

Introduction

Printing on Fabric is fun and easy to do – it is just as easy as printing your own photographs.

My first project was a pillow for my aunt and uncle to celebrate their 65th Wedding Anniversary. I scanned a picture from their wedding and printed it on fabric and then used upholstery fabric in the colors of the bridesmaids' dresses to border the photo. It was a huge success.

Most of my experience comes from printing the photographs of soldiers overseas for the quilts made by the Military Appreciation Quilt Group (MAQG). I get physical photos from Collette Barry-Rec, coordinator for the Care-Box Project, or she attaches a photo to an email. Once the image is in the computer, I edit the photo to crop the portrait and sharpen the image by increasing the saturation. I have printed maybe 200 photos on fabric now for all the quilts.

I also printed labels for MAQG and for my own quilts. You can create a simple label in **Word** and then print it with no borders on the fabric sheet and then add borders from the fabrics you used in the quilt to make the label.

I have now moved on to printing dried or pressed flowers/leaves onto fabric. I hope to use some of these fabrics in a bed quilt soon.

I am going to talk about printing images (either pressed flowers/leaves or pictures) onto fabric: from start to finish. This will be posted on the website as "Lecture Notes".

A. Get your image ready

1. Scan your image into your computer as a .jpg file, using the scanning software supplied by the printer manufacturer.

2. Edit the image photo:

- Crop the image to minimize the background

- Adjust coloring if necessary

- Deepen the saturation (ink will saturate the fabric more than a glossy photo paper)

3. Send the image to the print function. Determine the size you want based on your project. I usually use 8x10 or 5x7 for portraits or trivets; 4x6 or 5x7 for mug rugs, and wallet size for ornaments. I uncheck the box which says "fit picture to frame" to give more white space around the image.

4. At this point I often print on paper, to make sure I have the image I want. (Note: If you are not sure how your paper feeds into the printer, mark your paper in the corner so you know which side of the paper is printed and where the top of the page is.)

B. Get your fabric ready for printing

You generally have three choices for fabric printing: 1) store bought fabric sheets or 2) your own processed print ready fabric sheets, 3) using transfer artist papers.

1. Store-bought fabric sheets

There are several brands of manufactured, ready-for-printing fabrics. The fabric has been treated so that the ink used by the various inkjet printers will not separate from the fabric during washing. These store-bought fabrics usually come in packages containing 5-10 sheets. All have a stiff removable backing, which helps guide the sheet through the printer. The fabric in these store-bought packages is usually high thread white or off white count cotton. It is extremely important to read and follow the directions for the particular brand you are using.

I mostly use **Electric Quilt Company (EQ) Printables: Premium Cotton Satin** (more thread count and stiffer fabric) or **Premium Lawn Cotton** (fewer thread count but softer fabric).

I have also experimented with silk and organza fabric sheets from **Jacquard Products**.

2. Self-processed print ready fabric sheets.

You can use just about any smooth fabric; I have used solids, solid batik (my favorite), linen, even lightly printed background prints. The smoother and tighter the weave of the fabric, the better the image copy will be. I love using linen, but the image quality suffers. Soak a yard or more of the fabric in **Bubble Jet Set 2000**; do not dilute the solution. This helps to lock in the printer ink colors so they will not wash out. Soak the fabric for about 15 minutes and then hang the fabric up to dry. Use rubber gloves during this process because the liquid is pretty harsh on hands. Save and reuse the left over liquid. (Once the image is printed on the fabric, you will use **Bubble Jet Rinse** to set the colors.)

Then you back the fabric with something that will go through the printer. Options are freezer paper, Self-Adhesive Template Sheets, or Sheets of Label Paper. I have only used freezer paper. I started using rolls of freezer paper from the grocery store and then cut to 8 ½ x 11, but that was an extra step. I now buy precut freezer paper sheets (found on NancysNotions.com) – these are easier to use. The sheets can be use a few times but they do not stick well with reuse. If you use freezer paper sheets, prepare the sheets just before you are going to print. The longer you wait, the more risk of the fabric coming loose and jamming in the printer.

3. Iron-On Transfer Papers

A third option is using transfer papers. This is the easiest of all since you just print the image on the transfer paper and iron it on fabric (even the cork fabric we used for the retreat) you want to use. The fabric does not have to be treated before or after. You can also transfer images onto leather, cork, wood, glass etc. The transfer is not totally complete, but often this is adequate for artists. The effect is

a stiffer overlay on the fabric. This would be fine for crafts (totes etc) but the stiffness might not be good for quilts.

I have used **Lesley Ripey's TAP Transfer Artist Paper** to do this transfer process.

Comparing store-bought vs. processing your own vs. transfer papers

Store-bought sheets:

- +easy to use
- +gives you truer color sharpness and clearer images
- +the ink colors generally bleed less than with those sheets you create
- the cost is \$3-\$5a sheet
- they are stiffer, making them hard to applique or hand sew
- they are a bit time consuming for setting the colors and then rinsing/soaking

Self-made sheets using Bubble Jet:

- +cheaper (I figure \$1-\$1.50 per sheet)
- +the resulting fabric is softer to the touch (if you start with softer fabric),
- +they are more versatile since you can use any fabric (use linen, colored solids, solid batiks etc)
- the process is labor intensive and time consuming
- the colors do not hold as well as the store-bought sheets

Iron-on Transfer Paper:

- + papers are approximately \$2.60/paper
- + versatile since you can use any fabric
- + no fabric prep work
- +/- resulting fabric is stiffer since you are ironing on a layer of material, not just ink
- ironing process is a bit tedious and can result in a poor image transfer

C. Printing the Image

1. It is now time to print the photo or label. Place the fabric sheet in your printer (my printer wants the sheet to be face down). Set the printer to best quality and Matte Paper. To be honest, I don't change settings. I load one sheet at a time. If you have a choice, load the sheet from the back because it will not have to go over as many rollers within the printer.

2. After printing, one of three tasks needs to be done depending on the printing options you used. If you printed on fabric (store bought or self-made sheets) the ink needs to dry. Follow the instructions for the fabric sheet you are using. I usually wait at least 30 minutes before pulling off the backing paper. If I am using the **EQ Printables**, I soak the fabric in cold water for 30 minutes and then dry flat on a towel. If I am using fabric prepared using **Bubble Jet Set**, you must now rinse the fabric in

Bubble Jet Rinse (you use only a small amount of the rinse in water) or a mild detergent. Then rinse in clear water and lay flat to dry. If I am use the iron-on transfer paper, I need to transfer the image to the fabric using a very hot iron. Make sure you read the instructions so that you use the correct iron setting and proceed as instructed.

Voila, you are finished.