



*FLOWER ARTIST SERIES*

## **Introduction to Fabric Flower Making: What You Need to Know Before You Start**



**PresentPerfect Creations studio, 2015**



[www.presentperfectcreations.com](http://www.presentperfectcreations.com)

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# INTRODUCTION TO FABRIC FLOWER MAKING: What You Need To Know Before You Start



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Svetlana Faulkner is one of the UK's leading designers of art flowers made with fabric and genuine leather employing advanced techniques. Following her extensive training with some of the experts in the craft from Russia and Japan, she has founded the PresentPerfect Creations studio.

Svetlana successfully juggles parenting, gardening, cooking and her passionate devotion at PresentPerfect Creations. She is the creative force behind it. In fact, she is involved in the whole process of producing flower pieces from design to material selection through to actual making and assembling elements into a finished piece.



All PresentPerfect Creations items are made from scratch. Most of them are hand dyed which is why the studio is able to offer a stunning range of flower accessories. The collection includes hand crafted intricate hair adornments, headbands, hairpieces and cocktail hats, brooches and corsages, necklaces, shoe clips, young girls hair accessories and so much more.

Svetlana is inspired by the colour and form of flowers in nature, the arts and fashion. She is constantly challenging and perfecting her techniques to ensure each and every creation is made to Svetlana's own exacting standards of excellence.



PresentPerfect Creations pieces are made with absolute attention to detail and fine craftsmanship. This is why they appeal to the discerning individuals, who appreciate originality and quality.

After starting with an Etsy shop back in 2011 and developing her skills through hard work, experimentation and study, Svetlana launched her own website three years later. As well as creating beauty she also shares her knowledge with anyone who wishes to learn. She has .pdf as well as video tutorials to offer to those who wish to perfect their skills in

flower making be it a novice with very little experience or a professional milliner. For more information on tuition please visit <http://presentperfectcreations.com/tuition/>



## FOREWORD

Man has always sought to preserve the ephemeral qualities of the flower. To achieve this he has strived to imitate the natural perfection and beauty of living flowers whether it be painting them on canvas or making them out of paper or fabric.

The aim of this book is to introduce you to the world of fabric flowers, describe the necessary tools and supplies as well as talk about where fabric flowers can be used and how one can learn to make them.



You might have never heard anything about fabric flowers before. Once I was like that too. But after I have attended my first class and created my first fabric flower (it was a poppy) I was hooked. I could not stop. More than three years later I still get a tremendous thrill from making flowers using fabric. The flowers I make are not artificial. I see them as much an art form as a painting or a piece of sculpture. They are not a mere substitute for real flowers, but artistic creations. What's more all of them are wearable pieces of art that you can take with you wherever you go. Do not wait for a special occasion, let yourself wear a flower every day, simply choose the one that reflects your mood at that moment in time. Beautiful flowers need to be worn, seen and admired!



## HANDMADE FLOWERS: ORIGINS, HISTORY AND CURRENT TRENDS

Some people have rather negative associations with the expression “silk flowers”. Their mind immediately conjures up pictures of some cheap factory blooms which are a poor copy of their natural counterparts let alone any art flower. We are going to be talking about fabric flowers at a completely different level.



The art of flower making has a long history. The first man-made flowers were crafted from papyrus. These decorations were known to Egyptian women as far back as 3000 BC. Then Roman and Greek ladies started wearing hand made flowers as well. In medieval Spain and Italy monasteries became the centres of artificial flower manufacturing as these flowers were extensively used for decorating temples.

In the heyday of the Rococo and Empire styles man-made flowers penetrated the world of fashion becoming an important accessory for special occasions.

Classical school of making fabric flowers dates back to 1655, the year when the Dominican monks first began to use gelatine to stiffen fabrics that were then used for making flowers. Sizing fabric with hot gelatine solution revolutionised the art of creating flowers. Up to that moment fabric flowers in Europe were mainly produced by curling ribbons into a ball shaped or a flat rosette and were used for adorning ladies' hair and outfits. Usually such ribbon flowers were used to hide small glass containers for perfume or perfume oil.



By the late 18th century Italy, France, Bohemia, Saxony and Switzerland became the main suppliers of artificial flowers. Innovations in the art of making flowers out of fabric followed: specialized tools, new fabric dyeing technologies etc. And during the 19th century artificial flowers firmly took their pride of place on bodices, skirts, hats, fans, umbrellas, lapels of ladies and gentlemen.

The language of flowers also gained popularity at that time in Europe. Using particular flowers in a variety of colours gave the opportunity for men as well as women to express their emotions, flirt, arrange dates, declare their love in a secret manner communicating with each other at high society receptions.



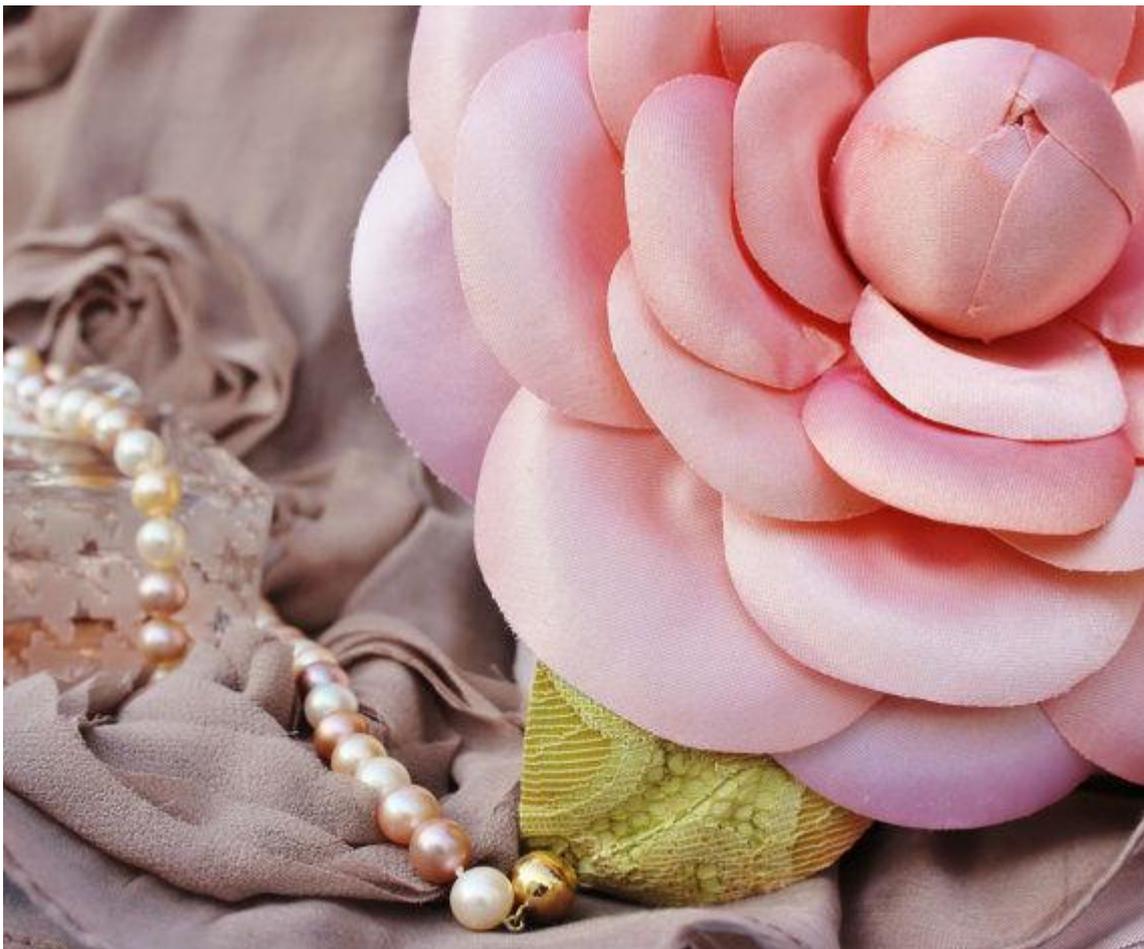
With the advent of the Industrial Revolution artificial flower making moved into factories, where flowers were produced in bulk to satisfy the ever growing demand in them.

In the middle of the 19th century each clothes or hat shop had their own skilled workers that were in charge of making flowers.

To this day, decorating with flowers has not lost its appeal. Luxurious floral arrangements bring a special touch to interior design and ceremonial events are rarely complete without flowers on clothes, hats or purses.

Perhaps you have noticed that all the latest fashion collections feature large and small flowers as brooches, hairpieces or hat embellishments. To really push the limits and come up with new ideas designers decorate shoes with flowers or arrange them around necks as necklaces etc.

Generally speaking, women love flower accessories for their beauty, diversity and colour.



Another area where fabric flowers are always in high demand is the wedding industry. The possibilities for fabric flowers for weddings are

endless: hairpieces, necklaces and bracelets, dress trimmings, accessories for the mother of the bride, the bridal party and flowergirls, boutonniere for the groom etc. The bride can even opt for a fabric flower bouquet particularly if she is allergic to pollen or would love to have it as a keepsake of this important day in her life.

Currently, the art of fabric flower making is experiencing a revival in the world of fashion and is attracting a large army of fans. Recently just a hobby, it is now becoming a professional occupation for some artists. We are about to discover new stars rising in the world of fabric flower making. One of those stars could be you.



## SUPPLIES FOR MAKING FABRIC FLOWERS

To be able to make art fabric flower you will require a number of tools as well as a selection of fabrics and other materials. Some of the supplies are necessary to make all the flowers whilst others are used for making specific ones only.

### **Fabrics for making flowers**

I would like to start with the fabric as it is the most important ingredient when it comes to creating fabric blooms.



If I had to describe the fabric used in flower making the way I do it in one word is to say “natural”. And this is true: any fabric made of natural fibres is going to be suitable. Natural fibres can be classified according to their origin. The vegetable, or cellulose-base, class includes such important fibres as cotton, flax, and jute; the animal, or protein-base, fibres include wool, mohair, and silk. I also include synthetically



produced fabrics from natural fibres such as rayon and viscose (they are made of cellulose). Sometimes these are called semi-synthetic.

With some limitation we can use mixed fabrics, where natural fibres are combined with synthetic ones as in the case of lace.

There are some very good reasons for using natural fabrics:

- ✓ They are easily dyed
- ✓ They withstand hot temperatures of the flower iron
- ✓ They shape beautifully and artistically
- ✓ They are pleasant to work with
- ✓ They look and feel luxurious

Some common types of fabrics that are widely used in flower making are cotton poplin, cotton velvet, cotton denim, silk satin, silk organza, silk habutai, silk dupioni, silk crepe de Chine, silk velvet etc. Before starting work on a flower make sure that your fabric is sized, i.e. stiffened with a special solution of your choice. Sizing the fabric will prevent the edges of petals from fraying but most importantly flower parts (petals, leaves etc.) will hold their shape and keep the texture after having been tooled with the help of a flower iron.

There are a number of recipes for a stiffening solution to be used in the art of flower making. Some are quite simple (just gelatine or wallpaper glue), others are more complex and involve a number of different ingredients. I am sharing some of them with you in the Appendix at the end of this book.

As an alternative to sizing fabrics yourself, another option is to buy industrially pre-stiffened fabrics. These ready-to-use fabrics come mainly from Japan, where fabric flower making is not just a craft but a



whole art. Pre-stiffened fabrics are great to work with, they are smooth and stiff, they colour beautifully even when layered 2 or 4 times. They have been tried and tested by dozens of silk flower artists. A selection includes differently textured fabrics such as pure cotton and silk ones as well as rayon and viscose mixed fabrics. The main drawback of such fabrics is that they are every difficult to come by and rather costly. So if you can not obtain any factory stiffened fabric for your project you can always size some natural fabrics yourself.



To begin with you will need at least 3 types of fabric:

1. Very thin (silk organza, silk pongee) – for lining leaves, petals etc and wrapping stems
2. Medium (silk habutai, silk crepe de Chine, thin silk satin) – for petals
3. Heavy (heavy silk satin or dupioni, cotton velvet, cotton poplin) – for leaves



You can purchase pure silk fabrics at large department stores, dedicated craft stores or online. Google batik suppliers in your area or country, they usually have a decent choice of affordable silk fabrics which are perfectly suitable for making fabric flowers.



### **Fabric Dyes**

Unless your project is about making a completely white flower you will need some fabric dyes to paint the petals and leaves.

We paint petals and leaves that have been cut out of stiffened fabric.

There are a number of dyes available that will suit your needs. The main thing to keep in mind is that we work with aniline dyes, not acrylic dyes. Acrylic dyes create a coat of paint on top of the fabric thus stiffening the material even further; they can leave marks and stains; hot tools might stick to the surface of the fabric etc.

Fabric (or silk as some of them are called) dyes come in either a concentrated liquid form, or as dry powder.



The brands to look for are Javana silk paints (liquid water-based dyes), Procion MX dyes by various manufacturers including Jacquard, Kemtex, Colourcraft and some Japanese brands (come in a powder form to be diluted with cold water) and most other dyes suitable for batik. As a rule, colour charts of each brand contain a wide range of colours offering us from 10 to 70+ vibrant colours. All colours are intermixable, and from my experience not only within one brand but between different brands too.



Truth be told to paint flowers you do not have to possess 70 jars with different colours although this is very tempting I admit. To start, you will need the primary colours (yellow, blue and red) and black. With time you might want to add more colours to your colour range such as olive green, dark green, brown, grey, pink, purple, lemon yellow and other colours you like, that appeal to you and your vision of fabric flowers.



Instructions for the aniline dyes will explain how to fix them to make them colourfast. With fabric flowers unlike batik, this information is irrelevant and I will explain why. Even if we went through all the trouble of fixing the dyes on petals and leaves, our fabric flower creations will not become waterproof, and, when they come into contact with water they will lose their shape altogether which makes colour fixing a futile operation.

You will not find pure white colour within the colour range of aniline dyes. So, when you need to make the dye lighter you just add some more water. This can be tricky and sometimes makes colour matching quite challenging. Different fabrics can accept the same colour very differently, so if you are trying to match a colour it is always recommended to paint a swatch, let it dry and then compare the



results, You might need to repeat this several times until you have got the colour right. But the more you experiment with colour mixing the better you become at it.



## TOOLS FOR MAKING FABRIC FLOWERS

Many of the tools that are required for flower making might be found at home or at your craft room or a workshop. Some can be substituted by others and can often be a matter of personal preference.

In nature flower petals and leaves have different textures and shapes, which are a part of their natural growth patterns. In fabric flower making we use a number of techniques to reproduce these shapes and textures in an attempt to achieve a natural looking result or create an unusual artistic effect. Some techniques can be done by hand, but most of them require the use of a heated tool designed for this purpose.



These days an electric soldering iron fitted with special flower making interchangeable heads is used to texture and shape petals and leaves.

The majority of flower irons on the market include a 40 or 60 watt handle. For our purposes a 40 watt iron is best, but you can work with a 60 watt iron as well providing you keep an eye at the temperature and switch it off every now and again to avoid overheating and singeing the fabric.

Sets of heads may vary in number and appearance depending on where they are manufactured and what technique they are designed for, European or Japanese. All of them though will include several round or mushroom like tools for cupping petals of different sizes.

Another must have head is a blade or knife which is used for veining leaves (or petals) by scoring them with grooves.

Smooth spoon tool heads are used to make concave hollows that are narrower than those made by the round heads.

Chrysanthemum spoon tools have grooves on the surface ranging from 1 to 3 and are used to make ridges on both petals and leaves.

A head that resembles a rat's tail is used for curling the edges of some petals namely roses.



There are more tool heads that are available for fabric flower artists today but it is difficult to describe their use in a book. Understanding how and when to use a particular tool comes with practice. At the beginning of every tutorial a list of necessary tools is provided. The tutorial itself explains how to use a tool to achieve the required effect.

To be able to work with a hot flower iron you will need to acquire foam pads of different softness. Cover the foam with thin cotton fabric (white or light-coloured) and use them as an ironing surface for shaping petals and leaves. Generally, the deeper the hollow you want to achieve the softer the pad you need to use.



When working with a flower iron is important to remember the following simple safety rules:

- Never touch the element or tip of the flower iron. They can get very hot (up to 400°C) and will burn.
- At all times keep a moistened cloth at your work place to check the iron temperature or to cool it down.



- Always return the flower iron to its stand or a special heat resistant pad when not in use. Never put it down on your work surface.
- Turn the flower iron off or unplug it when not in use to prevent overheating.
- Always check if the temperature is right and not too high on a piece of spare fabric before shaping your elements.
- Unplug the iron before changing heads and use potholders, oven mitts or a pair of pliers to do that.



Online and in books you will come across some ideas of how to substitute the flower making heads with a variety of household tools and objects. Whilst it may be an option if you are only trying this craft or need to make just one or two flowers for a particular occasion, I would not recommend taking that route. Yes, a specialised iron with a set of heads is an expensive piece of equipment to purchase and needs a certain level of skill to operate, that may be out of the range of the average craft person. However, if you plan to make a lot of flowers, or

if you would like to create very real or highly sophisticated flowers you must have a flower iron to be able to do that. See it as an invaluable investment into your craft that will last years. Besides, the enjoyment of working with a set of professional tools which provide a consistent result can not be overrated.

To purchase a flower iron and heads browse the Internet. They are not easy to come by but there are a number of sellers on Ebay, Etsy and other websites. Read the reviews, compare the sets and choose the most reliable seller which offers the widest choice of tool heads. If that seems costly, go for a smaller set which has all the basic heads to start with.



## ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

Apart from fabrics, fabric dyes and a flower iron you will need a range of additional tools and materials most of which you might already have.

1. Sharp scissors for cutting out petals, leaves and other parts. Try not to use these scissors for cutting anything else apart from fabric. This way they will stay sharp for longer.
2. Pliers and wire cutters for bending and cutting wires, flower stems etc.
3. Glue for assembling petals and leaves into finished flowers. I recommend using good quality PVA glue that has a thick consistency and dries clear. Sometimes such glues are marked "Tacky". One of the reliable brands is Sobo. Feel free to experiment with fabric PVA glues available in your area. Ideally you should have two types of PVA glue: a thicker one for gluing petals and other parts together and a slightly thinner one for gluing petals and leaves onto the lining silk. The reason for this that the thinner glue will take a bit longer time to dry, which will allow you to cut out and shape the parts before they become bone dry and stiff.
4. Awl for making small holes in the centre of petals.
5. Tweezers for working with small parts or stamens. Sometimes they are also used during the final assembly process and quite often used for curling petal edges especially in roses.
6. Wire to be used as stems or to reinforce and give structure to petals and leaves. Wire is categorised by the gauge which refers to its diameter (the higher the gauge number the finer the wire).

When making flowers we use paper coated wire primarily in white colour. That allows us to paint wires into any colour we require for our projects. This sort of wire can be found online or in craft stores which sell supplies for sugar flower making (cake department). The most commonly used gauges are #30, #28, #26 and #24.



7. Cotton wool for making flower buds, rose hearts, flower centres.
8. Brushes for painting petals and leaves. It is a good idea to have a number of flat brushes of different widths. When you paint flower parts try to use a separate brush for each dye.
9. Stamens for making flower centres. You can buy factory made stamens in a variety of colours, sizes and shapes. They are usually sold in the same place where you find wire. To start with buy white stamens only in several sizes. You can always dye them in the colour of your choice using the same dyes as for fabric. As in other aspects of flower making process there are some tips and



tricks here too but they are revealed in the course of study. If you wish so you can make stamens from scratch.

10. Newspapers or a roll of plain absorbing paper to be used for painting petals and leaves.
11. Decorative trimmings such as beads, feathers, crystals, gems, veiling etc. - anything that can be used to decorate a flower piece.
12. Card for making strong longer lasting templates
13. Pens, pencils for tracing out the patterns and drawing around the templates.
14. Ruler for measuring supplies as well as finished pieces.
15. Findings for finishing off flowers and turning them into wearable pieces of art. These may include plain headbands, brooch bars, barrettes, hair combs, hair clips, shoe clips etc.

There might be some other supplies and tools that are required when making a particular flower but I tried to mention those that are important and used often. Every tutorial has a list of necessary tools and supplies so you know what to prepare for a particular flower. See an example in the picture below:

### *Materials you will need:*

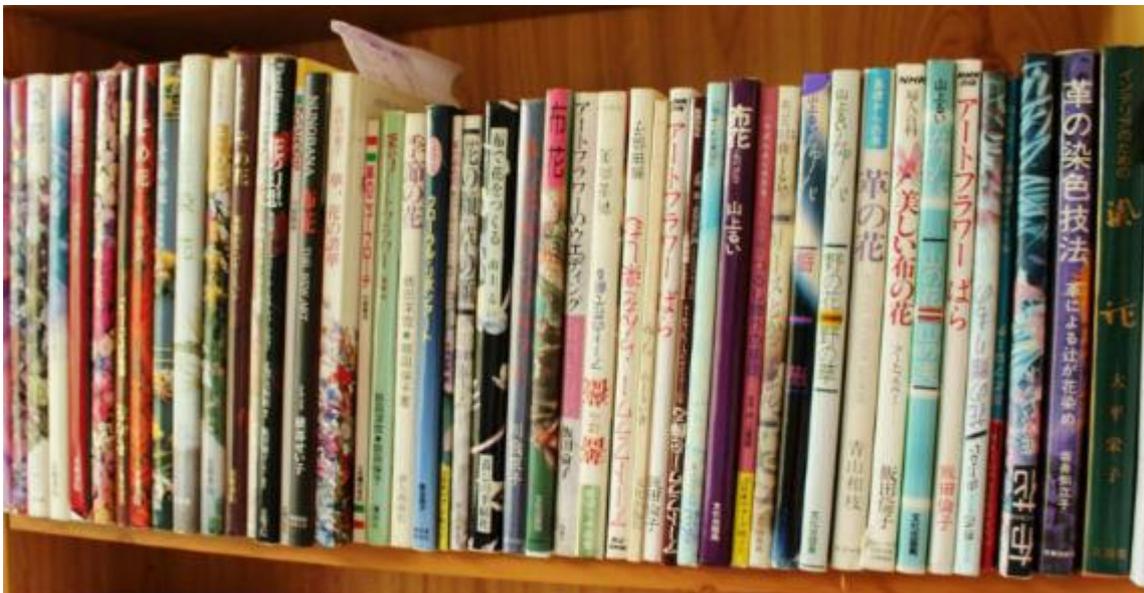
1. White crepe paper
2. Paper wrapped wire
3. Silk for lining and wrapping the headband
4. Stiffened lace
5. Satin ribbon for wrapping the headband
6. PVA glue
7. Ostrich feather
8. Cotton or polyester sewing thread
9. Headband or hair clip
10. Seed beads, embroidery pearls etc.



## WHERE TO LEARN HOW TO MAKE FABRIC FLOWERS

The immediate thought would be instruction books. This is an inexpensive but very time consuming and material consuming way of learning particularly if you are a beginner. Using trial and error method you will perfect your skills by making several samples of the same flower each time improving the result.

Unfortunately, there are very few books available on the subject. The best books I have in my library happen to be Japanese. Even if you are fluent in Japanese you will still spend days studying the written instructions and looking at photos through the magnifying glass in an attempt to catch the evasive beauty of silk blooms created by Japanese artists.

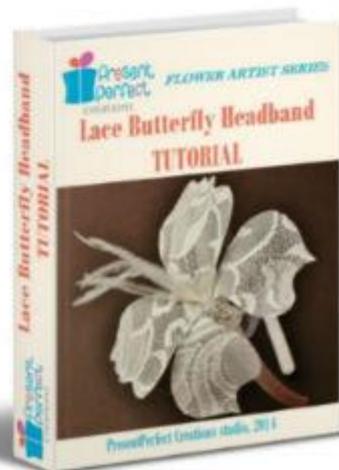
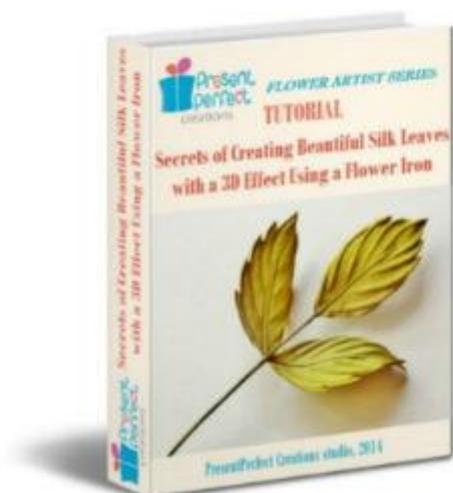
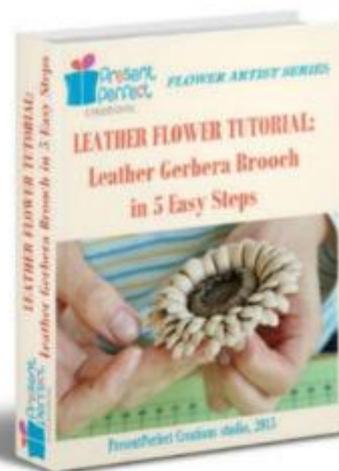
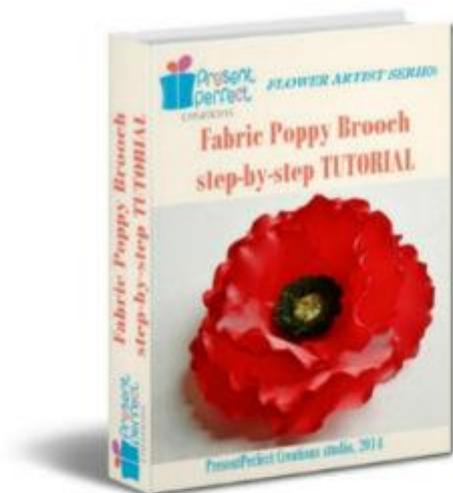


Another option is free tutorials online. There are a number of them, both in text and video format but the flowers that are shown tend to be simple and repetitive.

You might be lucky enough to have a fabric flower artist living in your town. If this is the case you can book a couple of sessions with them

and learn the basics of the craft. This is one of the best ways to learn how to make fabric flowers. Unfortunately these sessions are rather expensive and in most cases to be able to learn from an artist you will have to travel to another town (if not country) which drives up the cost even higher and calls for special travel arrangements.

With all this in mind I can say that probably the most efficient and economical way of learning how to make fabric flowers is via .pdf or video tutorials prepared by a practicing artist who knows their craft inside out. There are very few of such tutorials available and on a limited number of flowers.



At the moment I am working on a series of detailed tutorials on fabric and leather flowers of different complexity.

Every flower has its own templates, particular features and peculiarities of the making process. With a new flower you learn to make you improve and broaden your skills, master a new tool, shape differently using well-known tools, assemble in a new way etc.

Some flowers are easier to make, others can be rather complicated. It is a good idea to move to them after you have mastered making more simple flowers.

Flowers like dandelion and clover require a lot of time and patience.

Scientists have calculated that there are more than 270 000 beautiful flowering plants on the planet Earth so if you are thinking of ever burning out think again!



Where else can you get more information on fabric flower making?



More information can be found on our website at

[www.presentperfectcreations.com](http://www.presentperfectcreations.com)

Feel free to subscribe to our newsletter and do not miss out on new articles containing useful information, release of new tutorials or special offers and discounts.

You can always leave a comment there or contact me with your questions, suggestions, ideas etc. I would be grateful if you let me know what questions regarding making fabric flowers you have got. It will allow me to prepare articles and newsletters which meet your needs. To contact me please use the contact form found on the website or write to me at [enquiries@presentperfectcreations.com](mailto:enquiries@presentperfectcreations.com) I would love to hear from you.



## APPENDIX

### Recipes of stiffening solutions to try

All the fabrics must be stiffened before being cut out. This prevents fraying of the edges and allows you to shape the leaves and petals with the flower iron. It also helps the completed flower keep its shape. There are several different sizing options available. Each of them involves different ingredients giving you a choice of options to try and test.



- One of the most popular options is gelatine sizing. Use powdered gelatine from a reliable manufacturer that you can obtain from your local supermarket. For 200 ml of cold water take 2 level teaspoons of granulated gelatine and place it in a heat resistant glass bowl. Pour the water over it stir and leave to soak for about

1 hour . Generally the concentration depends on the thickness of the fabrics used - the thicker the fabric the less gelatine is needed. This concentration will do for medium-weight fabrics such as satins, crepes, habotai fabrics etc. For organza and chiffon you might want to use a bit more gelatine.

Heat the soaked gelatine over a pot of gently boiling water (bain Marie).Constantly stir until all the granules dissolve and take the solution off the heat before it starts boiling. Then dip a piece of fabric into the solution (please be careful and watch your fingers as it will be boiling hot!), take it out and let it drain for a few moments. Then peg in onto a clothes line to dry completely.

- The oldest stiffening solutions used starch, which you can still use today. Here is a recipe to try. Mix: a tablespoon of cornflour (or cornstarch which is the same) and mix it well with a tablespoon of water. Pour this mixture into 200 ml of boiling water; continue heating and stirring until the mixture has thickened and no lumps appear. Take off the heat and stir in a tablespoon of good quality PVA glue like Sobo. You can apply the stiffening solution by placing a piece of fabric on a flat smooth surface like glass or plastic and using a sponge or a wide flat brush to spread the mixture evenly on the surface of the fabric. If the fabric has a right and a wrong side to it apply the solution onto the wrong side. Then peg in onto a clothes line to dry completely.
- I successfully use spray starch (the one that is used for starching shirt collars) for stiffening such delicate fabrics like velvet and lace. Just spray the wrong side of your chosen fabric until it is well saturated and let it dry completely on a flat surface before using it.





- Another option is to use wallpaper paste as sizing. Following the manufacturers instructions mix some wallpaper paste with water. Apply to a flat piece of fabric with a brush or a sponge and then hang it up to dry.



- White PVA glue can also be used for stiffening fabrics. Here is one of the recipes: Mix 200 ml of warm water with 2 tablespoons of good quality thick PVA glue, stir well and then add a tablespoon of vodka or spirit and give a final stir. To stiffen a piece of fabric dip it into the prepared solution, let it drip and then hand up to dry.

There are other recipes for stiffening solutions one can

prepare. There are also proprietary stiffeners that you can get from craft shops or online.

- One of them which is readily available and can be bought at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) is Stiffy. It is a water based stiffener which means you can experiment with the strength of the solution. I would recommend to start by mixing 1 part of Stiffy with 5 parts of water. Depending on the thickness of your chosen fabric you can vary the proportions and find the perfect solution which works for you.

To save yourself time and effort you can use industrially stiffened fabrics for making flowers. But even if you do so for most of your designs there will be times when you will need to stiffen unusual fabrics for some of your projects like denim, wild silk, linen etc. This is why I recommend to try a couple of solutions mentioned above and choose one that is easy to use, made of readily available ingredients and has shown the best results to utilise in future.

