

Sue Bleiweiss

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Stamping on Paper & Fabric

This month's technique of the month project is all about stamping on paper and fabric.

I am going to show you some fun and easy techniques for making your own stamps that you can use to add some additional layers of interest and depth to both paper and fabrics. I'll show you how to carve your own stamps and give you some ideas for using moldable foam. Then we'll talk about using found objects like leaves and flowers to stamp with.

One of the easiest and simplest stamps to make uses just a block of wood and some rubber bands. Just wrap some rubber bands around the block and voila! You have an instant rubber stamp ready to use.

If you don't have a block of wood use a sturdy piece of cardboard or you can use those acrylic blocks that are designed for using with unmounted rubber stamps.



Now before we get too far into this subject, let's take a minute to talk about how to ink up this new rubber stamp that we've made. For paper, you could use a purchased rubber stamp pad. Just tap the stamp pad over the surface of the rubber stamp and then stamp your paper. And on the subject of rubber stamp pads here's a few things to keep in mind when you're standing in the stamp pad aisle of the craft store trying to figure out the difference between all the different types available.



These are the brands that I like to use. They're a little more expensive but I think they work much nicer than the cheap stamp pads that you can buy. The colors are more vibrant and the pads last longer.

Stamp pads come in a lot of different ink types. There are dye based, pigment and fluid chalk just to name a few. Each type of ink is good for different types of surfaces so make sure that you read the labels on the ones you buy to see what surface it's appropriate to use on. There will also be a difference in drying time between the types of inks. Pigment inks dry a lot slower than dye-based inks, which may be important to note for your project. If you're not sure how the one you bought will perform then test it on some scrap paper or fabric first before using it on your final project. Some of these inks can be heat set for use on fabrics so it's important to read the label so you know what you're buying.

For stamping on fabric you'll probably want to use paint on your rubber stamp. You can use a rubber stamp pad but you may not get a good clear transfer of color. You can use any paint if you're stamping on something that won't be washed. If you're stamping a piece of fabric that's going to be laundered however, you'll need to choose an appropriate textile paint that you can heat set so that your design doesn't wash away.

I think thicker paints work better than thin ones for rubber stamping but experiment with what you have on hand. To ink up your rubber stamp with paint you can either brush it on with a foam brush or use a roller. Whichever method you use practice first before stamping onto your project. You'll want to get a feel for how much paint to apply to the stamp to get the result that you're after. Too little paint will give a uneven print and too much will smear and obscure your design. When I stamp on fabric I prefer to use a lightly padded surface. An old mouse pad works great or a board covered with some wool felt works well too.



Ink up your rubber band stamp and see what you get!

If you don't like how it looks simply move the rubber bands around, add some more or take some off. This is an easy way to add lines to a page. Just place the rubber bands going all in the same direction, stamp on your page and now you've got lines to follow when you add some text.

Or for some thin lines try gluing pieces of wooden skewers to a block of wood like I did with this one.

When I stamped this one I got nice wispy lines. I inked up the stamp again with a different color and placed the stamp offset from the first time I stamped on the paper and added a second and third set of lines.



Take a look around the house for other things that you can glue to a wood block to make a stamp of. Try old buttons, beads, puzzle pieces or even some string wrapped around a wood block. Experiment and see what you get!

Another fun way to create your own stamps is to use some craft foam. I bought a package of the cheap craft foam from the kids craft aisle in the craft store, cut out some simple shapes and glued them to a block of wood.

I did find that with the foam you need to really ink it up well in order to get a good impression.



With this next one I didn't do a very good job of inking up the stamp very evenly but I actually like this result.

Don't get too caught up in trying to get a perfect impression. An uneven impression can add character and interest to the design. You can always go back and paint in more color with a brush or cosmetic wedge if you wanted to even out the design after you've stamped it.

I found these stick-on foam stickers in the same aisle I bought the foam sheets. Just peel off the back and stick them to a block of wood and you've got an instant stamp.



You can even make a stamp with just a hot glue gun and a block of wood. Just draw or scribble with the hot glue on the block. Let it cool completely and then ink it up and stamp away.

I think you get a better impression if you place a piece of foam underneath the paper before you stamp. This helps accommodate the unevenness of the glue on the surface of the block.

Carving your own stamps

For years I've wondered why anybody would want to carve their own stamp when there are so many thousands of commercial ones available already. Then I came across Gloria Page's book on Art Stamping and saw what I was missing. Her book *Art Stamping Workshop* (ISBN 1581806965) is a really great reference for all types of information on rubber stamping techniques and supplies. She also has a DVD that I recommend called *Art Stamping Innovations: Carving Workshop*.

Carving your own stamps is easy and fun. You can make your designs as simple or as complex as you like. All you need is some carving blocks or material and some simple carving tools. I like to carve on the Blick EZ Cut Printing blocks from Dick Blick. It's a soft easy-to-carve surface which is nice but the softness lends itself to accidental marks with your fingernails or any other sharp object so you have to be very careful when you're carving that you don't accidentally create surface marks with your hands or fingernails. I buy the larger sheets and then just cut them down to size.



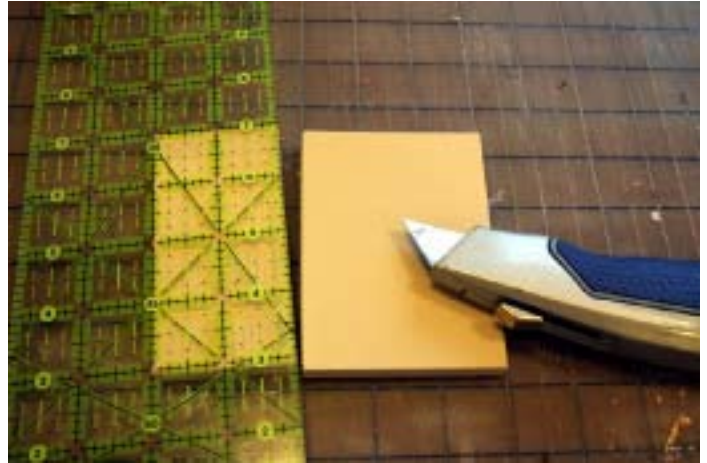
For carving tools I use the Speedball brand linoleum cutters. They're easy to hold and use and they're relatively inexpensive to start off with. You have to use care when handling these tools though because they are very sharp. Always be aware of where the hand that is not holding the tool is and always use a pushing motion instead of a pulling motion.

Now for your first carved stamp—start simple! For this first stamp I simply cut off a 2" square from a larger block of carving material using a sharp knife and a ruler.

Then I roughed up the edges a bit with my knife by dragging it along the edge and then used the knife to rough up the inside surface of the stamp just a bit. This is a great way to add a background spot of color to your pages. Then I inked it up and stamped it.

Now I can stamp over it with another image or just write right on top.

You could use it as a background for a dimensional embellishment such as a button, bead or dried flower.



This next stamp is simply a shipping tag design. I used an actual shipping tag for the dimensions and cut out the stamp.

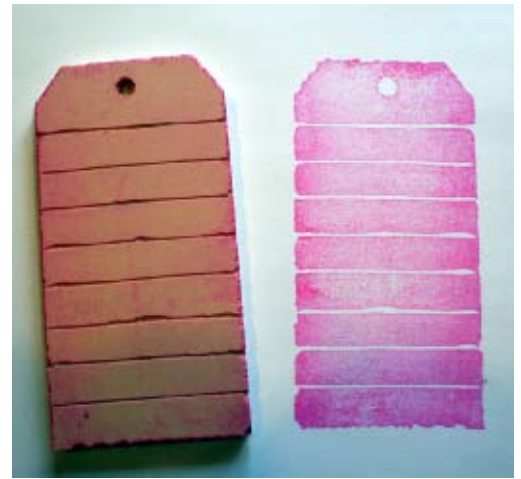
I roughed up the edges and the surface a bit like I did on the previous stamp and then inked it up and stamped it.

I inked it up rather haphazardly because I didn't want a perfect image. I think it has more character when the ink is applied unevenly. Then it was over stamped with some commercial stamps.



Creating a background stamp like this can make your commercially purchased stamps look a bit more custom on your pages. For this tag stamp I carved in some lines.

This next stamp I started with a 2" square block. You can see in this next photo how I hold the carving tool.



It takes a bit of practice to get the feel for how hard you need to push the carving blade into the block as well as the angle and the speed to use. This is why it's good to start slow and just carve randomly for your first stamp.

When you're turning corners while you're carving, turn the stamp rather than turning the carving tool.



Another easy stamp to carve that is great to have on hand for embellishing pages in a journal is a corner stamp.

Just cut a square of carving material and then cut it in half diagonally. Then carve your design. For a more complex corner design you may want to draw your design onto your stamp first using a ball point pen to give you a guide to carve by.

You can draw more complex stamps as you get more practiced at the process. Can't draw? Well neither can I so I use images from clip art books.



To create a leaf stamp I found an image in a clip art book that I liked and I enlarged it a bit on the copier machine.

I traced the image using a pencil onto a piece of parchment paper. Then I laid it pencil side down onto a piece of the carving material and rubbed it with my finger.

This transfers the pencil mark from the parchment paper to the carving block surface. Be careful once you pull the parchment off the surface that you don't smudge your pencil line on the block.

Then I carved out the stamp.

Notice that I've left some of the block surface beyond the edge of the design. This helps to create a more stable stamp. The extra is below the actual carved surface of the stamp so it won't be inked.

Make sure you wipe off your pencil lines before you ink up your stamp and use it or you'll wind up with pencil marks in your stamped design.

The first stamping I did with it (on the far left in the photo looked great but it looked a little too artificial to me. So I went back and rouged up the edges and stamped it again (the image in the center). I think the rough edges make it look a bit more like a real leaf image.

For this next leaf stamp I traced a real leaf onto the carving material and then added some veins. Use a ball point pen and a light touch to trace your leaf onto the carving material.



Here's another fun way to create a stamp. A company by the name of PenScore puts out a product called Magic Stamp.

You can get it in sheets, blocks or fun shapes and this stuff is very fun to work with.

You simply heat it up with a heat gun, press it into something and you've got a custom stamp.

Try it with some buttons. Put some buttons on your table and heat up the Magic Stamp. You need to heat it for at least 30 seconds and it's important to keep the heat gun moving across the surface so it heats evenly.

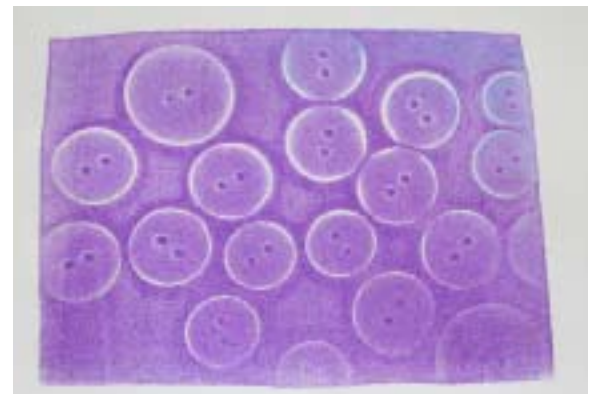
You'll notice the surface changes a bit when it starts to get hot. It sort of takes on a little bit of a shiny appearance. When you're ready turn off the heat gun and very quickly lay the foam down into the buttons and press really hard. You really need to lean into it and press firmly or you won't get a good impression.

Lift off the stamp and see what you get.

You can see here my first impression was less than successful. I didn't heat the stamp enough and I didn't press hard enough. But nothing is lost because I just heated the surface of the stamp again and repeated the process. This time I got a much better impression.

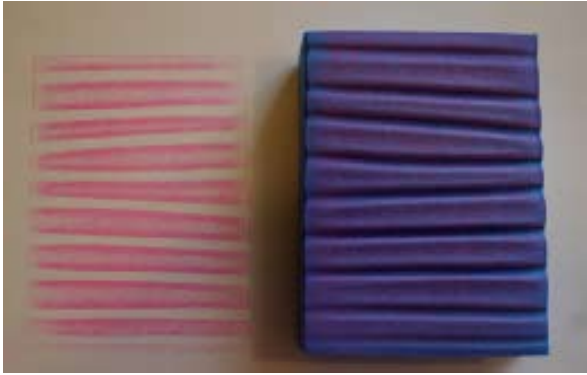


Then I inked it up and stamped it. This material definitely needs a lot of ink. A light tap with the ink pad is not enough to get a good impression so you may want to practice a bit before stamping on your final project.



You can use just about anything you want to make an impression. I used keys for this stamp.

I used wooden skewers for this one.



And even a piece of lace makes a great impression.

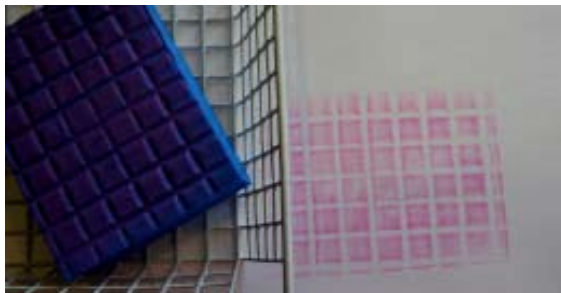
Here's some other things to try:

- Corrugated cardboard
- Paper clips
- Coins
- Rubber bands wrapped around a block of wood
- Marbles or beads
- Chain
- Rice or pasta
- Washers
- Watch pieces
- Old jewelry
- Pile of string or yarn
- Coiled wire



You can press something into the Magic Stamp material instead of pressing it onto something too. For this one I heated it up and pressed a meat mallet into it!

And for this one I pressed it with the bottom of this little wire basket.



You can even make a stamp of a stamp!



Here's another spin on rubber stamping. Instead of using rubber stamps, foam or hot glue why not try using some things found in nature, like a leaf for instance?

I picked up a batch of these lemon leaves when I was in the grocery store. Unfortunately at the time of writing this class there isn't a leaf to be found outside because it's not quite yet spring here so I had to buy some.

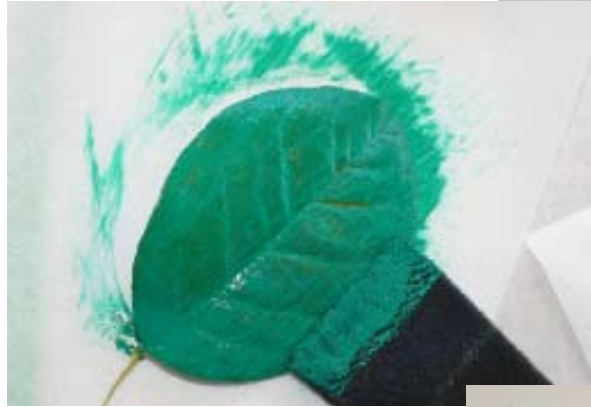
This is really easy to do. Just paint a light coating of paint onto your leaf. I'm using Stewart Gill Colourise for this. It's nice and thick which works well for this purpose.

A light coating is all you need and I applied it using a sponge brush. Then I carefully placed it on my paper and covered it with a piece of paper towel. I used a brayer to lightly brayer over it. Having the paper towel on top of the leaf helps to avoid picking up any paint onto the surface of the brayer and transferring it to the paper. You want to press hard enough with the brayer to get the leaf in contact with the paper but not so hard that you crush the leaf!

How about flowers? I'm using a silk flower for this but a real one will work too. I painted it with some hot pink Stewart Gill paint and added a little bit of Cadmium yellow in the center.

Then I laid it on the paper, covered it with a paper towel and lightly ran the brayer over it.

Cool huh?! Wouldn't this be great if you were doing a garden-themed journal?



Or let's say you're creating a food-based journal. How about stamping with fruits or vegetables?

Try stamping with an apple. Brush a light coat of paint onto a sliced apple and then stamp onto your paper.

Once the paint dries you can go back in and draw in a stem and some seeds. Try this with a pear or an onion.



Or how about an artichoke?

These are a little trickier to get a good stamped image of. I peeled away some of the outer leaves and then sliced it in half using a sharp serrated knife.

Then I took out a little bit of the fuzzy choke using a spoon and inked up the artichoke using a black rubber stamp pad.



You can use paint for this too, if you prefer, but I found it harder to get a good print with the paint. If you do use paint, brush it on with a sponge brush and don't use much. A light coating of paint is all you need.

You need to press really hard on the artichoke to get a good impression. I mean really put some muscle into it! It pays to practice before you do this on your final project. I got a lot of impressions before my artichoke started to fall apart!

When it comes to stamping pretty much anything that you can get some ink or paint on can be used as a stamp so take a look around the house, both inside and out and I'll bet you'll find a lot more things to stamp with than what I've shown you here. Have fun!

