

MAKING YOUR OWN DECALS

By Maureen Williams

For many people decoupage (the art of sinking a print using many coats of lacquer) is just too time consuming to worry about. Because of the thickness of the paper, numerous coats are required together with extensive sanding to achieve a smooth finish on the shell.

An alternative for achieving a similar appearance, is the use of a decal. There are many designs available through ceramic supply outlets. However, many times you will find the picture you want but it is far too big for the egg you have chosen or if you plan on entering your creation in a show, it is usually stipulated that "Commercial transfers are not acceptable".

Making your own decals is an ideal way to get around this stipulation and ensures you have a suitable image for whatever design you choose. The main reason to make a decal is to reduce the thickness of the print you want to put on the egg, thus making it easier to "sink" the print with the decoupage medium, or in some cases, a spray sealer is sufficient.

A couple of alternatives are available to make your own decals. First you need to find a suitable print - from a card, wrapping paper or computer printout. Using a computer you can make any size print from a choice of pictures from your own clipart, digital photos or scanned images.

In this class I will show you two different ways of creating a decal. The old, traditional method of coating the image and then removing the paper off the back and another, much more simplified method.

Some people may say "why bother making a decal?" - the advantage of the new method is the resulting decal is so thin (basically only the ink on the shell) there is no need to sink the print with lots of coats of finish - just seal it! This is very evident when using a card.

The Tools

These are the same for both methods - you will need the following:

A print of your choice.

A suitable medium (e.g. J's Complete Coat, Plaid Royal Coat, Regal Sheen Egg Satin, Aleene's Instant Decoupage, Mod Podge etc)

Flat brush - I prefer a Francheville 250-L



Traditional Method

Apply the coat of a suitable medium (e.g. J's Complete Coat, Plaid Royal Coat, Regal Sheen Egg Satin, Aleene's Instant Decoupage) on the printed side of the image, brushing evenly from top to bottom.

For the next coat brush left to right. Allow each layer to dry completely before applying another coat.

Apply 5 - 6 coats of medium, alternating the application direction between each coat. Once you have applied sufficient coats of medium, allow to dry thoroughly - preferably overnight.



Removing the paper off the back of the print.

Place the print in a small dish of tepid water. Allow the image to soak for a little while and then place on a flat surface.



Gently rub the back of the print, you will notice the paper start to roll off the surface.

Continue until all paper has been removed, returning to the dish of water periodically to remove the paper residue.

Once you have removed all the paper you will be left with a milky looking impression of the picture. Don't panic - this will dry clear.



When you have done this, the picture is trimmed to size, glued to the shell and then "sunk" using multiple coats of the decoupage medium.

As you are now working with just the ink on the medium be careful that you don't stretch the picture out of shape when applying it to the shell.

The New Way:

All you need is a suitable print, decoupage medium and a spray sealer for this easy, unique way to make a decal for your designs. The print can be from a magazine or a card but the one thing that makes this way so versatile is that you can print anything from the computer and make a decal from it. If your printer doesn't have water fast ink it would be advisable to photocopy the print-out before attempting this technique.

Suggestions:

- Photocopy a favourite photo to make a delightful keepsake for a birthday or Mother's Day.
- Personalised a wedding gift incorporating a photo of the happy couple.
- Use clipart to create Christmas decorations using your favourite font for the lettering - a delight for family and friends. (Remember to flip the lettering before you apply to the egg)

Use a paint or publishing program on the computer to flip lettering to make your own personalised messages for your designs

What to do:



Step 1 - Cut around the print as close as possible to the image.

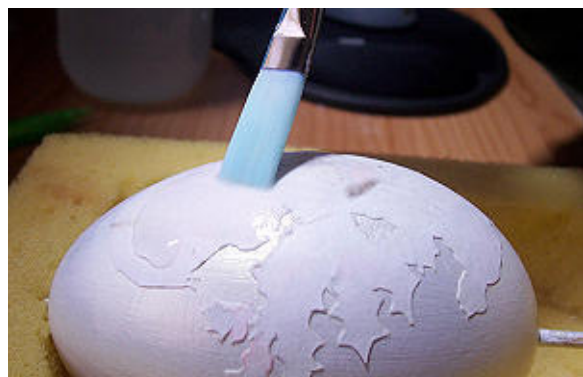
On the **printed** side apply a smooth liberal coat of Mod Podge, J's Complete Coat or other suitable medium.



Step 2 - Apply the print to the egg, smooth out any creases or air bubbles. I use the back of my thumb to do this.



Step 3 - Leave overnight to dry thoroughly.



Step 4 - Use a soft brush dipped in water to soak the back of the print. Once saturated gently rub the paper off the print. Apply more water as required.



Step 5 - Remove the thickest areas of paper using your finger



Step 6 - Swap to a soft, flat brush to remove the paper once you get close to the image.

Allow to dry before continuing as this will show if there is any paper residue remaining on the print. If there is it will appear "milky" - like on this image.



If necessary, repeat Step 6 using a soft, damp flat brush.
When all the paper has been removed, allow to dry thoroughly. Seal print with a suitable spray sealer.

Important Points to Remember

Extensive experimenting with this technique has produced a list of do's & don'ts to save you some heartache and stress while working on your project.

- Use a natural shell or a light coloured background behind the print to reflect the colour through the image. As you are removing the white background when you remove the paper this is very important. Using a gold coloured egg resulted in a dull, lifeless image as the colour of the flowers was absorbed by the background.
- Make sure you position the print correctly the first time as you can't move it once it's on the shell. If you try to lift the print the ink will remain on the shell.
- If using a greeting card peel off some of the thickness before adhering it to the shell. You can do this by splitting the card at a corner and then carefully rolling the paper off. This will result in a much thinner card to work with.
- If using a photo remove the background surrounding the image, as an oval shaped cut out will tend to crease at the top and bottom of the print. Chalks can be used to replace the background around the photo image.
- Do not rub too hard in one area as you will rub right through the paper and remove the ink. Use a soft, damp brush in the final stages of paper removal.
- Practice the technique on some scraps of shell before starting on your masterpiece! This will allow you to get the feel of how far you can rub through the paper without going too far. The most likely place where this will happen is on the high part of the shell. Try rubbing away the paper around the edges first, working up to the centre of the print.
- Keep a tissue or soft dry brush handy to gently remove the paper residue as it is rubbed off.
- If you do happen to rub through a small portion of the print, use watercolour pencils to repair the damage. A very small brush moistened with "Mum Spit" is ideal to blend the pencil into the ink area.
- If using a hinge in the design, cover the hinge with Micropore or tape to prevent the spray from gumming up the hinge.

Sealing the Decal

Use a spray sealer rather than a liquid sealer to seal the print. This was probably the most frustrating area of the whole technique! Once you have rubbed off as much paper as possible using the brush for the final cleanup, the image while wet, will appear quite clear.

However, on allowing the image to dry thoroughly it still seems to have a milky appearance. An application of Mod Podge brought out the bright colours while it was wet but as the medium dried, the white patches returned. A number of methods were tried in an attempt to retain the "wet look" but nothing worked.

In a moment of sheer desperation I decided to try some of the spray sealers I had lying around. The first coat left a slightly furry, although clear image. The second spray coat resulted in a beautiful shiny, smooth finish!

Three different brands available locally were tried and all gave a similar result. These were:

- Design Master Dresden Clear Glaze, available from floral art supplies and some craft stores.
- Folk Art ClearCote non yellowing Extra Thick Glaze available from Spotlight and other craft stores.
- Nuart Crystal Clear available from art supply outlets.
- Try using Porcelain Spray for a soft, dreamy finish if you don't want the shiny gloss.

Although this technique is not for the faint hearted, patience and perseverance makes it a very versatile design element. I hope you find these instructions helpful in your egging designs. If you have any problems or queries with this how-to page don't hesitate to [email me](#).