



Smithsonian Associates

Fabric Printing with Natural Materials

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Welcome to class!

Here is a timeline to help you prepare and purchase supplies. Don't hesitate to email if you have any questions.

At least two weeks ahead source and order cloth and art supplies. In many cases, shipping will be slow because of the pandemic.

Two days ahead, start collecting flat leaves in a variety of sizes and shapes. Flat leaves print best, so layer leaves between sheets of newsprint (or newspaper) and weigh the pile down with a cookie sheet and a few cans of soup or beans, evenly placed on the sheet. These flat leaves will be easy to print with.

Printmaking supplies

Available online or from local stores. Here are links to the supplies we will be using in class from online / in-person stores I use myself.

From Dickblick.com <https://tinyurl.com/y6t5kq6k>

- Versatek screen printing ink, printer's ink meant specifically for cloth. The colors I recommend here blend the best, and they will give you unique color in your prints.
- Versatek fixer, which allows you to wash printed clothing without using an iron to heat set the ink
- Newsprint pad measuring at least 11 x 14 inches
- Masking tape

From a grocery store

- Freezer paper to insert in a bag or shirt to keep the print from bleeding through **and** to make a surface for rolling out printing ink
- Zipper plastic bag, two gallon size holds most large leaves
- Paper towels

CONT PG. 2

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From Home Depot and Amazon

- Home Depot 3 inch **foam** trim roller, order 4-6, one for each color <https://tinyurl.com/yxo3nbwj>
- I use Wooster 4 inch foam rollers from Amazon because they are reusable and wide. However, they are much more expensive. <https://tinyurl.com/y5medzy7>
- Either roller will do a good job.

Fabric

Available locally at a fabric store, of course and online. We will practice printing on fine cotton muslin. Once you have the techniques down, you can print a scarf, a bag, a furoshiki or use your own cotton or silk clothing to print a personal project. Look for fabrics that are at least 60 percent cotton or 100 percent silk. Fine grained fabrics print with the most detail and are easy to work with. Coarse fabrics, such as a loosely woven linen, are hard to learn on.

From Dharmatrading.com

- Fine-grained muslin for practice: <https://tinyurl.com/y5g99uml>

Order 1/2 yard of fabric and cut it in half (or quarters) to make pieces roughly 18 x 22 inches. Order at least 1/2 yard of muslin but feel free to order other types and quantities of fabric to experiment on!

Optional, you may choose items from home instead

- Silk scarves: <https://tinyurl.com/y69cyt2l>
- Fine-grained cotton muslin bags, many choices at Dharmatrading.com
- In Japan, *furoshiki* are cloths used to wrap gifts. You can make your own furoshiki out of white cotton bandanas. These come in packages of 12: <https://tinyurl.com/y5nybqlp>
- Novelty fabrics, with a linen or cotton count over 50%. Printing on metallic linen with opaque ink is beautiful and worth a try! <https://www.moodfabrics.com/metallic-pearled-ivory-and-gold-linen-329654>

Of course leaves!

- Dogwood, ash, hickory, maple, oak, oak-leaf hydrangea...all are mid-Atlantic native trees that print well and are easy to find and identify. Experiment with plants from the garden: ferns and rose leaves make unique prints. Flat leaves are best, and if they have holes or look worn, they make fascinating prints. Look for leaves of different sizes, too.

CONT PG. 3

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- Shiny leaves, such as hollies, and very furry leaves, such as lamb's ear, do not pick up ink well.
- Store flat leaves in the refrigerator in the two gallon zipper plastic bag. Inflate the bag by exhaling into it, this will protect the leaves and give them a bit of carbon dioxide to keep them fresh until we need them for class.

Walking press -- optional

A walking press is a low-tech press that uses your body weight to make prints. It's especially useful for printing large compositions on heavy-weight cloth, and I'll demonstrate how to use and make one in class. However, you don't need one to make beautiful prints in today's class!

To make your own, you need:

A 3 x 3 foot piece of plywood or wallboard (larger is fine)

Double sided carpet tape

An inexpensive polar fleece blanket from which you cut two pieces to match the size of your plywood

After printing

- If you used Versatek fixer, you can wear your shirt in 48 hours, but wait a week before washing. Wash the garment inside out by hand (I use Dawn dish soap in the kitchen sink) or on a cool setting in the washer and hang to dry.
- If you did not use the fixer, no worries! Wait 48 hours until the ink is dry to the touch. Turn the shirt inside out. Place an old towel over the inked area and iron the towel on the highest iron setting for at least 5 minutes. You can wear your shirt now and wash as above.

Going further

- My own book, ***Into the Woods: Families Making Art in Nature*** came out in June 2020. It celebrates nature and teaches people to meditate in nature, to handprint with fish and leaves, and to create sketchbooks of the natural world. [It's available on Amazon](#) or through your local independent bookstore.
- ***The Art of Printing from Nature*** by the Nature Printing Society is a go-to resource for printing with natural objects on cloth and paper. [You can order direct from NPS.](#)

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