

DIY Well Dressing Recipe!

The Ingredients:

For the base:

- A wooden frame (if using a large frame, tack some nails into the base so the clay has got something to grip onto. Please bear in mind the weight of the packed frame and make sure the base is very secure! Strong helpers will be needed to lift the frame afterwards when it goes on show). Plates can be used for mini well dressings or for practice runs.
- Fresh, red clay (not grey china clay as this will dry out too quickly)
- Water and damp towels
- A bucket for puddling
- Wooden chip forks (broken in half length ways)
- Tracing paper and needles (optional)
- Plastic sheeting and/or newspaper
- Lots of friends to help!

For the topping:

- Peppercorns
- Petals (Gerbera are ideal. Avoid carnations as they are too delicate)
- Egg shells (good for skin tones if people are in your design)
- Sheep wool (good for fluffy clouds or sheep!)
- Leaves
- Anything natural - let your imagination go wild!

Method:

- Cover the floor with plastic or newspaper. Get a table at a good working height as there will be a lot of stooping over! Cover this with plastic too as it's a messy job to begin with and place the wooden frame flat on top.
- 'Puddle' the clay (knead it so it's squishy and soft). Add water if you need to, but don't make the clay too wet or it'll damage the petals) and pack into the frame. Smooth the top with a pallet knife (or something similar) so it's like a freshly plastered surface (or if you're feeling really adventurous, do some sections in raised mounds to create a 3d effect).

- Gently draw your design (don't dig in) on the clay using the chip forks. You may want to sketch your drawing onto tracing paper first, then lay this over the clay and prick the design through using a needle.
- Gently press in peppercorns along the out lines of the sketch leaving a mm of space in between each one to allow for expansion! Don't dig them in too deep. Just a very light press so they adhere to the clay.
- In a painting by numbers style, start to 'colour in' the design using your selection of natural products. When petalling, start from the bottom and place the petals in neatly, slightly overlap ping rows (like roof tiling with the row above slightly overlapping the one below). Pluck each petal individually from the flower head (very carefully so you don't bruise or crush it) and place on the clay with the coloured tip downward. Use the broken chipfork to gently poke and slide the pointed end into the clay (don't jab down, or it'll stick up!). Egg shell, stones and other natural products can just be poked into position (again, gently and not too deeply) using the chip fork or just clean fingers.
- Regularly wipe your chip fork and fingers clean on the damp towel to avoid getting clay on top of the design.
- Have fun and keep the ancient art of well dressing well and truly alive!
- To keep your well dressing fresh, give it a very light spray of water. This will help keep the petals and clay hydrated.
- When finished, put on display and enjoy the view.
- Well dressings will last up to 5 days before the clay starts to dry and crack. When your display is passed its best, scrape off the design and recycle your clay by soaking it in water.