

Etching Cream Application Tutorial

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Etching with cream is relatively simple... but there are lots of little details that a lot of people learn the hard way. Hopefully, this tutorial will help you to avoid some of the pitfalls.

What is involved in the etching process?

These are the basic steps:

- 1) Design a pattern and cut it from vinyl.
- 2) Transfer the cut vinyl to the surface to be etched. Weed out the areas to be etched.
- 3) Mask around the area to protect outside surfaces from the cream.
- 4) Apply a thick layer of etching cream over the open areas and wait 15 minutes.
- 5) Scrape the etching cream back into the jar. Then wash, wash, wash with water to remove any excess cream.
- 6) Remove the vinyl and dry the surface.

What all do I need?

Cutter and software

Vinyl

Vinyl transfer tape

Vinyl weeding tool

Sharp plastic scraper, such as an old credit card

Etching cream

Item to be etched

Masking tape

Soup spoon or spatula

Access to a non-ceramic sink or a large bucket of water

Old towels

Sponge

Which brand of etching cream is the best?

EtchAll is the best. But Armour Etch can also be used. Here are the reasons:

- EtchAll is thicker and, thus, easier to apply, especially on vertical surfaces such as a window.
- EtchAll doesn't contain acid, thus it is less likely to seep under the vinyl or eat away at the vinyl adhesive. This also means that it can be left on far longer, in case you get called away during the waiting time.

- EtchAll is reusable (you scrape the cream back into the jar after using) which helps with the cost. Armour Etch may be as well. But note that EtchAll actually encourages its customers to keep reusing a jar of cream for as long as the product is active.

What brand of vinyl is the best to use?

Any of the regular decal (permanent) vinyl brands should work. Do NOT use wall vinyl (such as Oracal 631) because of the lighter adhesive.

What kinds of items can be etched?

You can etch glass, mirror, ceramic, porcelain, marble and slate. Note that cheap items (jars, old drinking glasses, dollar store glass items, and small inexpensive mirrors) are great for practicing. Also note that expensive crystal may not be etchable due to the high lead content. Apparently, older Pyrex dishes also cannot be etched.

What do I need to know?

Designing:

After you design the pattern, add a rectangle around the design before cutting. This will make it easier to align your design and provide a background from which you'll be weeding out the shapes to be etched. Remember that you're essentially creating a stencil.

Transferring:

After cutting, don't weed, other than removing any excess vinyl around the outside of the rectangle. Then cover the entire rectangle with vinyl transfer tape. Remove the backing sheet from the vinyl and apply to the surface. Using an old credit card (or some other small plastic, sharp-edged tool) press and scrape firmly over and over. You want to make sure the adhesive on the vinyl is pressed down very well. Then remove the transfer sheet.

Weeding:

You want to pick at the middle of an area you want to lift up... not at the edge/cut line. Otherwise, you'll possibly rip the cut line and it'll never lay flat after that. Any edge that isn't flat will get cream underneath and ruin the design.

Hint: Keep the cutting file up on the screen to make it easier to see what shapes need to be weeded out.

If there are little bubbles under the vinyl, they're fine. Just leave them be... unless they are close to an edge. Then use the credit card (or whatever) to get rid of them so that, again, the edge of the vinyl is pressed down really well.

After you get everything weeded, use the scraper to press all of the cut edges to make sure the vinyl is pressed down REALLY well.

Masking:

Next, you want to use masking tape around the outside of the pattern. It's so easy to inadvertently get a tiny bit of etching cream on a spot where you don't want it. So, let's say the mirror is 4 x 4 and your rectangle is like 3 x 3.... you want to take masking tape and cover that extra inch. In other words, the ONLY exposed areas are where the cream should go. If you are etching a wine glass, for example, it's a good idea to cover the entire glass, stem and base, just to be safe.

Applying the Cream:

Place your item on a flat surface. If it's cylindrical, like a jar or drinking glass, fold up an old towel and then press the glass down in the middle so that it's cradled by the sides of the towel.

There's a technique to applying the cream, as well. Use a soup spoon or spatula to apply a very thick layer of cream across the surface. Spread it all in one application... a huge blob of it from one side of the pattern to the other, making sure that all exposed areas are under this blob of cream. You should not be able to see the exposed surface through the cream.

Final Steps:

Wait 15 minutes and use your spoon and scraper to get as much as possible back into the jar.

Then, in a non-ceramic sink, start running water in a strong stream and have a sponge handy. Start rinsing with water and wiping with the sponge... LOTS of water to make sure all of the etching cream is completely gone. Rinse rinse rinse! You can also wash off the cream in a large bucket of water.

After thoroughly rinsing, make sure the jar of cream is closed and put aside. Wash the spoon and scraper really well. Clean the areas around the sink or bucket. Wash your hands well.

Pat dry the etched item a bit with a clean towel (not the one used for cradling) and start pulling off the vinyl and masking tape. Clean any remaining adhesive off the surface and you're done!

Note that EtchAll cream can be either white, cream, or light tan when you open the jar. Exposure to air makes it get darker and darker over time. My Etch All is almost black now... but still works great.

For more information, check out this excellent document:

<http://etchall.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Encyclopedia-of-Etchall.pdf>