

Flower Garden Tiles

Easily make flower tiles with clay, plaster, and liquid watercolors

(art + science)

Influenced by the work of contemporary clay artist Chris Garofalo, these beautiful plant-inspired tiles focus on texture and structure. A clay artist and avid gardener living in Illinois, Garofalo's first sculptures were inspired by garden plants breaking through the soil in the spring: uncurling, splitting, sprouting, evolving, and adapting — thus reinventing themselves over and over.

The intimate nuances of the plant world are captured through simply pressing and carving in clay. Students gather various plants and flowers and study their anatomy such as leaf shapes, margins, and arrangements. Are leaves needle-like, scale-like, palmate, or whorled? Look closely at the stems, buds, and roots to find whole worlds of detail including stamens, pistils, petals, and sepals. Notice how the petals attach. Do they overlap, or sit across from each other?

After plant details have been pressed and carved into clay, plaster is poured into the carving and then colored with liquid watercolors.

GRADES K-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View the artwork of Chris Garofalo.
2. Investigate plant and/or flower anatomy.
3. Cover tables with canvas.

Process

1. Make a sketch of a plant or flower detail in extreme closeup. Alternately, sketch the whole leaf, flower, or plant.
2. Using a 1" thick piece of wood, or a canvas cross brace (see materials list) and a rolling pin, roll a pound of clay into a slab approximately one inch thick. Press a 4" traditional profile canvas into the clay, canvas side down, being careful to keep it level. This will act as the border for the plaster casting. Press down approximately 1/2" into the clay.
3. Within the 4" x 4" square, use tools to carve and/or press into the clay. Make borders or textured areas. Remember that the carved areas will protrude out from the final piece.



Materials (required)

Amaco[®] Stonex White Clay, 25-lb (33247-1025) or Blick[®] White Moist Talc Firing Clay, 25-lb (30534-1025); need one pound per student
Blick Premier[®] Traditional 7/8" Profile Cotton Canvas, 4" x 4" (07140-0044); share 4 across class
Best[®] Medium-Duty Cross Brace, 12" (07209-3012); share 4 pairs (8 total) among class
Rolling Pin, wooden, 8" (30345-1008); share 4 among class
Blick[®] Pottery Plaster No. 1, 25-lb box (33536-1025)
Boxwood Clay Tools, set of 10, 6" (30304-1069); share 3 sets among class
Mini Ribbon Clay Sculpting Set, 6 tools (30321-1009); share 3 sets among class
Blick[®] Liquid Watercolors, assorted colors, 8-oz (00369-); share at least 3 colors among class
Blick[®] Scholastic Short Handle Golden Taklon Flat Wash, set of 4 brushes (05859-0049); share six sets among class

Optional Materials

Coated Aluminum Wire, 11-1/2 gauge, 50-ft coil (33404-2050)
Hippie Hemp[™], 20-lb, 1mm, 380-ft (61532-8221)





Step 1: Roll out a 1" thick slab of clay and impress 4" x 4" canvas into it, pressing evenly from all sides.



Step 2: Using various carving tools, carve a design, avoiding and repairing any undercuts.



Step 3: Pour the mixed plaster into the recessed tile. When set, remove the clay. Color the plaster tile with liquid watercolors or leave as is.

Process, continued

4. With leftover clay, make coils to build a wall approximately 1" high all around the four sides of the carving to hold the wet plaster. Make sure the seams are tight and smooth.
5. Mix the plaster by filling a plastic cup with one cup of water and adding plaster to the cup until a small island of plaster forms above the water. Stir with a fork until the plaster is creamy and smooth.
6. Pour the plaster carefully into the carved area halfway up the coils of clay. Let the plaster harden (approximately one hour). Remove the damp clay from the plaster casting. This clay can be used again for this process, if kept moist. Do not fire the clay in a kiln after contact with the plaster. If the plaster casting will be hung on a wall, insert a wire loop or a piece of twine into the plaster while it is still wet to form a hanging loop.
7. When the plaster casting is thoroughly dry, paint with Blick Liquid Watercolors, or leave as is.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

K-4 Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

9-12 Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

Content Standard #2 — Using knowledge of structures and functions.

K-4 Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

5-8 Students select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

9-12 Students demonstrate the ability to form and defend judgments about the characteristics and structures to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art

