

Book cloth

Canberra Craft Bookbinder's Guild

Book Cloth Paste Recipe

1 cup Silver Star starch (obtainable at Hawker IGA, check other outlets)

3 cups of water

Soak starch for at least half an hour. Soaking can be done overnight.

Cook on top of stove stirring constantly over low heat with a wooden spoon to prevent lumping. Let the mix come slowly to boil. If the worst happens and you do get lumps resorting to a food processor or blender works OK.

When the mix boils turn down heat and continue stirring until the mix thickens and looks transparent (coating the back of a wooden spoon is also a good way to confirm the texture is right). Pour into a bowl. Dribble, carefully, up to 2 cm of water from tap down side of bowl to cover paste. This prevents a skin forming and protects the paste. Leave to cool in bowl.

When cool, strain mix through fine cloth such as muslin or terylene curtaining on to plate or small paint tray. The process of 'kneading' starts at this point. Pour a small amount of water on to tray/plate and work in water to paste using a brush ensuring that it has no lumps. The result should be a thin fluid paste similar to very runny custard. The paste is ready for use.





Basic equipment & materials

Paste prepared as above.

Perspex, melamine, or glass on which to lay the fabric.

Brushes (house painting brushes of appropriate size are suitable) –one for pasting and one kept dry for brushing out air bubbles.

Rollers are useful for final smoothing but not essential. Small hard rollers used in printmaking or a wallpaper roller are useful for the final smoothing.

Paper for backing. For archival work thin Japanese 'mino' paper is used. For normal use the Chinese paper purchased at Pepe's art stores in rolls for about \$20 or less works well.

Fabric should be cut larger than required and ironed ready for backing. Selvedge cut off or clipped horizontally down its length. Close woven fabric such as that used for patchwork works very well. Loose woven materials can be used but paste sometimes shows through on the right side and needs to be wiped off with damp cloth later. Silk can be backed using this method but a little of its gloss is lost.

Dowels or rulers for transporting the pasted paper to the waiting fabric. If backing a small piece of fabric it is possible to transport the paper by hand. The dowel method, however, puts less stress on the paper.

Technique

Clear and set up workplace with smooth surface such as melamine, perspex or glass on which to lay fabric face down. Either spray or paint back of fabric with water which will ensure that the fabric adheres and lies absolutely flat to the surface.



In a separate area lay out previously cut paper, which is larger than the fabric by at least 2cm all round, ready for pasting. If it is the paper from Pepe's it will have faint laid lines on it which should run with the fabric grain. It should be placed rough side up. Using a large brush, paste it all over. Avoid wrinkles. Paper is very strong. Make sure that there are no brush bristles on the surface and the paper is completely covered with paste.



When pasted use a dowel to pick up paper – turn paste side away from you and take it to the fabric.



Starting about 2cm below the bottom edge of the fabric gently lay the lower edge of paper, paste side down, onto the perspex or melamine surface.



Using a large paint brush and trying not to cause air bubbles, gently tap and fan the paper onto the fabric. If you have too many air bubbles the paper is strong enough to be lifted off and reposition. Move slowly towards the top while fanning and tapping the paper on to the fabric.





When all the paper is laid it can be gently gone over with a roller to smooth out any wrinkles or air bubbles.



The fabric should be completely enclosed all round by the paper. Using this method it will take at least 12 hours to dry. It will need to be cut off around the edges to release it.

A more professional method which ensures that there is no shine on the finished bookcloth is carefully pick up the papers edges and carefully turn over it over so that the fabric is now uppermost. The cloth will take less time to dry.

Alternate paste/pva mix

Using paste is an archival method of making bookcloth and you may find that you are able to part the paper from the fabric when it is dry. When the fabric is finally pasted to cover boards this is not a problem. If this bothers you it is possible to put a small amount of PVA in the paste mix to give a firmer hold. However, using the paste method, provided there are no major air bubbles, gives cloth a nice hand and when pasted or glued to boards it has a firm appearance that wears well without any further attention.

Tips

For those who find the use of dowels to transport the pasted paper difficult the use of *mylar* is an alternative. Place paper on to a piece of mylar which is at least 1 cm larger all round and paste ready for adhering to fabric. Using this method the paper sticks to the *mylar* on its upasted side. You then pick up the *mylar* with the pasted paper attached and transport to the fabric. Use the same method of application and then peel off the *mylar*.

Another method of protecting the fabric (used by professionals) is to place a piece of terylene under the bookcloth fabric. 1) Wet the terylene; 2) place fabric on top and wet it also and proceed as above. In this procedure you turn the whole package over at the end with fabric facing upward and peel off terylene.

Using the simple method with loosely woven fabric the finished bookcloth may have a shiny appearance. This can be taken care of with a damp cloth or even a gentle scrub with a brush after slightly dampening the cloth.

Some bookbinders put PVA in the paste and this makes a much more secure, but less archival, bookcloth. PVA/starch works well and it lasts longer in the jar. Some recipes use up to a third PVA. You will need to test PVA/starch mixes to see what suits best.

It is possible to do quite large pieces of fabric but the larger the piece of fabric the more difficult to keep out air bubbles and while the paper is strong larger pieces are harder to manipulate.

If you run short on paper it is possible to use two pieces and make an overlap which will be seamless when the cloth is dry.

Reference

Kojiro Ikegami's book *Japanese Bookbinding: Instructions from a Master Craftsman*, has detailed instructions which are a little more complicated. At the end of the process he turns his fabric over so it faces upwards – this would facilitate drying.