

Leaf and Flower Prints

Plant pigments provided some of the earliest dyes for artwork and clothes and can still be used to color our world. Pigments are chemical compounds within plants that absorb certain wavelengths of light and reflect others; this is what makes them appear colorful. The most common is chlorophyll, the green pigment that is present in almost all leaves and helps capture the sun's energy to convert it to food for the plant. But you can find the full spectrum of colors in all different plant parts — from red at one end of the spectrum to purple at the other, and every color in between. These pigments serve multiple purposes inside the plant, from creating flower petals that attract pollinators to helping prevent disease.



Although our local stores provide a diversity of crafting supplies, using natural plant dye is a fun activity for kids. Add the fact that it gives kids the chance to use a mallet and you have a winning combination. Use the following instructions to show kids how to pound the plant pigments out of plant parts to transfer them directly to fabric, creating decorative patterns to adorn napkins, pillowcases, or to make prints for framing.

Materials:

fresh flowers and leaves
rubber mallet
white or light-colored cotton fabric (old sheets will work just fine)
safety goggles
wax paper
newspaper

Approximate Time to Complete: 30 minutes

Location: Indoor or Outdoor

Ages: All Ages

Season: Spring, Summer and Fall

Instructions

- If using new napkins or pillowcases, wash them first to remove the starch-like sizing. If kids are making a print to be framed, cut fabric 1 inch larger than frame size so they can wrap the fabric around a piece of cardboard in the frame.
- Cut flowers from stems, leaving a little bit of stem attached.
- Choose a workspace that can be safely pounded with a hammer, such as the floor or a sturdy worktable. Cover the surface with thick protective

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layer of newspaper, and place wax paper on top to keep the newsprint from being transferred to the fabric. Lay fabric on top of the wax paper. Have kids practice using their mallet to pound the flower onto a piece of scrap fabric first to see the effects of different flowers. Ask them to consider whether the colors transfer the way they thought they would.

- Next, have them lay out the plant materials in a design. They should place flowers and leaves face down on the fabric. Once they are happy with their layout, cover the whole arrangement with a sheet of wax paper.
- With safety goggles on, kids can hammer through the wax paper to transfer the flower pigment onto the fabric. Make sure they pound along the margins to define the shape. Thick flowers require more pounding.
- Remove wax paper and check the fabric. Kids may want to add more flowers and continue the process until they are pleased with the results. For a print to be framed, leave the small flower pieces that adhere to the fabric. For napkins and pillowcases, remove the plant residue.
- Wash napkins and pillowcases in cold water and iron them. (Flower prints may fade when washed in hot water.) For a framed print, iron the fabric, then wrap the border of the fabric around the thin piece of cardboard that comes with the frame (or provide your own). Tape fabric to cardboard and place it in the frame.

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