



Overview to working with Shrink Plastic

Shrink plastic is a great art and crafts medium that children age from 5 and upwards simply love to work with.

What is it exactly?

You simply draw a picture onto a piece of shrink plastic, cut it out, and heat it to shrink it. As the plastic is heated it shrinks down up to 45% smaller than the original materials. So the fine detail you are able to create on the plastic is quite amazing. Once shrunk the plastic is also very durable so it is possible to make decorative pieces of jewellery and other novelty items.

About the plastic

It can be purchased at art and craft shops or on the Internet. It comes in various finishes including un-sanded, sanded, black, white, frosted, and clear.

Note: it is best to buy ready sanded plastic if possible; otherwise you will have to sand it yourself using 320-400grade wet and dry paper for the best results. However, it is not necessary to sand the clear plastic or it will have a frosted rather than clear appearance when shrunk.

Creating the drawing on the plastic

Each sheet of shrink plastic feels like a sheet of paper or card before it is heated. One side of the card has a slightly rough surface (which is the best side to draw on), and you can use almost any pens or pencils to draw your design onto the plastic which makes it ideal for all kinds of craft projects.

Once you are happy with the design you have made on the plastic then you cut it out. If you wish to make a piece of jewellery or a tag from your piece of plastic then make a small hole into the plastic before it is shrunk as making holes after shrinking is very difficult.

Which pens, pencils and inks work best?

Almost all pens, pencils and inks will produce good results. However, here are some that we have found work particularly well:

- Glitter Gel Pens – these produce a lovely glittery effect that looks stunning and adds some dazzle to your piece!
- Glaze Pens – these are very good for colouring in or for writing message. The ink intensifies in depth when shrunk down producing really vivid results, and they are also good for drawing on most types of plastic.

- Watercolour Pencils – all coloured pencils work well but we have found the watercolour pencils produce particularly good results.
- Rubber Stamping – most rubber stamping inks work well also.

Rubber Stamping the Plastic

One good way of creating an outline design on your plastic is to use a rubber stamp and ink. If you create an outline with a rubber stamp and black ink, it is then possible to colour it in using the different types of pens and pencils mentioned above.

Bigger stamps work better due to the loss of size in the shrinking process.

Tracing pictures and wording onto plastic

If you use frosted plastic you can place an image, or typed wording in a font of your choice beneath the plastic and then trace the design or wording onto the plastic.

Remember if using wording to print off your words in a larger font to allow for the shrinking and to ensure it is legible when shrunk down in size.

Heating and shrinking the plastic

The plastic may be heated in an oven, or it is possible to use a specialist heat gun (that retail from between £7 and £20). As you heat the plastic it will start to shrink down in size and your design will also shrink down in size.

CAUTION: An adult should undertake the heating process when using a heat gun.

Here are a few tips on the heating process:

- Always use a protective mat (such as a heat resistant cutting mat) to place the plastic onto when shrinking it
- Try to heat the plastic as evenly as possible, if it starts to curl try moving the heat under the curl to help it to uncurl.
- Occasionally you may find that one part of your piece has curled over and has stuck to another part and won't uncurl. Whilst heating gently pull it apart using your cocktail stick.
- When using cocktail sticks to uncurl or hold your piece use a very gentle touch as the plastic is very soft when heated and will make easily.
- To create a very flat finish, flip the plastic over in the last seconds of heading. It is also possible to place a piece of paper over it and press it down gently using a flat object such as a book
- Always let the plastic cool after heating before handling