

Harnessing the Sun's Energy for Art

By Nicholl Spence

While browsing a lovely fabric store near our family cottage I happened upon the art of nature's photography: Cyanotype printing. Cyanotype printing uses the sun's UV light to create photographic results on paper or fabric. You create your artwork using foliage from an assortment of plants, berries and stems. Cyanotype is a UV-light-sensitive emulsion that I purchased from the small shop near my cottage, but I have also seen it available on Amazon. Cyanotype can be purchased as a two-bottle sensitizer set or pretreated fabric sheets. The resulting artwork creates deep blue and white images and was historically used for blueprints in the mid 1800s.

Discovering this process, I quickly got to work and gathered an abundance of different materials for my designs.

To begin, I used sprigs of lavender, several maple leaves and maple keys. This project can be exposed on paper or fabric and I chose to use pieces of cotton muslin. I used the two-part Cyanotype mixture and when I mixed part A

with part B, the liquid was activated and became sensitive to sunlight (UV light).

In a dark room, I used a foam brush to evenly coat the muslin with the Cyanotype liquid and then covered the fabric with parchment paper and set it in a dark room free from UV light to allow the fabric to dry.

Using an old picture frame with the glass removed, I laid my prepared muslin onto the board and arranged my garden leaves on top of the muslin. I then sandwiched everything with the glass to keep the leaves flat to the muslin and placed my frame outside in direct sunlight. Depending on the day and the intensity of the sun, you may need to leave your cyanotype in sunlight for 15 minutes to one hour. You will know the photographic process is working because when you lift a side of the leaf it will appear darker than the exposed sunlit areas. This is a similar result to what you would see in photographic silkscreening. When you see this contrast, take your frame inside, remove the glass and leaves and continually run your muslin under water until the water runs clear. Allow your muslin to dry and iron out the creases.

I am thrilled with my



▲ An assortment of leaves and maple keys is arranged on the UV-sensitive prepared muslin cloth.

results and plan to sew my pieces of muslin together to create a re-usable market bag. Feel free to write us and let us know what you created with your Cyanotype!

Follow Along

You can find how-to tutorials on my YouTube channel @FarmhouseStudioOnFifth.

Nicholl Spence is a freelance graphic designer who works from her rural farmhouse home office in Erin. Among her work is the design and layout for this magazine.



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▲ From exposure to final artwork, the above image shows the final result.



▲ Above two examples of rinsed, dried and ironed muslin after exposure. Once rinsed and dried the exposed areas are vibrant, deep blue with the unexposed areas remaining the colour of the fabric. The result may resemble tie-dyeing.

◀ This image shows the contrast in colour you will see after exposure to sunlight.



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