

FORAGER

crafts

TIPS, TRICKS,
& INSTRUCTIONS

BLOCK
PRINTED
TEA TOWELS





BLOCK PRINTING



Table of Contents

1	What is block printing?
2-3	Supplies in your kit
4	Preparing your workspace
5-6	Transferring your design
7-8	Carving tips & tricks
9-10	Inking & application
11-14	Patterning techniques
15-16	Post-ink treatment & care
17-18	Other project ideas
19	Contact information



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BLOCK PRINTING

What is block printing?

Block printing is a form of relief printing, in the same family as linocuts, lino prints, woodblock prints, rubber stamping, and so on. Relief processes include methods where the artist carves into a material (a metal plate, a rubber block, or a piece of wood, for example) and then creates a ink-based print – or impression – of the carving. With this kit, we'll be using soft rubber blocks to create our carved designs, and will then use special ink to transfer the design onto two tea towels.

As a technique, block printing has been around from more than two thousand years. It originated – as did many art forms – in China, where it was used for decorating silk cloths with intricate designs. After several hundred years, block printing made the leap from fabric applications to paper. In East Asia, block printing text and images became the most common printing method for books well into the 1800s.

Indeed, the stamps that you'll create with this kit can make the same leap! Your rubber stamps will be reusable many times after their first use, and can be used in the future for customizing further tea towels or fabrics, or can be used for customizing paper goods such as cards, prints, or gift wrapping.

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Supplies in your kit

Your kit includes all several tools that may be unfamiliar to you, as well as a few familiar faces. The first thing you'll notice when you open your kit is a **paper template**, printed on ordinary printer paper. You can use this paper to create your own designs or trace one of the ones provided.

Underneath the tissue paper, you'll find a tool with a colorful, oblong handle, and a metal tip. This is our **carving tool**. It has a metal collar that can be partially unscrewed to loosen it and change out carving nibs. If you pick up this tool and give it a shake, you'll hear a rattle inside. Open the tool up at the bottom by giving it a twist - this will reveal a hidden compartment in the handle that holds two introductory **carving nibs**. One is a fine v-shape (a #1 nib), perfect for details and outlines - the other is a medium-sized u-shape (a #3 nib), ideal for carving away larger sections of the design or adding in broader lines. These are very versatile nibs, and a great start to your collection.

Next to the carver, you'll recognize a **pencil**, which we'll use for sketching or tracing our design. You'll also see a **metal spoon** - we'll use this for portioning out our block printing ink. Lastly, you'll see a roller tool - this is called a **brayer**, the critical tool that allows us to ink our stamp perfectly each time.

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Supplies in your kit (continued)

If you remove these top four tools and untie your bundle, you'll find a few more treasures inside. First, your **two tea towels** - one in a neutral beige, and one in a crisp white. These towels are 100% cotton, and have a built-in hanging hook.

Underneath the towels, you'll find a colorful **rubber block** - this will form the basis for our carved stamp. We use rubber blocks because they're beginner-friendly and perfect for creating many different sizes and shapes of stamps. At the bottom of the bundle, you'll find a **clear acrylic sheet** with an opaque protective film on top. Feel free to remove the protective film (it's extremely satisfying!) so that the sheet is ready to be used.

Last, but certainly not least, is your **block printing ink**. This will be nestled in the paper fill in an amber jar underneath the bundle, and is labeled "Ink." This is a special kind of ink that is used for block printing onto fabric - it's thicker than paint, with a very glossy and smooth texture. When not in use, make sure to seal the lid back up on your ink. This will keep it in good condition for many printing sessions to come!

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Preparing yourself & your workspace

Whenever using inks, paints, or dyes, it's a good idea to cover your work surface with craft paper, newspaper, or cardboard to protect it from unwanted staining. Similarly, we wouldn't recommend wearing your brightest white outfit while working with block printing inks- it's easy to accidentally transfer color from your hands to your clothes in a moment of creative inattention, and these inks are meant to adhere to clothing.

Our block printing ink can be wiped off of non-porous surfaces (like a sealed marble countertop), but may stain. To clean a stained surface, first scrape away any remaining ink with something thin & flexible - like a credit card. To handle any additional staining, you can saturate a cotton ball with rubbing alcohol and blot away. For fabrics, we'd recommend the same advice - just make sure to address the stain as soon as possible.

It's easier to prepare than to clean up, however - so try to protect your crafting surface, and make sure to wear an apron or clothes that you're not too attached to. And always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before returning to normal life after a block printing session, lest you leave inky fingerprints all over your home, pets, clothes, or yourself!

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BLOCK PRINTING

Transferring your design

Let's jump in! The first decision you'll need to make is what design you'll start with. We've included some templates to use or to get your imagination going – but you can truly create anything. We'd just recommend that you start out with simple line drawings. For a first attempt, more detail can make carving a challenge; and when printing on fabric, details that are too fine can get lost during the printing process.

If you elect to trace one of the designs, you can do so by simply tracing over the lines of the design with the included graphite pencil. It might be helpful to cut out your chosen design from the larger template- but you certainly don't have to.

As you trace, keep in mind that whatever we carve away will appear as white in the final design; any section of the design left uncarved will appear as black. It can be helpful to fill in the design the way that you want to see it printed – so filling it in with pencil to remind yourself not to carve in that section, and leaving white lines where you intend to carve away. Some folks also prefer the reverse – it's all up to you and what makes the most sense to you! Just make sure to remain consistent.

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Transferring your design (continued)

Once your design is traced, turn the template over so that the penciled side is touching your rubber block. Once it's placed where you want it (we recommend at least an 1/8 of an inch from the edge), rub your finger briskly over the backside of your paper while holding the paper firmly in place. You can carefully take a peek underneath to make sure your design is transferring, but be sure not to shift the paper when you do so. Lift up the paper, and voila- your design has been transferred onto the rubber block.

If you'd prefer to sketch an original design, we do recommend sketching it out on paper first before applying it to the rubber block. You can use the backside of the paper template, or your own blank sheet of printer paper. Sketch out your design, and then follow the same method - flip it over, and then rub the pencil onto the block. Words and letters are just fine here as well - just try to scale them up and make them bold, for the easiest carve and smoothest printing.

With either method, you'll notice that the design has been transferred as a mirror image of itself. This is good! When we go to print the design onto our fabric, it will reverse again and appear in the proper orientation.

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Carving tips & tricks

The two nibs included with your carving tool are a #1 nib and a #3 nib. The carving point of the #1 nib is a narrow v-shape, ideal for details and outlines. The carving point of the #3 nib is a medium-sized u-shape, which is perfect for carving away larger sections of the design or adding in broader lines. The flatter u-shape on each nib is the bottom, where it will be inserted into the carving tool.

Decide which nib you'd like to begin with - you'll likely find yourself switching between them a couple of times during the carving process. Gently unscrew the top of the carving tool's collar, just enough to reveal a small slot which will fit the bottom of the nib; then gently screw it back in the other direction to tighten. We'll turn right to tighten, and left to loosen. Try not to fully unscrew the metal collar, as the interior components can fall out. If this happens, no worries - you can reassemble them - they fit together like a puzzle, with the rounded side sticking up.

When the carving nib is securely in place, we're ready to carve. Hold the tool so that the cutting edge of the nib (the bottom of the "v" or "u") is at about a 45° angle to the block. Gently press the tool into the block and push it away from you. You'll see a ribbon of rubber emerge as you carve into the block.

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Carving tips & tricks (*continued*)

Importantly, please always carve away from yourself, and carve **lightly into the block**. The nibs are very sharp, and it's easy to slip and cut your hand or fingers, especially if you're applying a lot of pressure. It's best to carve lightly and go back over sections to remove more material. We can always carve more, but we can't add material back once it's been carved away.

For curved lines, gently rotate the block with your non-working hand, rather than twisting the tool – this will afford you more control over the final line, and will let your working hand focus on maintaining consistent and light pressure. For areas that you'd like to remain un-inked, you'll want to carve away more material. For this, it's easiest to use the #3 cutter. If you're not sure if you've carved enough material away, we can make a test print, and then go back and carve again if needed. Remember that we don't want to carve deeply into the block – it needs to maintain some structural integrity for it to be an effective stamp in the next section.

If your design is smaller, you can cut around it using scissors. This makes it easier to carve away the background of your stamp, and allows you to make multiple stamps out of each rubber block.

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Inking & application

When your design is coming together, it's time for us to start inking!

It's a good idea to make several test prints toward the end of the carving process – this will give you a sense of any alterations you might want to make with your carving tool, and will also give you practice with the ink and brayer before you commit the design to fabric.

When you're ready to ink, get your brayer, ink jar, spoon, and acrylic sheet together. Using the spoon, place a small (about a half of a teaspoon) dollop of ink onto the center of your acrylic sheet. Hold the brayer by the handle, and push the black rubber roller into the ink. Roll the brayer on the acrylic sheet in all directions until the rubber roller is evenly and lightly coated in black ink. As you go, you'll notice the unique consistency of block printing ink – very smooth, shiny, and tacky.

With your brayer fully “loaded” with ink, you can gently roll the ink onto the block. Roll in multiple directions for good coverage. Flip your block over and press it onto your paper template or kit box as a test. Apply gentle pressure all over the back of the block – like you did in transferring the template. Be careful not to move the block in the process. Then, starting from one edge, lift the block slowly and reveal your test print.

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Inking & application (*continued*)

If the finer details are being erased or smudged, you may be overloading your brayer with ink. Too much ink has a tendency to fill in the gaps of the stamp, creating a muddied impression. Similarly, if you're noticing faded spots in your test print, you may not have inked the entire block evenly, or may have applied inconsistent pressure when transferring the print.

You may notice during these test prints that there are sections of your stamp that need further carving. If you need to go back to carving, you'll want to blot the stamp on a paper towel to remove excess ink first – that'll keep your hands and your carving tool much cleaner.

Once you're satisfied with the consistency and look of your test prints, you're almost ready to begin printing onto the tea towels. The only thing left to consider is how you'd like to apply the stamp. You can certainly stamp the tea towel just once, toward the bottom of the towel, where it will be visible when hanging from an oven handle or folded by the sink. That works particularly well for larger designs. And of course, you can also stamp it randomly – that works very well for geometric designs or for a more abstract appearance. But often folks prefer to create a repeating pattern instead, for an all-over design.

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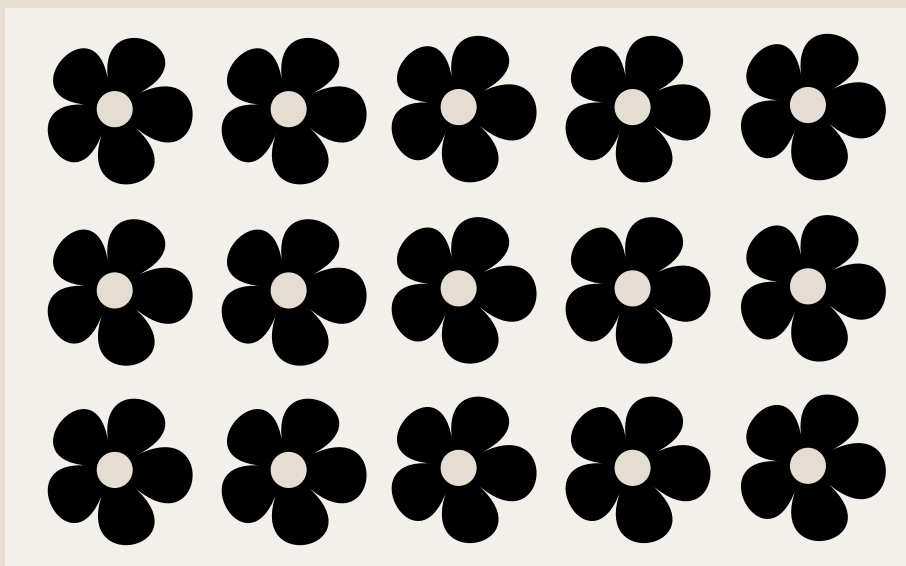
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Patterning techniques

If you prefer a repeating pattern, there are four methods we can use. These are the full drop repeat, the half drop repeat, the mirror repeat, and the continuous repeat.

The Full Drop Repeat

The full drop repeat is the simplest method of creating a repeating pattern. For this, you'll simply apply your stamp along the same line horizontally and vertically – creating, in effect, an evenly-spaced grid of repeating stamps.

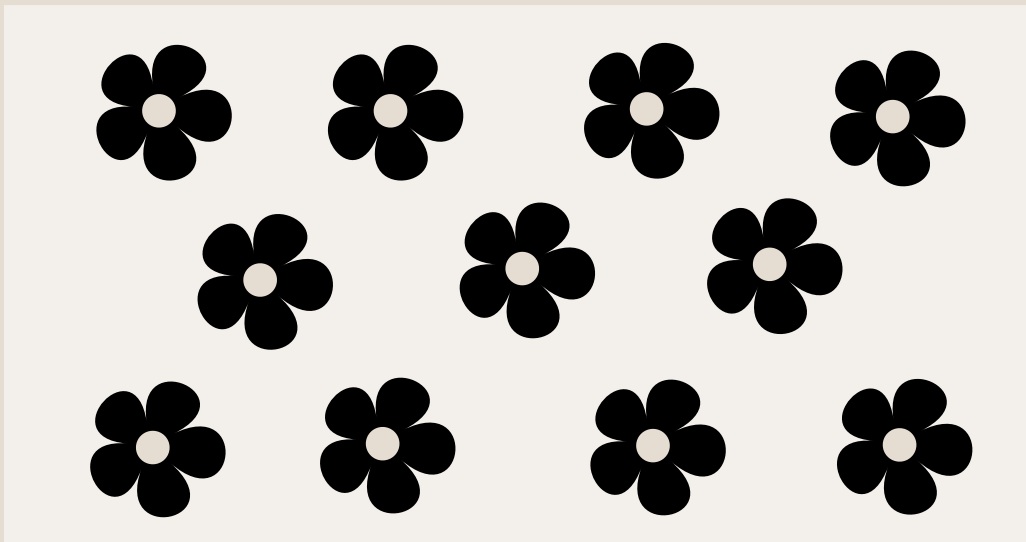


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The Half Drop Repeat

The half drop repeat gives us the same pleasing gridded pattern as the full drop repeat, but helps break up any monotony by skipping a spot - or spots - in the grid. This adds in empty space to the design and provides a bit more visual interest.



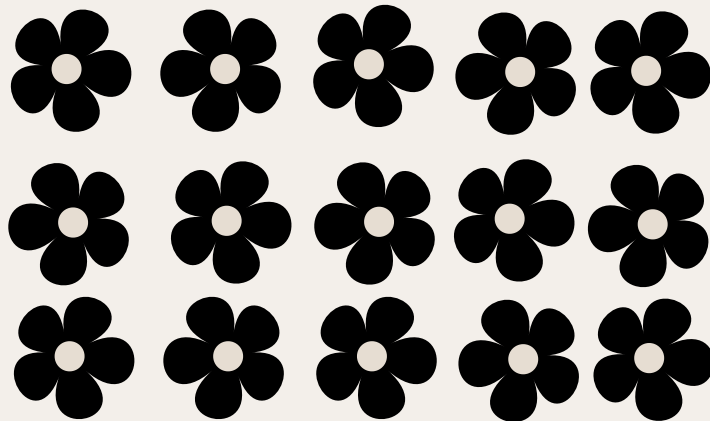
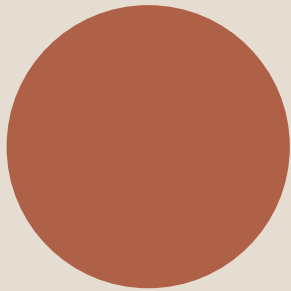
With this technique, you can keep the stamp in the same orientation each time, or you can play around with different angles and merge it with the "mirror repeat," shown on the next page. This technique can also be combined well with a second motif that fills in the gaps left by the first design.

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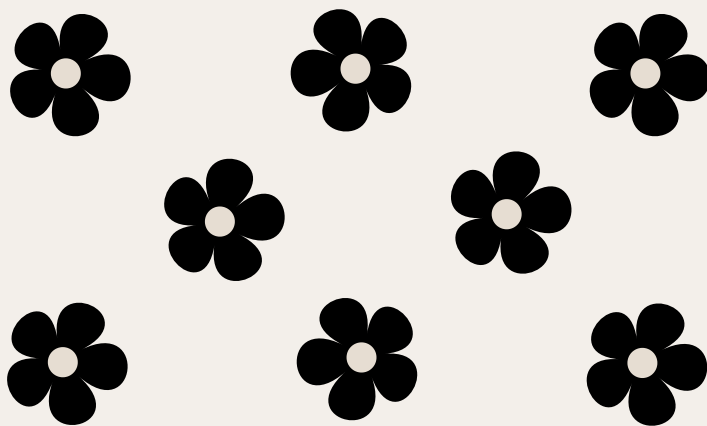
The Mirror Repeat

To create a mirror repeat, we'll play around by alternating the direction of half of the stamp impressions. We'll stamp once in single direction, then – aligned against the vertical and/or horizontal axis – we'll stamp again with our stamp turned to whatever degree we'd like – whether a small 15° change or a 90° or 180° change.



Mirror + Full Drop

Mirror + Half Drop

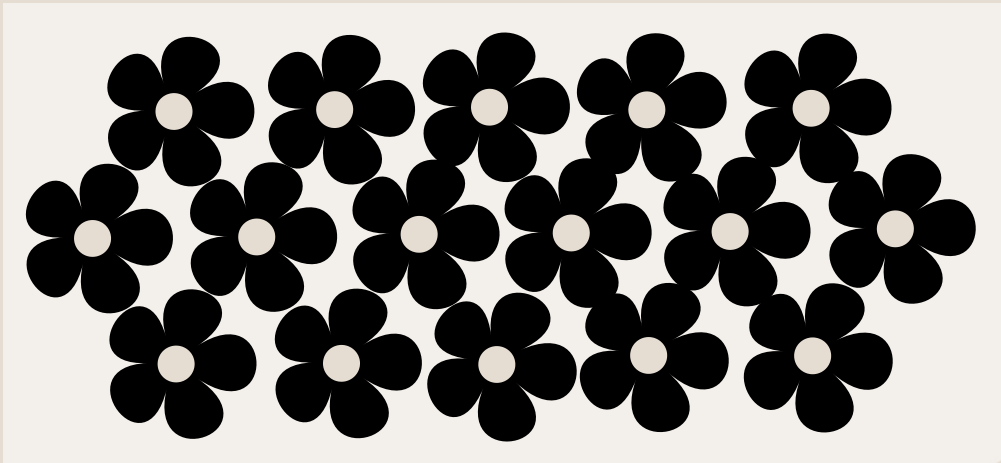


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The Continuous Repeat

This method can be a bit time intensive for such a large piece of fabric, but is essentially an all-over print, in which the stamps overlap with one another on multiple edges. This creates a good deal of depth and visual interest, and works particularly well with design motifs such as leaves.



With whatever method you use, you'll want to use the same inking consistency and pressure as you used in your test prints for application. It's a good idea to fully unfold your tea towel before beginning the stamping process, and – if you're looking for a perfect print – you may even want to iron out any wrinkles that will get in the way of your pattern to prevent incomplete stamps.

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Post-ink treatment & care

After you've had a chance to apply your stamps in whatever patterning you'd like, and when you're sure that you're done printing for the day, wash all of your tools and blocks with warm water and soap until the water runs clear. Rinse your sink to make sure that no ink remains that could stain the surface, then pat your tools dry with a paper towel gently before storing.

Your tea towels should rest – unfolded – for at least 24 hours to give the ink the chance to fully set. Depending on the ambient temperature and humidity in your home, you may want to let them dry for even longer, sometimes up to 72 hours.

You'll know the ink is dry when it's no longer tacky to the touch and doesn't rub off on your fingers when you touch it. At this point, we'd recommend "heat-setting" your print using an iron. If you don't have an iron, or would prefer not to, this is an optional step. But it can help ensure the longevity of your print and help your tea towel stand up to repeated washings.

To heat set the ink, we recommend placing your tea towel between two sheets of wax paper (this will protect your ironing board and your iron from any ink traces). Heat your iron to medium-high, and then gently iron each tea towel for about 3-5 minutes per side. Hang to let cool. Your tea towel is now ready for use!

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Post-ink treatment & care (continued)

You can care for your tea towel by washing and drying using normal machine settings. For the first wash, we recommend washing and drying the tea towels by themselves. Ink transfer is rare, but it's always best to be on the safe side! After the first machine wash, the tea towels should be perfectly safe to be mixed in with other laundry loads.

You may find that the look of your printing softens or fades slightly over time – this is normal. If you'd like to extend the life of your print, you can hand wash and hang dry your tea towel instead of using the washing machine – this tends to be a bit gentler on the ink. If you'd like to touch up a part of the design, feel free to do so with a paint brush or a cotton swab – and then just follow the same setting advice as on the previous page before putting the tea towel back into rotation.

If you'd like to iron your tea towels, make sure to use a press cloth or wax paper for the first couple of ironing sessions to protect the surface of the iron and ironing board. Or feel free to use a clothing steamer on any setting to help release wrinkles from the fabric.

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Other project ideas

Once you've gotten a feel for carving stamps and printing on fabric, there are so many other possibilities out there! Pillow cases, wall hanging, tee shirts, and tote bags are just a few of the potential canvases for your stamped designs.

The ink that's included in your kit will work on most fabrics, but is particularly well-suited for smooth, sturdy fabrics, such as cotton, linen, hemp, bamboo, polyester, and nylon. Fabrics with a lot of surface texture or a very smooth finish (like a wool, tweed, or satin) can be a bit harder to print on, and very stretchy fabrics can wear away the print quicker than a sturdier fabric. If you continue working with your black ink, it's best to stick to lighter colored fabrics for the best contrast.

Before you print on a new textile, it's best practice to give them a pre-wash. This helps remove any coatings from the manufacturing process (for new fabrics) or give a clean start to the printing process (for pre-loved fabrics). If there are a lot of wrinkles in your fabric, it's a good idea to give them a quick pass with a steamer or iron to give yourself a nice smooth canvas to work with

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Other project ideas (*continued*)

As you continue in your block printing journey, we encourage you to play around with other colors of ink. Try white ink on a black fabric, or even use your brayer to mix together a custom shade or create riveting ombré effects between two colors. Just make sure that the ink you select is advertised as being for fabrics specifically, or else it may wash out or smear.

And of course, don't feel limited to fabrics! Block printed stamps are wonderful for creating custom cards or decorating envelopes, and if you become really great at the details, you can even create custom stamps with your name and return address for the mail. For birthdays and holidays, you can transform a regular roll of craft paper into custom wrapping paper using your hand-carved stamps – simply let it dry flat, and then use the same way as you would store-bought paper. You can also use your stamps to create printed artworks for your walls on watercolor or mixed-media paper.

With paper stamping, don't feel limited to your brayer and ink! You can use ink pads for quicker, easier stamping on paper, and can play around with all sorts of color combinations. Craft stores are a great place to visit for stamping inspiration as well as some really cool types of inks and ink pads – from metallic pads to embossing powders, and everything in between.

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Conclusion & contact information

And that's all there is to it! At least all there is for getting started. Keep practicing and experimenting, and you'll be amazed at the things you'll create.

For more information, troubleshooting, or any questions about sourcing or materials, please get in touch using any of the methods below - and feel free to tag us on Instagram - we'd love to feature your artwork!

We can't wait to see what you create!



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instagram: [@foragercrafts](https://www.instagram.com/foragercrafts)



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