

# PASTE PAPER

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BY EMMA JANE HOGBIN

*Strange Little Girl*

## Paste Paper

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### Colophon

This booklet is set in 10pt Georgia. The headings are 14pt Helvetica. Each book is hand bound by the author. This booklet is produced as an open edition and is individually numbered. Your copy is number

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# Introduction

If you have always been drawn to marbled papers it may take you a while to develop the unhealthy addiction to paste papers that is inevitable. (It may be even harder if you've sat at the edge of the ocean on Prince Edward Island and watched men collect the Irish moss used in marbling.) But once you've recovered from your strong desire to boil moss and have seen the light that is paste papers I can promise that you will be hooked.

One of the things I love about decorating papers with paste is the absolute ease with which everything comes together. There are virtually no special tools required, and almost anything you can find around the house (that you're willing to submerge in paste) can be used. It can take mere seconds to decorate your first page. Make sure you have a healthy stack of paper before you start. Better yet, make sure you only have a small stack of paper available to you. Once you get started you'll want to decorate every last sheet of paper you can get your hands on. And even that won't seem like enough some days.

# Cornstarch Recipe

I use two different methods to make paste. They both use the same recipe. The first method requires the use of a stove, while the second can be done with an electric kettle. The kettle only needs to be electric if you do not have access to a stove.

## Ingredients

- ◆ 1/3 cup corn starch
- ◆ 2-3 cups water

## Method One: The Stove Method

Place both the corn starch and two cups water into a pan on the stove. Mix the two together, carefully. You'll end up with magic mud on the bottom of the pan and your rubber scraper will stick to the bottom in very odd ways.

Bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat as soon as you see the mixture change colour. Stir, stir, stir until the paste is the right consistency. What is right? Thick paste will give a textured surface; thin paste will give a smoother surface and more of a water colour effect. The paste will continue to cook even

after it has been removed from the stove, *and* it will get even thicker if you leave it overnight in the fridge. I tend to make a really thick paste to start, and then add water to give the desired texture for any given technique.

You can also use flour of any kind for this method if you do not have corn starch at home. When using wheat flour, use half the amount of flour as you would corn starch, or add twice the amount of water.

## **Method Two: The Kettle Method**

Mix the corn starch and 1/2 cup water in a heat safe container. Stir, stir, stir. You want to make a slurry at this point which has dissolved cornstarch which can be easily stirred. Add more water one tablespoon at a time if you can't easily stir the slurry.

Boil the water in the kettle, when it has boiled pour the water into the slurry slowly (your stream of water should be about 1/4" thick). Stir like mad while you're pouring the water. At some point the mixture will change colour (this change will be obvious); continue to stir and pour until the entire mixture has changed colour and consistency.

## **Warnings On The Kettle Method**

If your slurry is too thick you will get lumps in final paste. These are chunks of cooked cornstarch that were unable to separate. Next time: add more water to the slurry.

If your slurry was too watery to begin with your paste may not cook when the water is added from the kettle. If this is the case, your paste won't change colour even after several cups of boiling water have been added. Next time: add less water to the slurry and pour a thicker stream of water.

## **Keeping Your Paste Smooth**

As the paste cools you will get a film on top. Skim this film off and discard it. Both methods will also yield clumps overnight in the fridge. Use cheese cloth or any mesh fabric (including pantyhose) to strain the mixture. You will need to squish the solution through the cloth. You will get paste all over your hands.



## Preparing Your Work Area

The next section describes how to prepare your work area. You will need to assemble the following tools and materials:

- ◆ batch of paste
- ◆ containers for coloured paste (yogurt containers work well)
- ◆ colour
- ◆ cue cards
- ◆ brushes
- ◆ paper
- ◆ room to dry finished papers
- ◆ masking tape
- ◆ flat work surface

## Preparing The Coloured Paste

Prepare a batch of paste using the recipe above.

Grab a bunch of old cottage cheese, yogurt, or other containers and put a drop of colour into each. I have tried putting the pigment into a water-colour tray and then dabbing as required. This method does not suit me, but it may be exactly the right set up for you.

For my colour I use acrylic paint. Anything that mixes well with water should work. I have tried food dye, fabric dye, acrylic paint, gouache, silk screen inks, calligraphy ink and block printing ink.

I do not have a set recipe for the ratio of colour-to-paste. The general rule of thumb is this: the more colour stuff or dye you use, the more vibrant the paste will be. Start with a few tablespoons of paste and add a bit of colour. Stir and check the paste on a sheet of scrap paper. If the colour is too weak, add more “pigment.” If it is too strong, add more paste. If the mixture is too thick, add a few drops of water.

If you like recipes, brush your paste onto a blank cue card. Write your formula onto the cue card. Include information on how the paste was cooked, how much paste you used, what kind of colouring agent you used and how much. When the paste has dried you can store your cue cards in a recipe box.

Each tub of coloured paste should have its own brush. I rarely work with more than three colours at a time, which means I never need more than four (yes, three plus one) brushes at a time.

## **Preparing Your Workspace**

Before I start mucking about with the paste I set up my workspace. I like to set up my colours first and my papers second. I do the same when I am printing and dyeing fabric. Colour first, canvas second. Use a routine that makes you comfortable and puts you into your best creative mood.

You should also have plenty of room to dry your papers. I recommend getting a wire clothes rack. I've tried using hangers on the bathroom shower rod, and that works as well—as long as you don't need to shower while the papers are drying. If you have enough surface area, you can also lay the papers flat to dry.

## **Preparing Your Paper**

All of your paper should be cut to size ahead of time. I've used many different kinds of paper for paste papers. They all work well. Slight variations in the surface of the paper (for example chain lines) are not visible on the finished paper. Japanese papers, although very strong when dry, are delicate when wet. This means they need to be decorated on their drying surface—don't try to lift them when they're wet with paste!

You may choose to do your paste papers under tension. This is a good idea especially if you find your papers are shifting while you work on them. Use a strip of masking tape on the edge furthest away from you. Create patterns by dragging things from the masking tape towards your body. These papers will have a definite direction when finished. If you are using your papers for bookbinding, be sure to attach your sheet so that your patterns are formed in the right direction.

The first step in decorating a single sheet of paper is to relax the paper. When wet, paper will curl. I use a clean brush for this (the “plus one” brush) with either paste or water. Using water dilutes your coloured paste (getting closer to a water-colour effect). The paper will curl after the first application of water/paste. Give the paper as much time as it needs to start to relax (you may need to uncurl the pages by hand). Then add a second coat of either water or paste.

As an alternate first step: submerge your sheet of paper in a water bath. If the paper is weak when wet, lift it out by draping the end along a wooden dowel (this distributes the stress along the edge of the paper instead of just two finger points). Lie the sheet

on your work area and smooth flat with a damp sponge or brush. Any bubbles or folds in the paper should be removed as they can negatively affect your final design.

Depending on the final effect, and the type of paper you are using, you may be able to skip this step entirely. I've tried making paste papers with both thin Japanese papers and thicker Western papers. I've found some of the Western papers (especially the machine-made Fabriano papers) will curl faster than you can count to five. It is frustrating to deal with, so I pre-wet all papers before I start working on the paste decorations. Let your paper be your guide.

I prefer to work on a flat work surface instead of a layer of newspaper. I find the newspaper shifts, and has lumps from the folds which can negatively affect the design. I bought a sheet of clear acrylic (plexiglass) from the hardware store and use it as my work surface.

# Decorating Your Paste Papers

There are lots of different ways to decorate your paper with paste. My favourite is “pasting off.” First I paint on a layer of pasty pigment. Then I use “things” to scrape the paste off. I've used plastic bags, pieces of mat board, tree leaves, forks, combs, etc.

You can also:

- ◆ “Paste on.” Add a second colour to create your pattern.
- ◆ Stamp and stipple. Use household items to stamp your pages. One of my favorite sheets of paper uses a fork as a stamp to remove the paste. You can also brush coloured paste onto the object and stamp the image onto the paper.
- ◆ Abi Sutherland likes to create her patterns by pasting up a sheet and then laying a second sheet on top. Gently rub the top of the two sheets. Peel them apart and dry them separately.

I highly recommend flipping through home decorating books on paint/wall treatments. You may

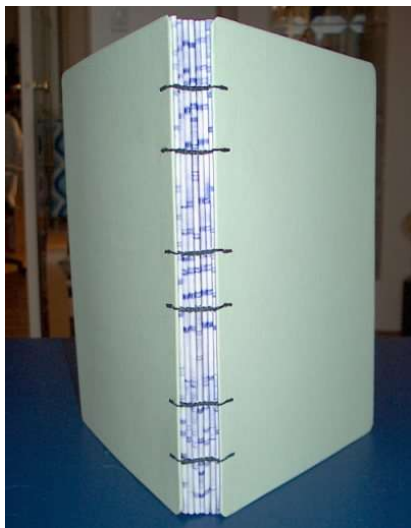
not want the finish on your walls, but I promise there will be some great ideas for your paste papers.

When you've finished your design, carefully lift the sheet off your work area and onto your drying area. As the paper dries it may make a crackling sound. The sound can be safely ignored.

Remember you're working with *paste*—do not let the sheets touch each other while drying!

Once the paste has completely dried you will need to press the sheets flat. Do not press the sheets until you are sure the paste has dried. I use my nipping press to dry the finished sheets, but thick telephone books, hardcover books, dictionaries, or boards with bricks on top will work just as well. Ideally your “press” is larger than the item you are trying to flatten.

One of my favorite paste paper books is called *Electrophoresis*. The lines were “drawn” with a scrap of mat board that had notches cut out. Although the lines were in approximately the same places, I didn't get it exactly perfect each time. I love the effect.





# Resources

Abi's Christmas Albums

<http://bookweb.sunpig.com/gallery/glxmas.htm>

*About Paper Grain* by Richard P. Grant

<http://www.hewit.com/sd10-pape.htm>

Home and Garden - Making Papers

[http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr\\_paper\\_crafts\\_make\\_paper/article/0,1789,HGTV\\_3292\\_1369899,00.html](http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr_paper_crafts_make_paper/article/0,1789,HGTV_3292_1369899,00.html)

Living Vintage Paste Papers

<http://dsc.discovery.com/stories/vintage/projects/pastepaper/pastepaper.html>

*Making Paste Papers* by Diane Maurer

*Paper making and bookbinding: Coastal Inspirations* by Joanne B. Kaar

Paste paper

<http://www.rubbertreestamps.com/supplies/paper.htm>

Paste paper techniques

<http://www.intersurf.com/~redstic/Paper/Paste.htm>