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WHICH CRAFT? Three ways to carve and cut Valentine stamps

Carving, cutting and squeezing might not sound like the best ways to handle a tender heart, unless you're making your own heart-shaped stamp to decorate Valentine's Day cards.

Crafting a stamp yourself means you can create whatever image or text you want. Maybe something that combines your name with your beloved's, or a design that highlights a shared memory or interest? I stuck with fairly simple Valentine's Day symbols — a heart, hugs and kisses, and the word "love" — but the options are endless.

Sure, it's easier to just buy a card or print one, but stamps allow greater creativity — you can use metallic ink on dark paper or go for a more rustic look. And if you like the design you created, you can easily make multiple cards for all your friends.

I tried three different approaches. Here's what I found, with each method rated from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating the least expensive, easiest and best results:

CARVING RUBBER

This technique, spotted on the Blitsy Blog (<http://bit.ly/2lcn95>), starts with a kit that includes a sheet of rubber and a carving tool with two tips. The kit costs about \$10, making this the second-most expensive option, though it includes enough rubber to make several small stamps, and the carving tool can be re-used.

To create a stamp, either draw a design on the rubber sheet, or use tracing paper to transfer a design, and then carve away the negative space around the areas you want to be printed. The carving was easier than I expected, though more intricate designs were tricky. I found it helpful to test my stamp on scrap paper and then do a bit more carving to clean up areas I'd missed. The result was a sturdy stamp that produced a fairly consistent image.

Cost: 6

Ease: 7

Results: 7

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CUTTING FOAM

This technique was a win-win: easy, inexpensive and impressive. I first came across it on the Mer Mag blog (<http://bit.ly/11QToZk>) and tweaked it a bit to use the supplies I had on hand.

This method involves cutting shapes out of sheets of craft foam and gluing them onto wooden blocks. I didn't have any blocks, so I used a sturdy sheet of corrugated plastic instead. And while I used scissors to cut out the simple heart shape, I used a craft knife when cutting out the more intricate lettering.

This technique was significantly quicker than the carving rubber technique, and the resulting images stamped more cleanly, without any stray bits of color around the image as there had been with the carving method. The foam was cheap — under a dollar for a letter-size sheet — though it likely won't last as long as the rubber.

Cost: 10

Ease: 9

Results: 8



SQUEEZING CAULK

The website Make: (<http://bit.ly/2kealll>) touts this technique as an easy way to design your own stamps without any carving, but I found it to be a disaster from the start. The basic idea is to outline a shape on plexiglass with clear, silicone caulk, but my first problem was cutting the plexiglass sheet down to size. The instructions call for scoring the plastic and then

snapping it. Maybe I'm weak — but I could not cut the plexiglass no matter how many times I scored it.

The next problem was applying the caulk. I was unable to achieve smooth results. Instead, it was a rather gloppy affair. I tried to outline a heart design and then fill it in, but the caulk was too thick and sticky to smooth out. The result? When I applied paint and then pressed the stamp onto a card, I ended up with a blotchy

mess. The caulk cost about \$7 and the plexiglass sheet cost nearly \$10, making this too expensive even if it had worked.

Cost: 4

Ease: 3

Results: 2

Courtesy of Holly Ramer
Associated Press

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