

Plant Paint

Plant pigments provided some of the earliest dyes for artwork and clothes and can still be used to color our world. You can find all the 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 colors serve multiple purposes inside the plant, from creating flower petals that attract pollinators to helping prevent disease.

Using plants to dye a fabric print is a fun activity. Using a rubber or wooden mallet, you'll be pounding the colors out of the plants on to a piece of fabric for a picture.



Materials:

- fresh flowers and leaves
- rubber or wooden mallet
- white or light-colored cotton fabric (old sheets will work just fine)
- safety goggles
- wax paper
- newspaper
- 8inch embroidery hoop or frame

Instructions

- If using new fabric, wash it first to remove the starch-like sizing. Cut the fabric into 10 inch circles to fit inside the embroidery hoop.
- Cut flowers from stems, leaving a little bit of stem attached.
- Cover the floor with a thick protective 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. Practice using the mallet to pound the flower onto a piece of scrap fabric first to see the effects of different flowers. Did the colors look the way you thought they would?
- Next, lay out the plant materials in a design. Place flowers and leaves face down on the fabric. Once you are happy with your layout, cover the whole arrangement with a sheet of wax paper and tape it on the corners to hold it in place.
- With safety goggles on, hammer through the wax paper to transfer the flower pigment onto the fabric. Make sure to pound along the margins to define the shape and edges of the flowers. Thick flowers require more pounding.
- Remove wax paper and check the fabric. You may want to add more flowers and continue the process until you are pleased with the results. Either leave the plant bits that adhere to the fabric, or brush them off before framing.
- Stretch the circle over the inside hoop, removing any creases and making sure the edges are even all around. Place the larger hoop over the fabric carefully, then twist the screw to tighten it in place around the smaller hoop covered with fabric.
- Hang your artwork on your wall!