

Printing Etchings with a Palm Press

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Go to the hardware store and look at the array of casters for furniture that are for sale. You want a set made to go on a fridge or stove. Careful ... they make a platform type that the whole appliance sits on ... that is NOT what you want. You want a package of either 2 or 4 casters. Each caster consists of two small diameter plastic rollers, housed in a metal case. There will be a short threaded stub out the top of each metal case. Your fridge or stove comes with 4 small, circular skid plates, one screwed into each corner of the bottom, essentially for leveling the appliance. These casters are designed to replace the little skid plates with rollers so you can move your fridge or stove around. You will only need one of these little casters, but they usually come as a set of 2 or 4.

The threaded stub will have a nut on it. Take the nut off. The threaded stub on the casters I have is 5/16 inch in diameter, and I suspect that is a North American standard. You will need a comfortable handle for your palm press, something that will fit your palm. Buy the largest diameter ball drawer pull you can find ... you want something at least 1.5 inches in diameter. Or, you can take a scrap piece of 2x4 and saw out a circle about 2 inches in diameter. I have also used old pool balls, old croquet balls, and carved wooden fruit ... check out your local junk store. Get a 9/32 inch drill, and drill out the hole in the drawer pull; if you cut your own handle from a 2x4, just drill a 9/32 hole in the center. Now, just screw the handle down onto the caster as tight as you can. You could also use an old door knob for a handle, if you can find the kind that screws onto the square rod through the door that the old latches used to have; use epoxy to hold it in place on the threaded stub of the casters. Presto ... you now have a palm press.



Figure 1: Making a simple palm press

In order to print an etching, you will need to keep the paper from shifting on the plate while you make multiple, overlapping strokes with the palm press. For small plates, you can use a clipboard and some of that non-slip rubbery sheet that is sold for shelf liners. The rubbery stuff can be found in marine and RV supply outlets, but it is cheaper if you buy it where shelf liner is sold in large cut-rate department stores.

First, put a sheet of non-slip material on a firm, flat surface a bit below waist height.

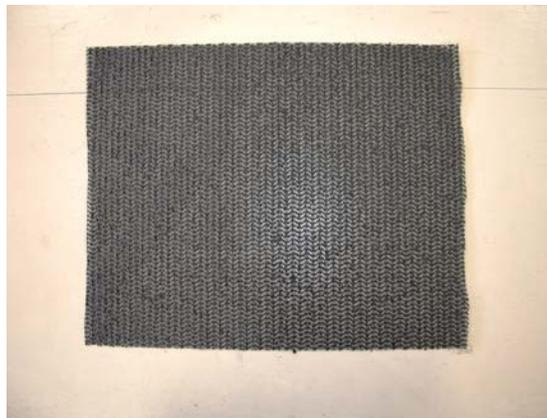


Figure 2: Non-slip material

Next, place the clipboard down on the non-slip material. This will keep the clipboard from moving around during the printing process.



Figure 3: Clipboard in place

Now place another piece of non-slip material on the clipboard, held in place by the spring clamp. This will keep the plate from moving around while you are printing.



Figure 4: Non-slip on clipboard

Place your inked plate on the non-slip material, inked side up. Position the plate so that it will print where you want it when the paper is under the spring clamp.



Figure 5: Place inked plate

Carefully slip your dampened paper under the spring clamp.



Figure 6: Place paper under clip

Cover the paper with two sheets of thin, fabric store “felt”.

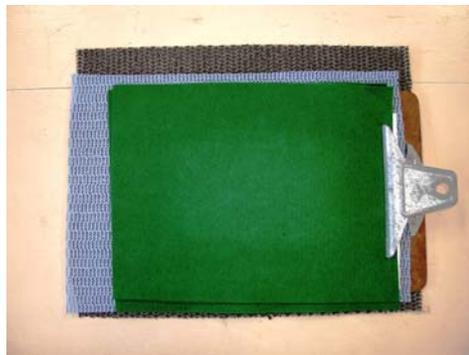


Figure 7: Place felt under clip

****It is important to start at the end nearest the spring clip.**** That will help keep the paper from moving while you print. Place your palm press at the bottom edge, with one roller on the plate and one off the plate.



Figure 8: Begin first passes

Begin with the palm press toward one side edge of the plate. Put both hands on top of the press. Keep your arms stiff and lean your body weight onto the press.



Figure 9: Palm press position

In this position, you now roll the palm press forward and off the far edge of the plate. Pick up the press and bring it back to the lower edge of the plate again, and continue making overlapping strokes from the bottom to the top until you have gone over the entire surface of the plate. The paper will now have the plate mark well embossed, and this will help to hold the paper in position.

Now you want to repeat the process, but beginning at the end of the clipboard away from the spring clip.



Figure 10: Begin second passes

As before, put both hands on the palm press, lean your upper body weight onto the press, and then roll the palm press forward and off the far edge of the plate. Pick up the press and bring it back to the lower edge of the plate again, and continue making overlapping strokes from the bottom to the top until you have gone over the entire surface of the plate.

Hopefully your etching will now be printed. You can check on your progress by going to the edge furthest from the spring clip and carefully lifting the top felts and the edge of the paper.



Figure 11: Check progress

If the image is not satisfactory, let the paper and the top felts relax back into position, and repeat strokes with your palm press in any places that seem too faint.

Be careful not to shift the paper as you make additional strokes. I have not had good success running the palm press from side to side. For me, doing so almost always results in shifting the paper slightly, with a resulting double image. Such shifting could probably be eliminated by putting another clip on the clipboard along one edge, at right angles to the original spring clip. But with two clips so arranged, it becomes more difficult to lift the paper and check on the progress of the print.



Figure 12: Finished print

For larger plates, the process is much the same, but of course you will probably need something larger than a clipboard. Art supply stores sell sketching boards that work very well for our purposes. These boards are 18 inches to several feet on a side, and come equipped with two large spring clips like those found on clipboards. Alternatively, you can easily make your own printing board from a piece of plywood or MDF. Simply cut it to size and screw on a couple of spring clips purchased from an office supply store.