

Silver leaves - immortalise nature



Immortalise nature using silver paste! Art Clay Silver Paste can transform any leaf into silver. It is so easy - simply paint a fresh leaf with paste, let it dry, fire it - and you're left with a fine silver replica.

Follow the instructions in this kit and you can have a silver leaf ready in a few hours!

What leaf can I use?

It is best to use a fresh leaf, dry leaves are often fragile and break when painted. You can keep leaves wrapped in a damp kitchen tissue placed in a plastic bag for a few days, as long as the bag is closed and the tissue is damp. Petra kept fig leaves like this for a couple of weeks in the fridge!

Here are some things to think of:

- Use a leaf with an interesting shape. Holes left from a snacking bug can look really interesting when turned into silver.
- You will be painting the back of the leaf. The vein structure on the back of the leaf is what gives you a beautiful texture. Feel the leaf, can you actually feel the veins? If you can't feel the texture of the leaf, the finished item won't have a visible vein structure.
- Remember that your leaf will turn into metal. Sharp points can make it uncomfortable to wear, and they can get caught in clothes. Holly leaves are pretty as decorations or a pin, but can feel uncomfortable as a necklace unless you round off the pointed edges.
- Ideally, choose a firm leaf. Flimsy, soft, or long leaves can curl up with the paste applied.
 - Hairy leaves (like some geraniums), can be very difficult to coat with paste.
 - Waxy leaves can be hard to paint as the paste can flake off, you can coat them with a thin layer of hair spray to help the paste stick.
 - Thick, moisture-filled leaves aren't great as they may split during firing.



Handy tips!

Bubbles appearing when your paste is drying? Pop them with a needle.

Make several leaves in one go; it doesn't take much longer than doing one!

Don't paint the stem, it might break. Use it as a handy handle instead!

Combine several leaves into one large piece. Use Paste to 'glue' them together and then fire in one go.



Create your leaf...

1. **PREPARE YOUR PASTE** - Add a little water to your Art Clay Silver Paste to make it a little thinner - the first couple of layers should be very thin so it can get into the texture and nooks and crannies of the leaf. Add just a few drops at a time, and stir slowly and gently, until your paste is like thick yoghurt. Don't whisk the paste, you don't want to add air into your paste. If you add too much water, just leave the lid off and it will evaporate.
2. **CAPTURE THE TEXTURE** - Paint your first layer onto the back of the leaf. Coat the whole surface, carefully.
3. Put on a steel mesh and dry quickly with a hairdryer on a low setting. Hold the dryer straight above your leaf about 20cm away - not at an angle or you'll be chasing your leaf as it flies across the room! You can also leave it in a warm spot, under a lamp for instance, and comeback to it later. Don't overheat it, you don't want your leaf to start drying up until you've added a few layers.
4. Add another layer as soon as the first layer has dried. Again, do it quite thin, and dry again.
5. **BUILD UP THICKNESS** - Paint your third layer; now the layers can start to be a lot thicker than the first two. At this stage I start to "dab" the paint on, rather than "painting" it. Dry again.
At the moment you are looking at the back of your final piece - you won't see a pattern, it should be smooth.
6. Keep painting/dabbing paste, and drying each layer, until your leaf is about 1mm thick.
7. **REINFORCE** - Add extra paste to the edges and centre vein, to reinforce these sensitive points.
8. If you are careful you can use a sanding pad to gently smooth the edges, but the thin layer of paste is very fragile until fired. Unless you have a steady hand you're probably better to do this after firing.
9. **FIRE** - Completely dry the leaf and then fire in a kiln, with a torch, or gas hob. A leaf no more than 5-7cm across can be fired with a torch for about 5 min, or on a gas hob for about 10 min (start timing when the piece glows).
10. If you want, you can now drill a hole to attach the leaf to a chain.
11. **FINISH** - Brush your leaf with a brass brush. Going over the surface and edges with a burnisher gives it a lovely shine. If you don't have a burnisher you can use a metal knitting needle or the back of a smooth spoon.