

Online Extra:

Basics: Choosing Quality Supplies

Stamping seems like such an innocent hobby. You just need stamps, ink and paper right? Well. Anyone who has been stamping for a while can tell you that stampers tend to accumulate a lot of crafting supplies! First you need stamps. Just a couple of stamps won't get you far. You find yourself needing this stamp and that stamp . . . and eventually you find yourself with thousands of them!

Then there is paper: white matte and white glossy cardstock, colored cardstocks, duplex and color cored cardstocks, decorative papers, handmade papers and more. Then there is ink for stamping: dye-based inks, pigment inks and hybrid inks. There are fibers, brads and other fasteners. Adhesives, both liquid, dry and tape versions are needed, as well as something to color your creations, be it water-based markers, alcohol ink markers, colored pencils, pastels, watercolors, acrylic paints or any number of other art mediums. And then there are the gadgets: scissors, paper trimmers, decorative punches, die-cut machines, machines to apply adhesive,



corner-rounders, heat tools and other must-have gadgets that haven't been invented yet.

Well, you get the idea. Stamping breeds craft stuff! It can cost you a lot of money over time, so you may be tempted to get the least expensive supplies you can find. In a budget-challenging economy, this may be the way you need to go. But let me suggest a different approach that to me makes more sense and is, in the long run, the better economical choice.

As with many things you can purchase, the cheapest craft supplies available may not be a bargain. There are stampers who use construction paper instead of cardstock, hair spray instead of artist spray fixative and kids' grade inks

and coloring mediums instead of artist grade. Yes, these can be cheaper, but remember, *“You get what you pay for”*.

Construction paper may be inexpensive, but anyone who has hung their child’s artwork in a sunny spot for very long will tell you that the color fades very quickly and cards made with it are floppy in the hand. You may save some pennies on spray fixative by substituting hair spray, but hair spray is notorious for yellowing projects and becoming sticky over time. And kids’ grade art products are the lowest quality, least pigmented items in any art supply manufacturer’s line.

Using low-quality supplies usually shows in the resulting project. Quality products, on the other hand, tend to last longer and give you much nicer results. The trick to your budget surviving your stamping obsession is to choose your supplies wisely. The core supplies you use should be high quality. Sure, try to find them on sale or shop around for the best price. But don’t be too quick to substitute a cheaper lower-grade version.

The Stamps

It used to be that art stamps were almost exclusively made of rubber. The clear acrylic stamps you could purchase were more typically one-off custom address type stamps from your local office supply store. Acrylic stamps had a bad reputation for being low quality and tended to have problems with stickiness.

Rubber stamps are still popular for art stamps today and are arguably the most versatile for stamping because you can use them with the widest array of inks, can use them in heat techniques and they are long lasting. But clear acrylic stamps have gained popularity in art stamping circles in recent years; many stampers love them for their ease of placement (because they are fairly see-through) and because they are often inexpensive. The quality of many acrylic stamps has improved in recent years and so these are an option to be considered when purchasing stamps for ink-on-paper projects.



Art stamps are typically sold in three basic ways: mounted, unmounted or cushioned. (Some companies sell only mounted, some sell only unmounted, some offer your choices.) Unmounted stamps are simply the image impressed and cured in a piece of rubber. They are popular because they are inexpensive, cheap to ship and allow you to use your temporary mounting system of choice. Sheets of unmounted stamps are often a real bargain if you like many of the images on the particular sheet you are purchasing. If you purchase stamps this way, you will need good heavy sharp scissors (like Kai scissors) to cut them out and some type of temporary mounting system for actually using the stamps.

Some unmounted stamps are sold with cushion of some type (often cling cushion) attached to the back of the stamp image. If your temporary mounting system uses this cushion, this option can save you some trouble.

You can also purchase mounted stamps that have a trimmed rubber stamp image layer attached to trimmed cushion and then a wood mount or handle. Usually an impression of the stamp image is “*indexed*” on the top of the wood mount so you can identify the stamp.

Finally, many stampers are also now using “*digital stamps.*” Digital stamps have the advantage of saving storage space and the ability to re-size images, but their use is limited to the surfaces that you can feed through your computer printer (typically paper.)

For in-depth information on the parts of a stamp, pros and cons of permanent and temporary mounting methods (with how-to’s), see Sept ’96 *VSN*. Oct ’96 looks at how to store stamps using the various temporary mounting systems considered in the previous issue. In the Oct ’08 *VSN*, we looked at *Clear Stamps, Cling Stamps, EZ Mount and Tack ‘N Peel*. If you are considering purchasing clear stamps, this article should be helpful.

VSN added a monthly “*Digital Corner*” column beginning with the Jul ’10 issue. The Jul ’10 and Aug ’10 articles are a good introduction to digital stamping, but also see this continuing article series for ways to re-size and color digital stamps.

The Paper

The paper you purchase for stamping will vary by the type of projects you do. Most stampers include card making as one of their top project types, so you will want a good quality cardstock. A white matte-coated cardstock is a good choice to begin because it is so versatile; most images stamp nicely on white and you can always use coloring mediums to change the white to something else. It will accept a wide range of coloring mediums too. I personally also like black cardstock for layering and other colors are fun if the budget allows. Decorative papers, including scrapbooking papers, can be nice for layering, although it can be fun to create your own unique decorative papers using various coloring mediums.



When choosing cardstock, go for heavier 100+ lb. cardstock if you can, especially for card bases that you don't want flopping around. The heavier versions are also less likely to have bleed-through problems when coloring

with alcohol ink markers. If you will be using watercolor, you may want heavy smooth watercolor paper.

If you have a local rubber stamp store, talk to the folks there about the papers they suggest for stamping. If you don't have a local stamp store, many mail-order stamp companies include basic cardstock for stamping. For a really large selection of stamping papers, try Marco's Paper (www.marcopaper.com), a company that has a retail store, a helpful website that lets you compare products, and that often pops up at stamp conventions as well.

Stamping Ink

When choosing stamping inks, unless you are specifically stamping with kids, don't go for the kids' inkpads. Pick artist inkpads and if possible, purchase a re-inker for the inkpad when you purchase the pad. You'll want a good quality black dye-based inkpad because many stamp images look best stamped in black. Add inkpads in additional colors as you need them.

If you think you will be stamping on surfaces other than paper, you'll need multi-surface inkpads. If you will be coloring with wet mediums like watercolors, you'll at least need a basic black permanent waterproof inkpad

that will not bleed when it gets wet. If you will be coloring your images using alcohol inks, you will need inkpads that don't bleed when alcohol inks touch them. A basic clear embossing/watermark inkpad is also a good basic stamping choice that lets you do heat embossing as well as watermark effects.



Stamping ink is a huge topic and one that **VSN** has covered in-depth in past issues. Please see the following issues for more specific information on choosing stamping inks for specific projects purposes: Aug '03 (*Extensive inkpad reference article*), Aug '04 (*Inkpad Update with five additional inkpad lines*), Jan '09 (*Alcohol Ink Markers article includes stamping ink suggestions for when you want to color with alcohol inks.*)

Coloring Mediums

Once you have your image stamped, you will often need to use a coloring medium to color inside the stamped lines. You may also use coloring mediums to create decorative backgrounds and layers for stamped projects. Coloring mediums include watercolor markers, alcohol ink markers, artist chalks, artist pastels, watercolor paints, acrylic paints, wax and watercolor crayons, alcohol inks, colored pencils (various types) and embossing powder.

Art mediums are often available in grades for children, students and artists. Always go for the artist grade if you can possibly afford it. Remember, that you usually get what you pay for, so with artist grade materials, you usually get a higher concentration of pigment for your money. If you can't afford the artist grade, then try the student grade as a compromise. Look for art mediums



in stamp stores and in the art supply area of large craft stores. If your local stores don't carry what you are looking for, I would suggest Blick (aka Dick Blick) found online at www.dickblick.com. They have a wide selection of art supplies, often have sales and I've had very good service from them over many years.

VSN did a popular series on art mediums in 2006 /2007. Each issue in the series focused on a specific art medium, including making purchasing choices and ways to use each medium in stamping. Please see the following issues for more specific information on each of these art mediums: Mar '06 (*Pastels & Chalks*), Apr '06 (*Markers*), May '06 (*Colored Pencils*), Jun '06 (*Acrylic Paints*), Jul '06 (*Watercolor Paints*), Aug '06 (*Embossing Powder*), Sept '06 (*Alcohol Inks Part 1*), Oct '06 (*Alcohol Inks Part 2*), Nov '06 (*Watercolor & Wax Crayons*), Dec '06 (*Metal Leaf &*



Foil), Jan '07 (*Oil-Based Mediums*), Feb '07 (*Finishes & Coatings*), plus Jan '09 (*Alcohol Ink Markers*), Mar '09 (*Acrylic Mediums*).

Gadgets & Other Items

There is an endless assortment of embellishments you can use for stamping as well as choices for tools and supplies used for attaching layers together, trimming your paper, scoring paper or cutting it into shapes, or dry embossing it.

For many of us, this is where we go our various ways, with something that is a must-have tool for me being something you can't see the point of owning. You will however, definitely need at least a paper trimmer (although there are stampers who swear by a sharp craft knife and a straight edge) and some type of adhesive. A sturdy double-faced tape is one adhesive that is a good basic choice that doesn't go out of fashion and that will get you through many stamped projects.

VSN has touched on various gadgets over the years. Here are a few articles that you may especially find helpful: Sept '03 (*Fasteners: Eyelets, Brads, Rivets, Jump Rings, Binding Systems, Tapes, Adhesives*), Jun '04 (*Choosing a Paper Trimmer*), Jun '09 (*Choosing a Die-Cut Machine*).

Stamping Safely

Finally, when choosing art supplies, please consider your personal health and safety. While it can be fun to experiment with using alternative supplies, watch out for chemistry experiments that could create toxins that you might then touch or breathe. Be particularly careful about melting plastics because they can create toxic fumes. And when a product label tells you to be sure you use the product in an area with good ventilation or not get it on your skin, follow their caution! Also, don't eat or drink in the craft room. Saving a little time or money by skipping a safety step can backfire with serious health issues years later!

For an article looking at this subject, see: Apr '08 (*Earth Friendly Techniques: Earth Friendly Stamp Art! Making Choices on the Materials, Tools and Techniques You Use. Avoiding Art Health Hazards, Good Stamp Studio Practices, Choosing Non-Toxic Products, Alternatives, Disposal, Recycling, Reusing and Using Up All Those Scraps! Plus: Fume Trap Product Review.*)

Enjoy the Adventure

Stamping is an adventure and the supplies you use should be high quality so that your time spent stamping is a pleasure. Invest in a core set of supplies and tools that will last you in the stamp room but will also help you to create long-lasting stamp projects that you, your friends and family will be enjoying for years to come.

Happy Stamping!

Nancie, VSN

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