

“Common Threads”

Presents

Bettye Kimbrell’s

“Cherokee Leaf Pounding” Workshop

Instructions are shown for pounding leaf designs onto cotton muslin fabric to make a quilt as taught by Bettye Kimbrell, 2008 National Endowment for the Arts, National Heritage Fellow, from Mount Olive, Alabama.

This workshop provides instructions for the “Cherokee Leaf Pounding” technique only.

Supplies for Leaf Pounding Workshop

Workshop Supply List



- **Hardwood Board Covered with White Fabric**
 - Choose a wooden board that does not chip, crack or splinter
- **Hammer with Flat Steel Head**
 - Choose a small, lightweight hammer that’s easy to handle as you grip and hold the hammer head in the palm of your hand
- **Dark Green Leaves**
 - Fresh, dark green leaves make better designs
- **100% Cotton Muslin Cloth**
 - Unbleached, off-white muslin that you can see through is best
 - Polyester and synthetic fabrics do not easily absorb the stain
- **Wide Masking Tape**
 - Use the off-white, natural color tape that’s about 1½-3 in. wide

Hard Wooden Board - Covered for Pounding

Wooden Board with White Fabric Covering for Pounding

- Select a solid, smooth, wooden board
 - Avoid plywood, particle board or pieced cutting boards
- Boards can be cut to size at your local home supply or hardware store
 - A good lap size is about 12 in. wide x 18 in. long x ½ in. thick
- Edges and corners may be covered with masking or duct tape to prevent snagging fabric
- The board is covered with a white cloth to add a little “cushioning” when pounding
 - Use an old, thinly worn white towel or a piece of thin white flannel fabric (not too thick, not too thin)



Choose the Right Hammer

- Choose a hammer with a smooth, flat steel face -- not a rubber mallet.
- The hardness of the steel head is needed to smash the chlorophyll out of the leaf so that it stains the fabric.
- Select a hammer that is the right size and weight for your hand to allow for continuous pounding. The correct weight helps avoid injury to your wrist, arm and shoulder.
- Keep a small scrap of cloth handy to wipe off tiny plant particles or stain that may accumulate on the head.



Choose a hammer that's right for you



When pounding, grip the hammer head under the claw and around the hammer cheek

Select Leaves for Pounding

Tips for Selecting Leaves

- Select dark green, "soft" tree or plant leaves.
 - Darker colors and leaf texture are important
 - Fruit and vegetable leaves may be too soft
- Keep leaves "fresh" with a moist paper towel inside a plastic resealable or brown paper bag.

Suggested Leaves

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| -- Hydrangea | -- Wild Honeysuckle |
| -- Kudzu | -- Hickory |
| -- Pine, Fir | -- Hedges |
| -- Fern | -- Coleus |
| -- Philodendron | -- Ginkgo |



Use Cotton Fabric



100 percent cotton cloth is best

- Unbleached, off-white, 100 % cotton muslin fabric is recommended. Select a quality, weight and thickness of muslin suitable for your project. Muslin can be 36-108 inches wide.
- Choose an off-white muslin texture that you can see through when pounding.
- The muslin may be washed or unwashed.



Prepare Leaf for Pounding



Select leaf for pounding

- Select leaves for your project.
- Choose only the leaves you intend to pound that day. Keeping leaves overnight or for several days causes the leaves to dry out and color intensity to decrease.
- If leaves must be stored, place them in a damp cloth or paper towel inside a resealable plastic bag and keep them in the refrigerator
- The leaf can be turned “face up” or “face down” on the cloth, depending which way it lies flatter.



“Baste” leaf to fabric

- Use masking tape to “baste” the leaf to the muslin fabric.
- Start by taping down the leaf tip and stem. Then tape the outer edges down just enough to keep the leaf flat on the muslin.



Cover the entire leaf with masking tape



Be sure the stem and all edges of the leaf are completely covered and taped down

- Tape down and cover the entire leaf onto the fabric with the masking tape.
- Overlap edges of the masking tape to cover and enclose the leaf under the tape.
- Be careful to keep the leaf, stem and all outer edges flat when taping.

Get Ready to Pound

Turn the **FABRIC SIDE UP**



Flip and Pound

- After the leaf is taped to the cloth, flip it over so the **FABRIC SIDE IS UP** and the taped side is down.
- You should be able to see the size and shape of the leaf through the fabric.
- Smooth over the taped leaf to be sure it is flat before you start pounding.

Ready, Sit, Pound!



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Posture and Technique

- Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor so that your lap is level.
- Position the cloth-covered pounding board across your lap.
- Spread the taped leaf -- fabric side up -- over the board.
- Notice how the hammer is grasped by the hand under hammer claw and around the cheek for pounding.



Ready to pound!

Pound the Leaf

Pounding must be firm—yet gentle—to release the leaf stain and so the fabric is not damaged.

Start Pounding with the Fabric Side Up

- With fabric side up, use the hammer to lightly pound around the outer edge of the leaf through the muslin fabric.
- Tilt the hammer at a slight angle as you beat through the fabric so that the bell edge of the hammer head crushes the leaf and releases the chlorophyll stain to be absorbed into the fabric.
- Then pound over the center area of the leaf area to continue to release the chlorophyll stain.
- When you are satisfied with the shape and color of the stained leaf, flip the cloth to the underside to peel away the masking tape.



Pound with hammer head tilted at a slight angle



Pound outer edges



Pound center of leaf



Pound the full leaf

Peel Away the Masking Tape to See the Leaf Design



Remove the Taped Leaf

- After the leaf pounding -- and staining -- is complete, flip the cloth back over to remove the masking tape.
- Starting at the outer edges of the masking tape, gently lift and peel the taped leaf away from the cloth to reveal an interesting leaf image with designs as beautiful and intricate as the original leaf.

Fabric Care for Natural Leaf Designs

After the masking tape is removed, swish the cloth in a mixture of vinegar and water to set the design

- Mix one pint of vinegar in one gallon of water.
- Loosely soak the fabric in the vinegar-water solution for approximately 15 minutes to an hour to “set” the chlorophyll stained design into the fabric.
- Once the design is set, wash and gently scrub the cloth using a white or clear detergent or dishwashing liquid to remove any plant particles or leaf residue. Rinse the fabric until the water is clear.
- Gently wring -- and dry the cloth in a machine dryer or hang to dry.

How to Make a Quilt Out of Fabric with Cherokee Leaf Pounding Designs

Make your quilt using traditional or contemporary quilting techniques. Use a “whole cloth” as Bettye Kimbrell describes in the book about her life, [Out of Whole Cloth: The Life of Bettye Kimbrell](#).

Use the patchwork approach and piece together blocks of fabric to create a quilt top that can be used in a quilt sandwich.

Tips for Using the Leaf Designs

Pound various sizes and types of leaves into the cloth to make table napkins, table runners or clothes. Embellish the leaf with assorted beads and fabric colors to create unlimited designs.

Resources

National Endowment for the Arts: Bettye Kimbrell, 2008 NEA National Heritage Fellow

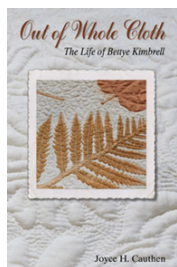
<http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/bettye-kimbrell>

Masters of Traditional Arts Education Guide: Bettye Kimbrell, Quilter

Watch documentary films, listen to recordings and see photographs of Bettye Kimbrell and her quilts by NEA photographer, Alan Govenar.

<http://www.mastersoftraditionalarts.org/featured-artists/bettye-kimbrell/>

Book: [Out of Whole Cloth, The Life of Bettye Kimbrell](#) by Joyce Cauthen



<http://www.outofwholecloth.com/>

Sponsors

“Common Threads: Empowering Communities Through Education in the Arts” is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and funding from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the “Support the Arts” Car Tag Program.

Written instructions and photographs by Sylvia G. Stephens, Alabama Folklife Association, Community Scholar, June 2014.



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