

EXPERIMENTATION

Hand-Dyed Paper

Want to create some knock-out backgrounds for your stamp art? Want a satisfying afternoon project? Want to do something new, but not spend any more money on gadgets and supplies?

Try dying some paper! You probably have the basic ingredients for this project right in your kitchen cupboards. The work is quick, easy, enjoyable and you can create so much dyed paper in a single afternoon that you'll be set for months!

This technique is based on an ancient Japanese art called "Orizomegami." Rice paper was folded very precisely and the edges were dipped into bowls of vegetable based dyes. There are directions, diagrams and a some color pictures of paper dyed this way in **A Guide to Making Decorated Paper** by Anne Chambers. Her orizomegami paper looks much like stained glass or even tie-dye. It is lovely.

For stamp art backgrounds, I like more randomly dyed paper. So I've twisted this ancient technique to my own way of doing things, and to use a variety of modern supplies. I hope that you will continue to twist the ideas. If you come up with a fun variation, please share them with us!

Note: The following is based on an online class that I taught on Prodigy in 1993. I have added several new ideas to intrigue former online students too!

(Note: A print version of this updated article can be purchased from VSN for \$3 US check or money order. Price includes shipping within the US.) www.vampstampnews.com



Supplies

- Ink, glitz and paper. (See chart below.) Note: The chart lists suggestions, and doesn't cover all possibilities. If you've got a favorite dye or paper, try it!
 - Water
- Small cups (muffin tins, yogurt or pudding cups, etc.) Depending on the dyes you use, you may not want to use drinking cups.
 - Plastic spoons (for spooning iridescent medium and/or stirring. Save them to use again.)
- Straws cut in 3" pieces (for stirring, dropping and/or blowing ink.)
- Pencil sharpener or sharp knife, aluminum foil and an iron if using metallic crayons
- Adhesives - Spray adhesive or glue stick, and Dry-line adhesive or paper adhesive of choice.
- Newspaper and wax paper to cover work area.
- Lava soap for cleaning ink stained hands (or wear plastic gloves.) If you don't wear gloves, I guarantee that you'll have beautiful purple hands!
- An area to dry your paper out of direct sunlight. A portable drying rack works well, but improvise.
 - Old toothbrush if you plan to spatter paint.
- Plastic art syringe (optional)
- Lickra moistener (optional)

(Choose one or more from each column)

<u>Ink</u>	<u>Optional Glitz</u>	<u>Paper</u>
Food Coloring (2-3 colors)	Metallic Crayons	Coffee Filters
Calligraphy Ink	Pearlescent Calligraphy Ink (Luma, Dr PH Martin)	Paper Napkins
Liquitex (or other brand of Acrylic Paint (tubes or bottles) 2-3 colors	Acrylic Iridescent Tinting to mix w/acrylic paint bottles, mix with water. (Liquitex)	Matte Coated Papers of various weights
		Rice Paper (Hand or machine made)

Set Up

First set up your work area. You'll need room to spread out, so a large kitchen table is a good choice. Stay away from rugs and upholstery. Spread newspapers to protect your table, and top with wax paper. Fill small cups about half full of water.



Food coloring or calligraphy ink:

If using food coloring or calligraphy ink, start with a few drops of color in each water cup. You can always add more if you decide you want darker colors. Some calligraphy inks, Higgins or Pelican brands for example, come with droppers in the lid. If your ink doesn't have a dropper, use 3" pieces of straw as droppers (idea courtesy of Lynne Mohr). Stir the dye with a straw or spoon.



Liquitex (or other brand) Acrylic:

If using tubes of acrylic paint, squeeze a half-inch or so ribbon of paint into the cup. If you are using the acrylic paint and want to add **Iridescent Tinting Medium**, this is the time to add it. (The tinting medium adds a lustrous sparkle. I recommend it!) Take half a spoon full of the medium and stir it into the water with a straw or spoon. You'll need to stir this dye occasionally to prevent the medium from settling to the bottom.

Use at least two or three colors. Blues, greens and purples are nice for for "sky" or "water" backgrounds. Keep in mind that colors mix a bit on the paper, so you may not want to use colors that don't mix well. (Mixing green and red can look muddy for example.)

Remember that water often makes dyes lighter. Red tends to dye pink, and dark blue dyes may turn light blue on the paper. Some light colors (like yellow) do not show up well. This varies with dye and paper.



Directions

Start Dipping

Take a piece of paper. Fold it, crumple it or wad it so that part of it is small enough to fit into one of the cups. Dip that portion of the paper in the cup, then lift it out again. Squeeze out excess dye over the cup. Then dip another portion into a new color. Unfold and re-fold to expose new areas.

If you are using especially heavy paper, try crumpling paper thoroughly before dipping. With very heavy paper, dye will sometimes settle in the lines where the paper was folded when you crumpled it, and may be very light in other areas.

Don't be afraid to just dip your paper randomly. Some of the best results are unplanned. Keep dipping until the entire paper has been dyed in various colors, or leave some parts of the paper uncolored. It's up to you.

Fold round coffee filters in half, then crumple so that you can dip the center in red dye. Then dip the outer edges in blue. Where the dyes blend, you'll get purple. You'll have a round paper with red in the center, blending to purple, then blue on the edges.

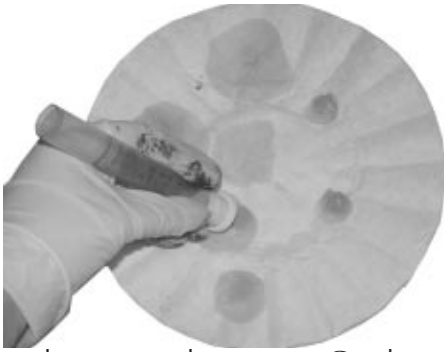
I taught this technique in a class at Milltown Obsessions a while back, and the group came up with a wonderful twist. They took coffee filters and folded them in half several times to form a pie-like triangle. They dipped the paper in one color, then carefully dipped only the folded edges in a second color for a star burst effect.



If you get bored with dipping, try using a **plastic art syringe** to spread the dye on the paper. Fill the syringe with a little dye, and drizzle it over your paper.

Try emptying the syringe of all dye except for the tip, then pump quickly. The air forces the remaining dye out in an airbrush effect. It would take too long to do an entire paper this way, so dip the paper in dye first, then use the syringe to spatter another dye on top. When using the syringe with acrylic and tinting medium combinations, you may find that the tip gets clogged by the medium. If this happens, fill completely with water, and force it through the tip over a sink. It's messy, but works.

For polka dots, try a **Lickra moistener**. This is a tube with a soft tip. It is normally filled with water for to moistening envelope flaps and postage stamps. Fill it with your dye mixture



and spot onto dry papers. Gentle tapping on dry paper gives precise circles, while pressure gives larger, less perfect spots. *Editor's Note:* I bought this product from my local grocery store in 1994, but do not find it in 2005. Check office supply stores for a similar "envelope moistener", sold for under a dollar.



Want still more to try? How about adding some spots of crayon on the paper before you dye it? The crayon will resist the dye.

Experiment! If you aren't happy with your dyes, try mixing them. If your calligraphy ink has a nice sparkle, but is too pale, try adding a few more drops of ink, or try adding some food coloring. Since you are only using a few drops of coloring and a bit of water, you can certainly experiment without fear.

Nancie's 1994 Favorites:

Red food coloring, blue food coloring, Windsor & Newton's emerald green calligraphy ink, cobalt blue Liquitex acrylic paint with Iridescent tinting medium. The acrylic mixes on rice paper gives the most vivid papers. Other dyes on napkins and coffee filters tend to be more pastel.



Let it Dry

When you decide you're finished dyeing each piece of paper, unfold it and lay it on wax paper. Very thin papers like napkins may need to dry partially before you unfold it completely (otherwise it may tear). If it does tear, you can usually "fix" it in the mounting stage. Let them dry right on the wax paper if you'd like. Thin papers may dry in less than an hour, while heavy papers may take overnight to dry this way.

What I like to do is dye a bunch of papers at a time, and lay them all out on wax paper. When I'm done dyeing, I take the whole batch outside and hang them up to dry (out of the sun!) On a breezy day, all but the heaviest papers will be dry in a short time. Sunlight may fade some of your colors, so pick a shady spot. You can also dry them on a portable clothes rack inside.

Add Some Glitz

Once your paper is dry, you are ready to add some glitz. (Or, you may decide you like it just the way it is. If so, just skip this section.)

To use **metallic crayons**, lay dry paper on aluminum foil. Use a small pencil sharpener or sharp knife to shave the crayon wax into very small bits. If you use a pencil sharpener and get large shavings, rub them between your fingers until they are very, very small bits and sprinkle them over your paper. Put another piece of aluminum foil on top, and then iron it. I set the iron to the wool setting, and pressing down once or twice does the job. Open the foil again. You will find that



the crayon has melted. (2005 Update: Or try using a heat tool for melting!)

(Crayola sells separate boxes of crayons with just metallic colors: bronze, gold and silver. If your kids or grandkids object to your crayon pilfering, you might look for this small set.)



To use **Pearlescent calligraphy ink**, place dry paper on wax paper. Shake up the ink to mix it in the bottle, then use a cut piece of straw to drop some ink on the paper. You can either use the straw to drag the ink around the paper, or try blowing through the straw to blow the ink randomly. Try dropping a couple of spots of the ink on the paper and then crumple it up. Also, you may want to experiment with adding the Pearlescent ink before the paper has dried. Keep in mind that the glittery portion of this ink does not usually penetrate the paper - It settles on the top.



Another option is to spatter some paint over the dyed paper. Put a little acrylic paint on an old toothbrush. Run your thumb over the toothbrush so the paint spatters onto the paper. Experiment on scrap paper until you get the hang of it.

Left Over Ink & Paint Mixture?

What can you do with the left over dye? Add a bit of dish soap and make some bubble paper.

Blow into the dye with a full length straw and carefully lower paper into the bubbles.

(See Apr '97 VSN for detailed bubble paper directions!)

Mount Paper

Once your paper is completely dry, it's ready to use. If your paper is extremely wrinkled or dried twisted, you may want to iron it between some wax paper. Don't use steam, because that can dilute the color.

Very thin papers like coffee filters, napkins or rice papers, will usually need to be mounted on cardstock to be used effectively as a background. I like to mount a bunch of papers at a time, so that I have a drawer full of mounted paper handy whenever I want it.

For thin papers, use a spray adhesive - 3M makes a spray adhesive for artwork that is supposed to be environmentally friendly - or a glue stick like UHU glue stick. (This is the solid, waxy type of glue stick, not the more liquid pen type.)

Choose a piece of cardstock large enough to hold an entire piece of dyed paper. Make sure the adhesive covers the entire surface of the cardstock evenly. If you're using spray adhesive, do your lungs a favor, and do it outside.



Once the cardstock is covered with adhesive, gently lay the dyed paper down over the cardstock. Start in the center of the paper, and press the paper to the cardstock. Use the flat area of your thumb nail or a spoon to smooth it down onto the cardstock, working from the center to the edges. If you are working with a torn piece, butt the torn edges next to each other and it usually is not obvious.



Fellow stamper Sue Newton gets very smooth adhesion by mounting them on sticker paper using a hard brayer. She lays the dyed paper carefully over the sticker paper. Using a firm hand, she rolls the brayer from the center to the paper's edges. (Note: Brayers are rollers available at art stores. Check near print making supplies. They come in both hard and soft varieties. For this technique, you need hard.)

(Editor's Note: In 2005, we stampers have even more adhesive possibilities. If you use a Xyron machine for adhesive, try it for this purpose!) Thin coatings of other paper adhesives would also work.

Using Your Paper

Now you've got large pieces of mounted dyed paper. You can cut them into post card sized pieces and use them that way. Or cut pieces of any size and mount them in turn onto the front of a card.

You may find that very heavy weights of dyed paper don't need to be mounted before using. With this heavy paper, try running dry paper adhesive or double face tape along the edges on the backside and layer it onto the front of your card. Experiment with tearing pieces of unmounted paper (of various weights) and gluing them to your card for collage effects. Stamp right on the dyed paper, or mount your stamped image on top with paper adhesive or foam tape for a 3D effect.

Liquitex Acrylic paints, tinting medium, calligraphy ink, Luma Pearlescent calligraphy ink and plastic art syringes are commonly found in art supply stores. Check rubber stamp stores for inkpad re-inkers.

Mail order sources:

(Note: Contact info updated 2005)

Dick Blick Art Materials
www.dickblick.com
800-828-4548

Nasco
www.enasco.com
800-558-9595

(Editor's Note: These are two companies that I have personally ordered from over the years.)

Notes From 2005's Play

Over ten years later, I still find spending a couple of hours dying papers to be very satisfying. Over these years I have accumulated more inks and paints and so I enjoyed trying them out for this technique. I particularly liked Dr PH Martin's Iridescent Calligraphy Colors and Adirondacks Alcohol Inks. If you have stamp pad re-inkers, try them out for dying paper. Some may be great mixed with water for dip dying. Others may work better for dripping or spattering onto the paper. Experiment!

Keep in mind that some coloring agents are more colorfast than others. Food coloring is great fun and creates some lovely papers, but may fade over the years. If it is a quick project not meant to last for decades, it is fine. If you are working on an heirloom project, check product labels for color fastness. For a long lasting project, you will proba-

bly want to lean toward good quality artist paints and inks.

My own personal favorite dying agents continue to be blue food coloring and water (use enough drops to get a good strong color) and acrylic tube paint mixed with water and Iridescent Tinting Medium. I don't worry about mixing the acrylics completely either. I like the unexpected clumps of color that you get with a more casual mixture! I also can't resist dripping iridescent calligraphy inks over the dried paper. The dip dying tends to create fairly lightly colored papers once dry. Dripping color on top of the dried paper adds spots of darker, more intense colors. Try it - it turns nice paper into wow paper!

In my original directions, I suggested wearing gloves. Even if you do not usually work in gloves, it is a good idea here. This project will dye your hands from fingertips to wrists if you work with bare hands. Posh

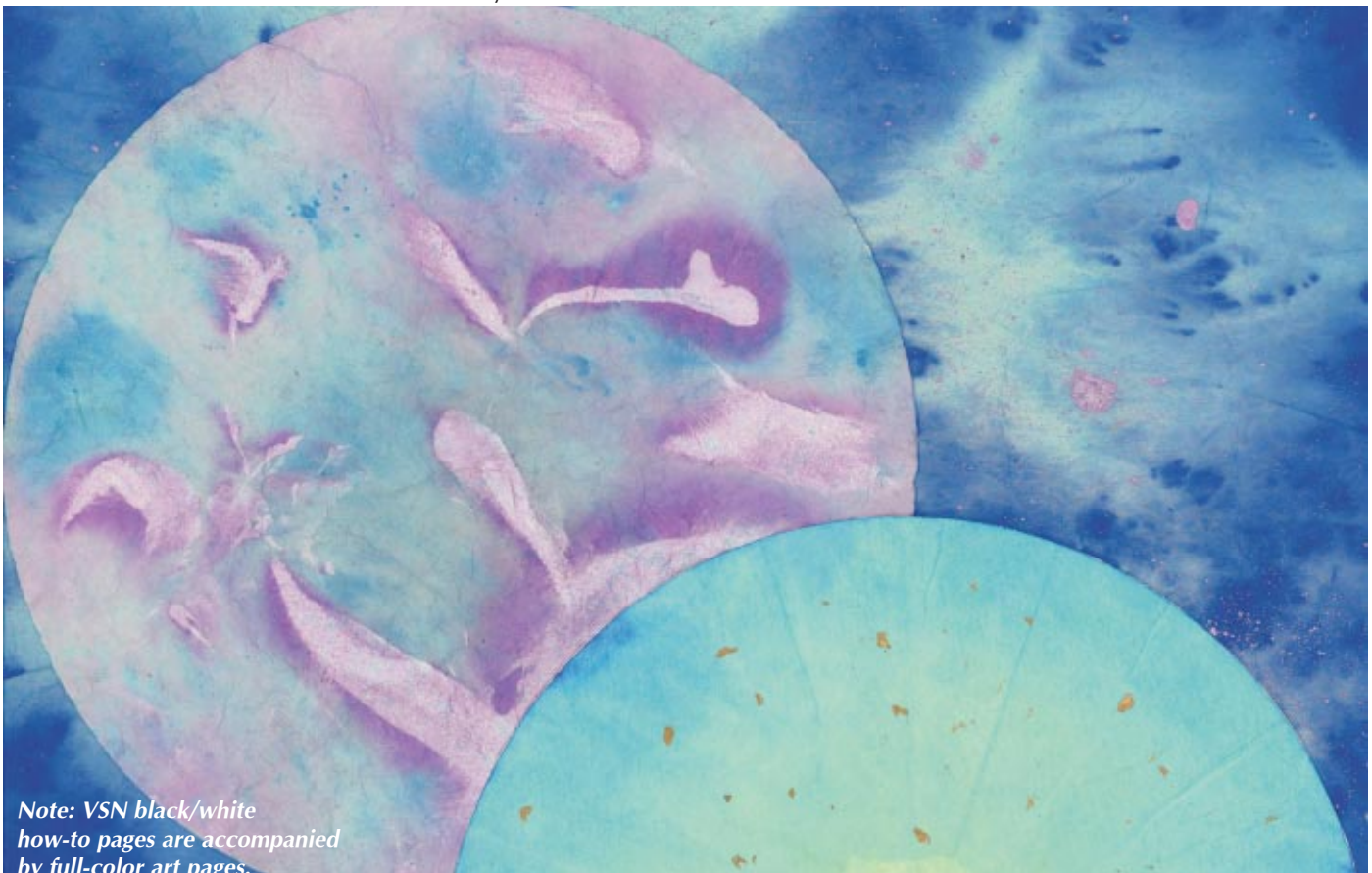
Impressions (www.poshimpressions.com) carries particularly nice Lycra gloves that are comfortable to wear, keep your hands clean and are washable and re-usable. (At least one pair of gloves is really a must in a stamper's toolkit, especially if you do a lot of messy projects.)

Also experiment with different papers you have in your stash. Try even heavy papers, shipping tags or papers that already have some color or texture. This is a good time to pull out some of those paper scraps that you have been hoarding because they are too good to toss.

Above all, experiment! Let yourself have fun. The result will be a wonderful selection of papers to use in future stamping projects!

Nancie

(Note: A print version of this article can be purchased from VSN for \$3 US check or money order. Price includes shipping within the US.)



Note: VSN black/white how-to pages are accompanied by full-color art pages.