

# PLANT POUNDING *with a Twist*

by *Bonnie Lucas*



PRETTY IN PINK, 16" x 23", by Bonnie Lucas

Many of you may remember a technique from several years ago called flower or plant pounding. This is the process of infusing the actual pigment from plants into the fibers of the fabric. The basic plant pounding technique is actually a fairly simple one, but I want to share with you how to take this old technique to a whole new level using Pigma Micron pens, Derwent Inktense pencils and thread sketching. These poundings make lovely decorative wallhangings or framed flower quilts for unique gifts, especially for the gardener in your life. This technique has a couple of advantages: no two poundings ever look alike plus it is a new way to appreciate and preserve nature's beautiful plants!

## Fabric

The plant pounding fabric needs to be pre-treated to remove any sizing and make the fabric more receptive to the pigment released from the plants. I prefer a medium grade off-white muslin. I like medium grade because it gives a bit of texture to the piece. If you use too tight of a weave, you lose that. The fabric needs to be a solid neutral fabric so your pounding won't blend into the background. Use Bubble Jet Set to pre-treat your fabric or buy fabric prepared for dyeing (PFD).

One of the things I discovered that works so well with this process is Glad Press 'n' Seal. Put a piece of Press 'n' Seal on the wrong side of the muslin so no pigment in the plant bleeds through during the pounding. Make sure there are no creases in your fabric before proceeding.

## Plants

I want to encourage everybody to look at all plants with a new eye for this technique. You don't have to use only flowers and leaves out of a garden or from house plants (although I definitely use those as well.) Think about mixing leaves with other flowers. Definitely don't overlook plants along the roadside including weeds. Remember that some of the ugliest weeds can become some of the prettiest poundings!

In general, leaf colors will usually stay close to their original color after pounding. However, the colors from flowers will more than likely change sub-

stantially on your fabric after the pounding is done. Red flowers tend to turn shades of maroon or purple. Orange and yellow flowers will turn a shade of light brown. Pink flowers tend to stay very light pink or light brown. Purple flowers normally stay pretty true to their original color. I don't worry about what color the pounding may turn out to be – I let it tell me what it wants to be. If you're concerned about the colors you may get, do some test poundings on a scrap of muslin first. Just remember to have enough of that plant for your main project since you can only use that particular leaf or flower one time.

Move the flowers and leaves around on your muslin until you are satisfied with the arrangement. Place the leaves vein-side-down on the right side of the muslin. Place the right side of the flower against the right side of the fabric. You will get better results by leaving a little space between petals and leaves. You may have to pull the flower apart to get more separation between the petals. I often choose plants with imperfections. This leads to more interesting results. Use painter's tape to temporarily hold the plants where you want.



Ready for pounding

## Pounding

After arranging your plants, carefully place another piece of Press 'n' Seal over the top of the muslin. This will seal even the smallest plant pieces in place until you get the pounding done.

Lay the pounding sandwich right-side down on a solid surface such as old cutting board or a block of wood with a magazine on top. Using a hammer (I

prefer a tack hammer but a regular hammer will work as well) tap lightly at first to see how much pigment comes out of your plant. Pound around the edges of the plant and work your way in. You will be able to see the progress of your piece as you continue pounding. (It's also a great stress reliever!) Once you are happy with the pounding, carefully remove both layers of the Press 'n' Seal, along with the remains of the plant, and discard. The muslin pounding will be wet at this time so lay it out flat to completely dry. When dry, there will most likely be remnants of the plant still adhered to the fabric. Just use your fingernail to scrape off the excess, then heat set the piece well with a dry iron.

Although I hope you love your pounding at this point, it is more than likely that the first thing you're going to think that your pounding is boring. Notice how the leaves in my pounding are non-descript. Well, this is where we begin our journey to the next level!



Pounded leaf

### Adding definition & color

To give the piece more definition, use a black Pigma Micron pen to outline the flowers, leaves and vines. *Tip: Iron a piece of freezer paper to the wrong side of your pounding; this will keep the muslin flat and firm and also keep the Pigma pen from bleeding through to your table.* Give the piece a more free flow look by not following the outline of the colors exactly. Notice how the colors from the plant often go outside of the

pen lines. Also, use the pen to break the plant colors into smaller flowers, if need be, and add veins to the leaves. Sometimes there may be no coloring where a stem should go. Draw it in anyway and later I'll tell you how to make it look like a real stem. *Editor's note: Photo below shows background quilting which will actually not be added until later.*



Leaf with penned outline

Now use the Inktense pencils to give color, shading, and definition. It was a light bulb moment for me the first time I used these pencils! They also produce a 'watercolor' effect on fabric.



Colored and shaded

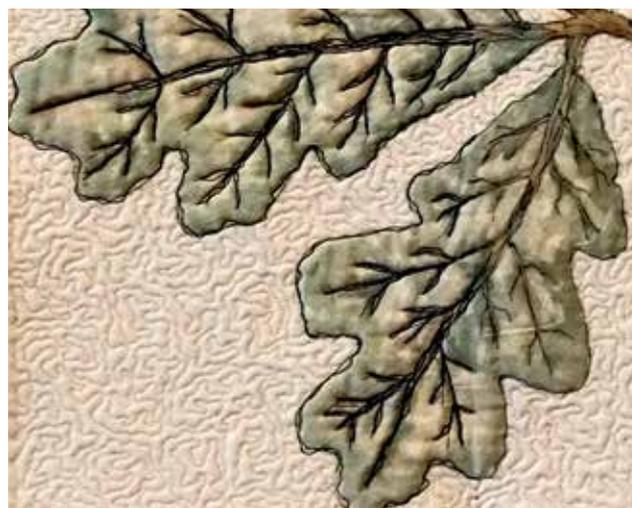
Sometimes I use the pencils dry and other times, with water. Use as you would a colored pencil but don't apply the pencils very heavily at first, you want to build on the color. Once you have applied your dry Intense pencils, take a small, scruffy paint brush, dip it in water, and dab the excess. Then use your paint brush to go over your Inktense pencil lines. You will notice your colors become much more vibrant! Continue working in this manner blending one color into another. Leave quite a bit of the original plant area untouched as well so you get a wonderful mixture of the original pigment from the plants plus the Inktense colors. Remember the stem that I mentioned earlier that may not have any color? Just use your Intense pencils to blend color in with the rest of the original stem and magically you have the stem the length you want!

Be careful not to get too much water on your fabric as you're working—that might make your colors run where you don't want them. Less water is better, and then add to it if need be. Work from the center of flowers or leaves where you want the most color to the outermost sections. For example, work from the main vein in the leaves to the smaller ends of the veins. You can also add more color if you want at this time. It is all right to add more Intense pencil to your design even if your work is still damp. You can also press with a dry iron before adding more Inktense if you like, just make sure that all the Press 'n' Seal and freezer paper has been removed. Continue until you are happy with the colors in your design. Heat set with a dry iron.

### Quilting & finishing

Add borders if you wish. Make a quilt sandwich of backing, batting, and pounded fabric. Quilt the background as you normally would.

The last step in building a pounding project is machine thread sketching using a black rayon thread on the top and bobbin. Set up your machine for free motion quilting and randomly stitch following the Pigma pen outlines that you drew earlier. Be careful not to follow the lines very closely. This will give more texture and interest to your design. You may also want to fill in an area a little more with your black thread if it still needs more definition.



Stitched leaf

Add binding and a sleeve for a beautiful one of a kind wallhanging! Check out my directions for a framed plant pounding at [AmericanQuilter.com](http://AmericanQuilter.com).



In the mid 1980s, **Bonnie Lucas** and her husband started a fabric store business in Ohio. Many of their customers were Mennonite or Amish and encouraged them to carry quilting materials and her love of quilting began. Ten years ago, they moved to North Carolina where Bonnie's quilting enthusiasm has continued to grow. For more information, visit [www.MountainViewsDesigns.com](http://www.MountainViewsDesigns.com).