

Roped Into Oshibana

Discover the Japanese art of dried flower “painting” — with a transparent twist

(art + social studies)

Drying and preserving botanicals has a long history dating back to ancient Egypt, where archaeologists have discovered pressed garlands in sealed tombs. In 16th century Japan, the practice of Oshibana (meaning “pressed flowers”) rose to popularity as artists created arrangements of pressed petals and plants that rivaled paintings in their complexity. As the techniques traveled westward, botanists catalogued collections from distant parts of the world. Pressed flower books were sold as souvenirs to tourists, and Victorians created pictures, cards, and jewelry as fashionable expressions of their fascination with floriography.

Nobuo Sugino is a contemporary artist who has pioneered new methods of preservation, framing, and color enhancement, leading a resurgence of Oshibana in Japan and across the world. Today, there are international organizations dedicated to the promotion of this art form.

It's easy to see why.

With just a few steps, anyone can capture a fleeting piece of nature's beauty and protect it from the inevitable degradation of time and elements. Students can use this project to develop or enhance an appreciation of the colors, shapes, and forms found in nature — even if they live in an urban environment.

Oshibana “hangers” can be used as ornaments, gift tags, pendants, and more. Flower petals from special occasions, such as homecoming, prom, or memorials can be incorporated if gathered and thoroughly dried.

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Collect leaves and flowers, then dry them thoroughly. Quick techniques for drying can be found through online searches and include using a food dehydrator, covering with silica gel, microwaving, ironing, and hanging upside down. For this project, pressed (flattened) flowers work best. This can be done using the traditional method of pressing between book pages or in a flower press.

A simple press that contains a classroom amount of botanicals can be made with two wood panels on the top and bottom, weighed down by evenly arranged paving blocks. Layer one piece of paper, then a layer of botanicals, a second piece of paper, and a piece of chipboard. Repeat for the next layer so that each set of botanicals is sandwiched between paper and chipboard.



Materials (required):

[Sargent ArtNon-Hardening Modeling Clay](#), 5 lb Cream (33281-1105); share one package across class

[Pepperell Cotton Macramé Cord](#), assorted dimensions and colors (65285-); share a minimum of one skein across class

[Vallejo Pouring Medium](#), 200 ml (00780-2404); share one across class

[Crescent Chipboard Pack](#), package of 40, 9" x 12" (13152-1023); share one package across class

[Grafix Dura-Lar Clear Acetate Alternative](#), .005", 9" x 12" 25-sheet pad (55506-1305); need one sheet per student

Optional Materials:

[Blickrylic Student Acrylics](#), assorted colors (00711-)

[Pepperell Crafts Natural Jute Rope Wreath](#), 6" (24258-1006)

[Gold-Tone Welded Macramé Rings](#), assorted sizes (66909-)

[ArtResin Epoxy Resin Starter Kit](#) (01044-1032)

Optional Materials for Pressing:

[Baltic Birch Panels](#), package of 5, 9" x 12" (13614-0912)

[Crescent Chipboard Pack](#), package of 40, 9" x 12" (13152-1023)

[Hygloss Dippity Dye Paper](#), package of 100 sheets, 12" x 18" (11217-1006)



Preparation, continued

Suggestions for drying and pressing success:

- Place botanicals between paper that is unsized and therefore more absorbent. (Sizing is added to paper during the manufacturing process to help repel moisture, among other things.)
- Allow up to two weeks for drying. Check every few days and remove any samples that are not drying well. To speed drying, flowers can be pressed for a few days to flatten, then another drying method such as a food dehydrator can be employed to remove any moisture left in the flower.
- For best results in a classroom or group, choose samples that are similar in thickness so they dry at the same rate.

Process

1. On piece of cardboard, draw a desired frame shape. For example, a circle, oval, heart, or eternity symbol. Tape Dura-Lar film over the drawing.
2. Roll modeling clay into a 1/8" to 1/4" thick rope. Shape the rope around the drawn frame shape, leaving a space the thickness of the cord to be used. Using fingers or a clay tool, push the clay rope down to assure a leak-proof barrier.
3. Place a section of macramé cord or jute rope inside the clay rope. With fingers or a clay tool, smooth the remaining clay over the rope at the top to hold it in place. Do not move the clay into the frame area. Position the long ends of the rope at the top of the shape — they will be used to form a hanger later. If needed, more clay can be used to hold the ends of the rope in place.

Leave one end of the rope long for hanging. To close the shape, the other end can be glued, wrapped with wire or string, inserted into a macramé bead, or tied into a knot. Refer to the photo example for ideas. Press more clay around the area where the rope meets to make sure the shape is closed and to help the rope lie flat.

4. Flow pouring medium into the frame created by the rope, just enough to cover the surface.

5. Arrange botanical samples as desired. Tweezers may be helpful in arranging delicate items. If time permits, allow this layer to dry, as lighter-weight samples may move as additional pouring takes place.

6. Flow more pouring medium onto the botanicals. Push anything that isn't covered by the medium into it to cover it, even if it isn't flat.

7. Allow to dry for 24–48 hours. Drying time will vary depending upon humidity and the thickness of the application. The pouring medium will be clear when dry. Drying times can be lessened by drying with an electric fan.

8. When dry, pull the piece gently away from the film surface. Remove the clay ropes and set them aside to reuse. Trim away any excess medium with scissors.

9. **A note about botanicals and color:** It is very common for bright colors to deepen, fade, or turn brown, especially with this "wet" method of preservation. First, realize that the piece is not ruined by the color shift. The beauty of shapes, veining, and translucency is not solely dependent on color.

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Step 1: On a piece of Dura-lar, shape a clay rope to make the frame and push it down to form a leak-proof barrier.



Step 2: Place a section of rope or cord inside the clay frame and add a layer of pouring medium.



Step 3: Arrange dried botanicals and cover with additional pouring medium.



Step 3: When dry, peel the piece away from the film and tie the ends together to hang.



continued

Many modern Oshibana artists have developed skills of gently tinting dried petals with transparent ink or paint before sealing completely. To tint, it is recommended that the process above is followed through Step 5. As the botanicals are arranged in the first layer of pouring medium, mix a very small amount of acrylic paint with pouring medium, approximately a 50/50 mix, although the opacity of the paint color may require more or less. The exact color of the petal may be difficult to achieve, so mix a close approximation and paint just the top side of the botanicals. For best results, use a small, soft brush and apply a thin layer to the petal, using light, gentle strokes. Allow to dry before covering with pouring medium.

To avoid fading, do not place the Oshibana in direct sunlight or UV light.

Options

- Ready-to-use rope rings for wreaths, bamboo rings, or macramé rings may also be used as frames.
- If the project is being created in a non-classroom setting (not around children), resin may be used to create stronger, crystal-clear pieces.



National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.