

Online Extra:

Basics: Heat Embossing

For many stampers, the entry technique that got them into the stamping addiction is embossing. There is something magical about seeing a flat line of ink appear to puff up into a shiny plump line. It's also easy and requires just a few supplies, so what is not to like?

In a stamping magazine like VSN, you will often see “*embossing*”, also sometimes referred to as “*heat embossing*” or “*thermal embossing*” to differentiate it from “*dry embossing*” methods. Heat embossing requires ink (or sometimes something with similar properties), embossing powder and heat. Embossing can be done on a variety of surfaces with varying results. For this *Basics* discussion, we are going to look at embossing on paper using ink.



Choosing Ink for Embossing

As a new stamper, when you look at the inkpads found in stamp stores or the stamping aisles of craft stores, you may wonder about the variety of different inks described on the labels, including: pigment, watermark, dye-based, solvent-based, craft and hybrid. Each ink has different properties and recommended uses. For embossing, you need an ink that stays wet long enough for embossing powder to be applied and stick to it well. Most dye-based inks dry too fast, as do solvent-based inks. What you are usually looking for is either an ink labeled “*pigment*” or “*watermark*”. Read the inkpad label to see if it is specifically intended for embossing.

Pigment inkpads come in a variety of colors, from clear to black, with all kinds of pretty colors in between. If you are not sure how much you will be embossing, you may want to start with a clear pigment inkpad or “*watermark*” ink and/or a black pigment inkpad. Clear ink is flexible

because it can be used with any color embossing powder, including clear, for a variety of looks and effects. A black pigment inkpad is also handy because many stamp images are designed to be stamped in black and look good stamped in black ink and embossed in either clear or black powder.

Editor's Note: VSN has looked at inkpads and their vast variety in past issues of VSN. Please particularly see the Aug '03 VSN's extensive inkpad reference article and the Aug '04 inkpad update article that adds coverage on five additional inkpad lines.

Choosing Embossing Powder

Embossing powder is a craft version of “*thermography powder*” used by commercial printers to create raised lines on paper, similar to engraving (but much cheaper.) The craft version typically comes in small jars of about an ounce (although you can also purchase some embossing powders in larger amounts.) Embossing powder is a plastic resin ground and sifted with chemicals added to control static electricity. The color comes from pigments.



When you go to a stamp or craft store to purchase embossing powder, you may see regular powders, super-fine “*detail*” powders and very coarse powders like UTEE (Ultra Thick Embossing Enamel) or Opals brands. For many embossing projects, regular powders are a good choice. Detail powders are favored when embossing images with a lot of fine detail that could get lost under a thicker powder. Coarse powders are meant for covering large areas with a thick coat of embossing. There are also specialty powders with regular grinds that include glitter/sparkle or tinsel or are designed to look distressed. For this *Basics* discussion, we will be working with regular grind embossing powder.

There are many colors of embossing powders available to stampers. The colors you choose will depend on how much you emboss, what you emboss and the types of embossing techniques you use. Most stampers who emboss seem to find that clear powder is the most flexible and use it most often. For that reason, you can sometimes purchase larger containers of clear powder. Clear powder can be used on top of any color of pigment ink to give you a raised impression while still showing the ink color below. A regular or fine detail black powder is another basic powder

color to consider, as many stamp lines are designed to be best stamped in black. But don't stop there. If you enjoy embossing, you will probably find favorite colors that you reach for again and again.

Editor's Note: VSN's Aug '06 article on *Embossing Powder Fun* looks at embossing in greater depth, including more information on types, brands and lines of powders, more detailed embossing directions, more on ink choices, storage, safety, mixing custom powder blends, using UTEE and Opals type powders and more advanced embossing techniques including embossing without ink and embossing on other surfaces.

Choosing a Heat Source

If you are new to embossing and not sure if you are going to like it, you may not be ready to purchase a heat tool specifically for embossing. If you don't have a heat tool, you can put your inked/powdered paper on a parchment covered baking sheet and heat it in a warm oven until the powders melt. While this will work, it isn't the best or most efficient way to emboss because you are warming up the whole oven for a small project and it can be tricky

to keep an eye on the melting so that you don't go too far and over-heat the powder and/or scorch the paper.

The stamper's choice for embossing is a "heat tool" or a "heat gun". You may have a heat gun in your home that you have used for home projects like striping paint. While these can be used successfully, they often get hotter (and are louder) than you need. Purchasing a heat tool designed for embossing is a fairly basic choice for most stampers. If you emboss, it will get a lot of use. These can be purchased at stamp or craft stores or on the internet.

Note: While a hair dryer may look similar to a heat tool, it does not get hot enough to emboss and also blows too much air, blowing the powder, so don't try using one for embossing.



Basic Embossing

You will need a rubber stamp, pigment or watermark ink, a letter-sized piece of scrap paper folded in half to use as a funnel, embossing powder and a heat source.

Safety: Although embossing powder tends to fall rather than blow (when used with a heat tool) and embossing sessions tend to be short, you should still work with adequate ventilation so that any fumes move away from you. Be careful not to work on a surface that can be damaged by the heat of the heat tool. (Note: VSN's Apr '08 on *Earth Friendly Techniques* includes craft room safety.)



Prepare Paper: (Optional) Some papers, particular glossy, will attract powder in areas beyond the stamped ink. You can purchase anti-static pouches or powders to rub on your paper before stamping to cut down on this if you find it to be a problem.

Ink and Stamp Image: Ink your stamp with water-based pigment or watermark ink and stamp on the paper.



Apply Powder: Lay a folded piece of letter-sized scrap paper open on your work surface. Hold or place your stamped paper over the folded scrap paper and sprinkle or spoon embossing powder over the inked image. The powder will stick to the wet inked areas of the paper and will be loose over un-inked areas.



Tap Off Excess Powder: Once the image is completely covered, lift and firmly tap the paper so that the excess powder falls onto the folded scrap paper. A soft brush can be used to brush away any specks that stick where they don't belong.

Return Excess to Jar: Partially folding the scrap paper, use it as a funnel to pour the excess powder back into the embossing powder jar and close its lid. Set the jar aside so it doesn't accidentally get heated with the heat tool.

Heat Powder: Use an embossing heat tool to heat the powder. Turn on the tool. Let it warm up for a few seconds. Hold it a few inches above the powdered image.



You will see the powder begin to melt. With a larger image, you may need to gradually move the tool across the image to melt all the powder.

Many powders turn shiny when melted. Others just turn slightly in color or texture. The process typically takes fifteen to twenty seconds on most papers. Once an area is melted, move on to melt additional parts of the image.

Cautions: Spending too much time on one area can eventually cause scorching of the paper. Holding the heat tool too close to the surface cuts down on air flow and can cause damage to the heat tool.

Give your embossed image a minute to cool. If you put your fingers into still-warm embossing, it can press down/mar the surface. Hot embossing powders can also burn skin (typically more of an issue when working with thick coats of coarse grade embossing powders.)

Happy Stamping & Embossing!

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VSN is a monthly print magazine for stampers available at rubber stamp stores or as a subscription.

Editor's Note: Many companies that sell stamps also offer embossing powders. Two of VSN's regular advertisers specialize in embossing powders. Ranger Industries manufactures embossing powders and inks and offers the Heat It Craft Tool, specially designed for embossing. While Ranger is wholesale only, their products are widely available. Check out their website for information on Ranger products (www.rangerink.com). Sparkle N Sprinkle is a stamp retailer who offers an especially large range of embossing powders (over two hundred). Check out their offerings at www.sparklensprinkle.com.