paper to the back of the



I used this block print-style stamp to decorate airy chiffon curtains with regularly spaced motifs. The black permanent mark in the center of the image helps align the image with placement marks on the fabric.

fabric using a synthetic fabric setting on the iron. Leave the freezer paper in place until the stamped image has been heat-set.

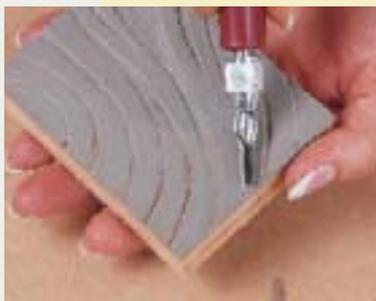
If you want to space a motif at regular intervals, as I did to make the curtains shown on p. 107, mark the fabric before you begin to eliminate guesswork. For placement, I marked the center of the stamp with a permanent marker, then used a tape measure and a temporary marker to mark the center position of each image on the fabric.

Making Your Own Stamp

Making your own stamps can be as simple as carving a design into a halved potato. However, although a carved potato serves as an effective stamp, it has a very short shelf life. If you plan to use a design more than once, use a linoleum or Speedy Cut™ block, either of which can be carved to produce complex designs. To carve the image, use a Speedball® cutter set, which consists of a handle with several interchangeable blades.

LINOLEUM CARVING BLOCK

Linoleum carving blocks come premounted in a variety of sizes and can be found at art supply



stores. The blocks are most often carved to make stamps, but they can also be left uncut.

1. To create a carved stamp, draw the image directly on the linoleum block surface with a pencil or marking pen. Use a Speedball cutter to gouge out the areas not included in the design. Always direct the blade away from your body



and hands for safety.

▲ Once the design is completed, make a test stamp to be sure the cuts are deep

enough and that all excess material has been removed.

2. The linoleum carving block can also be left uncut to create interesting patterns.

▲ Apply paint to the uncut linoleum block with a brayer, then remove some of the paint with a rubber-tipped tool to create a pattern.



▲ When you're satisfied with the pattern, use the block to stamp the surface, using firm, even pressure.



SPEEDY CUT CARVING BLOCK

A Speedy Cut carving block, which comes in a variety of sizes, consists of a very dense, spongy material that is mounted, after the image is cut, onto a support block.

1. Cut the block to a size appropriate for your design. Draw the image directly on the block, then cut the image from the block using a Speedball cutter or a craft knife.



2. Use rubber cement to mount the Speedy Cut stamp to a clear acrylic or wood block that is slightly larger than the stamp.



3. Once the stamp has been cut and mounted, it's ready to use.

UNIQUE STAMP MATERIALS

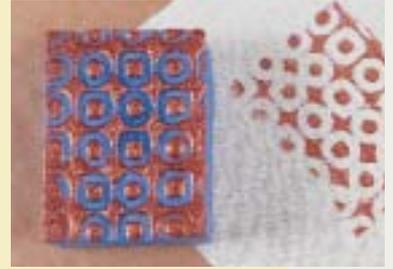
Everyday household items make unique, inexpensive stamps. Just reach into the fridge or a kitchen drawer and pull out...an apple or an eraser, a bell pepper or a piece of string. The possibilities are endless.

▲ Vegetables and fruits can make terrific stamps. Choose firm pieces, such as apples and green peppers, and cut them in half through the stem to get a full image. Perishable items such as these will last about a week if refrigerated in a plastic bag.



▲ An art gum eraser carved with a sharp craft knife, is another great stamp idea.

▲ High-density sponges, available from craft-stores, also make interesting stamps. Heat the surface of the sponge with a heat gun, then impress an image into the softened surface to make a stamp.



▲ Regular sponges can be used as is to create an interesting textured stamp, or you can cut them into shapes with sharp scissors. If you plan to cut the sponge, purchase compressed sponges. It's easier to draw the image and cut it out while the sponge is still compressed; then dip the sponge in water to expand it to its normal size.

▲ For an alternative way to make stamps, mount double-sided tape on heavy cardboard, foam core, acrylic blocks, or wood blocks and attach items to create patterns.

You can use anything that will adhere to the tape and remain level for printing. If the surface isn't level, the stamp won't print properly. Here, tape



has been applied to the surface of a 4-inch acrylic block. String is then arranged on the tape in a random pattern. Be sure to use tightly twisted string and avoid crossing it over itself to keep the surface level. Spray with varnish to seal the stamp and to cover exposed areas of tape.

Applying paint to a stamp

Here are three easy ways to apply paint to a stamp. Try each method and see which one works best for you.

1. Use a brayer/roller to spread the paint in a thin, even layer on an inking plate (top photo below). Then press the stamp into the paint on the inking plate (bottom photo below).

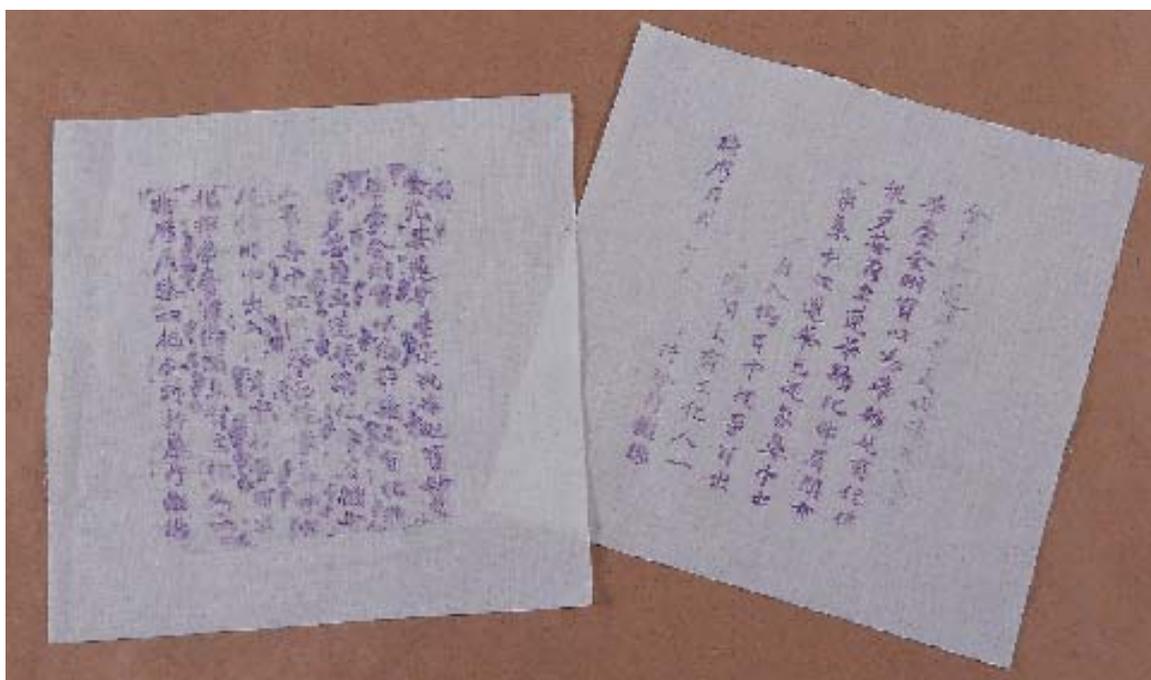


2. Use a brayer to roll a thin layer of paint directly onto the stamp.



3. Use a stamp (or inking) pad: Pour a small amount of paint onto a blank pad (top photo below). Work the paint into the inking pad with a craft stick or the back of a plastic spoon (bottom photo below). When the paint is well distributed on the pad, press the stamp onto the pad, using a firm tapping motion.





To create clean, complete images, apply a thin, even layer of paint to your stamp and transfer the image using firm, even pressure. The samples above show the result of using too much paint (left) and uneven pressure (right).

Applying paint to the surface

Stamping requires more paint than stenciling does, but using too much paint will blur the image. Before stamping your project, experiment first on paper or a scrap of fabric to find the right amount of paint to use.

In the photo above, the image on the left shows what happens when too much paint is applied to the stamp. The incomplete image on the right shows the result of using uneven pressure when stamping. Practice your technique until you get an image you like.

1. After paint has been applied to the stamp, press the stamp onto the surface of your project,



using firm, even pressure. Do not rock the stamp because this can blur the image. Repeat stamping as needed to complete the design.

2. If the paint is drying too quickly, add water or extender to increase the open time.

3. Keep the stamp clean as you work. Dried paint is difficult to remove and will blur the image. Baby wipes are handy for this cleanup task; just be sure to blot the stamp dry on paper towels before reapplying more paint.



Special effects

After you have mastered the basic stamping techniques, try these variations to add greater dimension to your work.

VARIEGATED COLORS This stamping technique uses two or more paint colors at one time to produce interesting effects. The added depth and tone of variegated colors creates a richer image, which is much more appealing than a flat-looking single-colored image, as you can see on the suede sample below. Paint “reads” differently on different surfaces, so be sure to test the paint colors before starting your project.

[RIGHT] Blend two or more different colors of paint at one time to give stamped images an almost three-dimensional look.



1. To achieve this look, drop small amounts of different colored paints next to each other on the palette or inking plate.



2. Roll the brayer through all the colors to blend them together at the edges.



3. Dip the stamp into the blended paint.



Handy Tips

- ▲ If you don't have a brayer to roll paint onto a stamp, use a foam paintbrush or a small sponge instead. These both make good paint applicators, plus they're easy to use and inexpensive.
- ▲ If you're interrupted while working or you need to stop for a few minutes, lay damp paper towels over the palette and slip it into a plastic bag. This will preserve the wet paint for a few hours, sometimes longer. But once the paint is dry, it can't be restored, and you'll have to start over with a clean palette.
- ▲ For masking effects, Mask-It™ (available from Purrfection Artistic Wearables; see Sources, p. 138) can be used again and again.
- ▲ To keep track of your stamps, tape a piece of paper to each of your storage boxes, then stamp an image of each stamp stored in that box. This will save time when you are looking for a particular stamp. A quick glance at the label tells all.

4. Press the stamp onto the project surface, using firm, even pressure.



METALLIC PAINTS ON VELVET Textile artist Marcy Tilton has developed a technique for stamping metallic paints on velvet. It takes practice, but produces beautiful results.

1. Choose a stamp with a bold design and deeply carved lines. You may want to make your own stamp to ensure lines are cut deeply enough.
2. Dab a generous amount of paint onto the stamp, using a sponge brush.
3. Practice stamping on scraps to see how much paint and pressure is required for the fabric. Too much pressure will flatten the pile

and blur the image. Nap lays in one direction, so work with the nap as you stamp.

Finishing

When you have finished stamping, clean the stamp with a soft brush and soap and water or with a stamp scrubber. Then let it dry on paper towels. You can also use rubbing alcohol for cleaning; this is a good solvent that won't damage stamps.



Allow the finished project to dry thoroughly, then heat-set or varnish, as required. See chapter 2, pp. 34-35, for how to finish designs on fabrics and wood. Store clean stamps on their sides rather than stacking them. This will protect the stamping surface, as well as make the stamps easier to see. I store mine in shallow plastic boxes with lids. A piece of paper with an image of each stamp taped to the side or top of the box is a big time-saver. 🍂

Stamping Idea File

Once you've mastered the basics of stamping, it's fun to experiment with different effects. Clockwise, starting from the top photo:

- ▲ For variety, apply paint to only part of the stamp or restamp the image in a different color to create a shadow effect.
- ▲ Create a simple border by using masking tape to mask off an area, as I did in this sample, and stamping within the masked area.
- ▲ Create a shaped area or a block-print effect like those used on screen-printed T-shirts.
- ▲ Check what a motif will look like before putting it on the actual surface: Stamp the image onto a transparent plastic inking plate, then hold the inking plate over the exact spot you plan to stamp on. This way, you can see immediately how the image is going to look on the project before it's permanently applied. Fiber artist Dana Bontrager came up with this clever idea.
- ▲ Preview a pattern of images by first stamping the images on paper. Then cut them out and arrange them on the surface of your project. When the pattern pleases you, mark the position of each image with a tiny pencil mark that will be covered by the stamp. (For the completed project, see p. 118.)

