

MAKE IT YOURSELF  
PIERCED-TIN ORNAMENTS



*Skill Development:  
Tin Piercing*

 Lee Valley

# MAKE IT YOURSELF

## PIERCED-TIN ORNAMENTS

#LVMadeByMe #LVLetsDoSomething

### **Skill Development: Tin Piercing**

Get into the Holiday spirit by making these pierced-tin ornaments with your family and friends. The kit includes three templates to fabricate six ornaments, but you can certainly create your own designs. While it takes little time to learn and do, tin piercing is a skill that is certain to strike your imagination. Your tinsmithing journey begins with learning how to pierce holes in 5 1/2" × 5 1/2" tin-plated steel sheets with two different punches and an 8 oz ball-peen hammer. Once the design has been punched, you will then safely cut them to shape with a pair of our clamshell scissors (while wearing a pair of zero-friction ultra-suede gloves to ensure you don't cut yourself on the sharp edges). Six ornament hooks are included, making it almost effortless to put your ornaments on display where they are sure to be noticed.

**Warning:** *What begins as piercing a pattern of holes in tin-plated steel sheets can become an addictive new pursuit. Inevitably, you will be inspired to incorporate this decorative technique into many other projects.*

**Skill Level:** Beginner to intermediate. 10+

**Time to Complete:** 3 to 6 hours



# CONTENTS

- Tin-plated steel sheets (6), 5 1/2" × 5 1/2"
- Ornament hooks (6)
- Templates (3)
- Piercing punches (2)
- Ball-peen hammer, 8 oz
- Clamshell scissors
- Masking tape, 1" × 60 yards
- Zero-friction ultra-suede gloves, pair
- Wooden backer board
- Foam ear plugs (2 pairs)
- Pencil
- Wet-dry sandpaper, 240x

**Note:** Many wares fabricated by a traditional tinsmith integrate tin piercing in ways that go beyond their functional purposes. What started as a way to provide ventilation and pest control in a pie-safe panel or to light a path and prevent strong drafts from extinguishing a candle's flame in a lantern eventually gave way to more intricate designs that brought the tinsmith's artistic side to light.

Since tinsmiths work with cold, light-colored materials, such as tin-plated steel, they are also called whitesmiths. Tin-plated steel is valued for its rust-resistant properties.

## Other items you should have on hand (not included):

- Safety glasses
- Waste bin



***DAY 1: COVERS STEPS 1 TO 7.***

***TIME TO COMPLETE: ABOUT 1 HOUR\*  
FOR THE FIRST ORNAMENT.***

**\*Note:** *Once you have made one ornament, the others should take less time to make.*

## 1 SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

- a. Select a clean, open work area, as well as a sturdy table, bench or desk.
- b. Remove the contents of the kit from the box and set them aside, but nearby. Unfold the box and use it to protect your workspace.

## 2 TAPING THE TEMPLATE



**Caution:** *The tin-plated sheets have sharp edges, so be sure to wear the zero-friction ultra-suede gloves to protect your hands from cuts whenever you are handling them.*

**Note:** *The **ultra-suede gloves** may look small, but be assured that the nylon and polyurethane fabric will adjust to fit a range of hand sizes. They provide form-fitting protection and allow freedom of movement while you work with the tin-plated steel sheets.*

- a. Choose one of the provided project templates, and trim some of the paper off as needed to center it on one of the tin-plated steel sheets.

**Note:** *Three designs are included, but feel free to design your own pattern.*

- b. Secure the template to the sheet with masking tape. This will prevent the template from shifting while the sheet is being pierced.



- c. Place the prepared sheet onto the wooden backer board.

**Tip:** Using the unfolded cardboard box under the wooden backer board will help to absorb some of the pounding shock.

### 3 TRANSFERRING THE PATTERN

**Note:** Two punches are included. The small punch will produce smaller holes than the large one. Use them interchangeably to create varying effects. For example, you could use the large punch on the outer shape and then use the small punch on the innermost sections. Alternatively, you could use the large punch to accentuate major points and the small one to provide finer details around the larger holes.

A ball-peen hammer is designed for metalwork. Since the head is harder than a standard claw hammer, a ball-peen hammer is less likely to chip on contact with tin-plated steel and hardened steel tools. It is commonly used for “peening”, that is, bending or shaping metal. The ball-shaped head is used for shaping, texturing, dishing, distorting and spreading metal as well as for setting rivets, while the flat end is used for striking, punching and hammering. The 8 oz weight of the ball-peen hammer that is included in this kit is appropriate for this project. It is neither too heavy nor too light. It's comfortable to hold and you won't tire from using it.

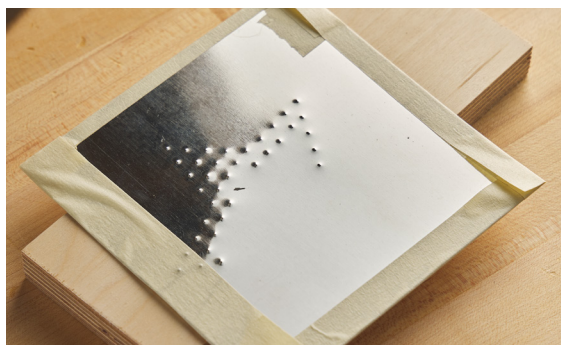


**Caution:** Always wear safety glasses when working with tinned steel.

- a. Center the point of the small punch on one of the marks on the template.

**Note:** Two pairs of **foam ear plugs** are included. One pair for you; the other, to give to anyone within earshot of your tapping. (A small token to maintain the peace in your household.)

- b. Gently tap the top of the punch with the flat end of the ball-peen hammer just enough to create a tiny indentation into the tin-plated steel sheet. You want to avoid tearing through the paper template so that it can be reused.



**Tip:** Check the backside of the tin-plated steel sheet to verify that you are using the correct amount of pressure. At this time, you should see a slight bump or indentation where you punched. If you pierced all the way through the sheet, you have applied too much force. However, there is no need to panic if you make a mistake. Small errors add character to your work.

- c. Lift the punch off the sheet and place it on another mark. Once again, gently tap it with the hammer. Repeat this step until all the marks on the template are transferred onto the sheet.
- d. Remove the template, being careful not to tear it.

**Note:** Should you damage one of the templates provided, you can print more; just download the [PDF](#).



## 4 PIERCING THE PATTERN

- a. Center the point of one of the punches on an indent.
- b. Tap the top of the punch with the flat end of the ball-peen hammer, except this time, use enough pressure to pierce all the way through the material.



**Note:** For piercing the holes, you want to avoid using so much force that the hole becomes too large, or larger than the others. As you practice and develop the proper feel for using the hammer and punch, you will be able to control the size of the hole and achieve uniformly pierced holes.

- c. Work your way around the sheet and pierce all the indents, using the small and large punches as you wish.



**Caution:** Repetitive hammering/punching can cause hand cramps and muscle fatigue. While the gloves will offer some protection, take frequent breaks, switch tasks and rest your hands. Also, avoid gripping tools for a prolonged time or too tightly in the palm of your hands.

**Tip:** If the sheet develops a curl from all the holes, gently tap the backside of the sheet with the flat end of the ball-peen hammer to flatten it without fear of removing any of the punched holes. Carefully tap on the punched holes to ensure you do not mar the surface of the sheet.



## 5 CUTTING THE OUTER SHAPE

**Note:** While the **clamshell scissors** are more often used for dealing with the toughest of plastic clamshell packaging, they are also useful for safely cutting thin sheet metal. The serrated blades will make a clean cut. However, they are not used like standard scissors. You need to maintain forward pressure into the cut as you open the blades. Squeeze down on the handles and push the blades up into the cut. Use your other hand to guide the sheet into the cut. This helps to reduce burrs and sharp points. Your first cut will likely leave burrs. When that happens, capture the burr between the blades and cut a fresh line from that point.

The clamshell scissors in this kit are a safe alternative to tin snips as they leave a serrated edge that is just right for trimming these ornaments to size. Keep in mind that these scissors are not meant for intricate cuts, which are not required for this project. For this project, the outer corners should be rounded slightly for safe handling of the ornament.

**Tip:** It is good practice to place the waste material directly into a waste bin so it isn't left lying around where you could inadvertently cut yourself. Keep your workspace tidy to prevent accidents.

- a. Trim around the general shape, leaving about 1/4" all around.
- b. Cut all the outer corners with a slight radius to avoid sharp corners that could possibly cut or injure someone.





- c. When you reach an inner corner, stop cutting, and start again away from the corner. You will come back to trim the inside corners later, but for now, you just want to make all the cuts in the same direction.
- d. Once you have gone all around the shape, turn the shape around to access and trim the inside corners that were skipped. In order to get a nice clean corner, you want to snip from the other direction and work your way into the corner, then stop right when you see the metal start to crease. Finish by capturing the piece between the blades, then gently wiggle and twist the piece until it disengages.



## 6 FINISHING TOUCHES

- a. Cut a 2" wide piece of sandpaper and wrap it around one end of the pencil.
- b. Sand the edges of the outer shape, keeping the sandpaper-wrapped pencil at an angle, to remove any burrs and sharp edges.

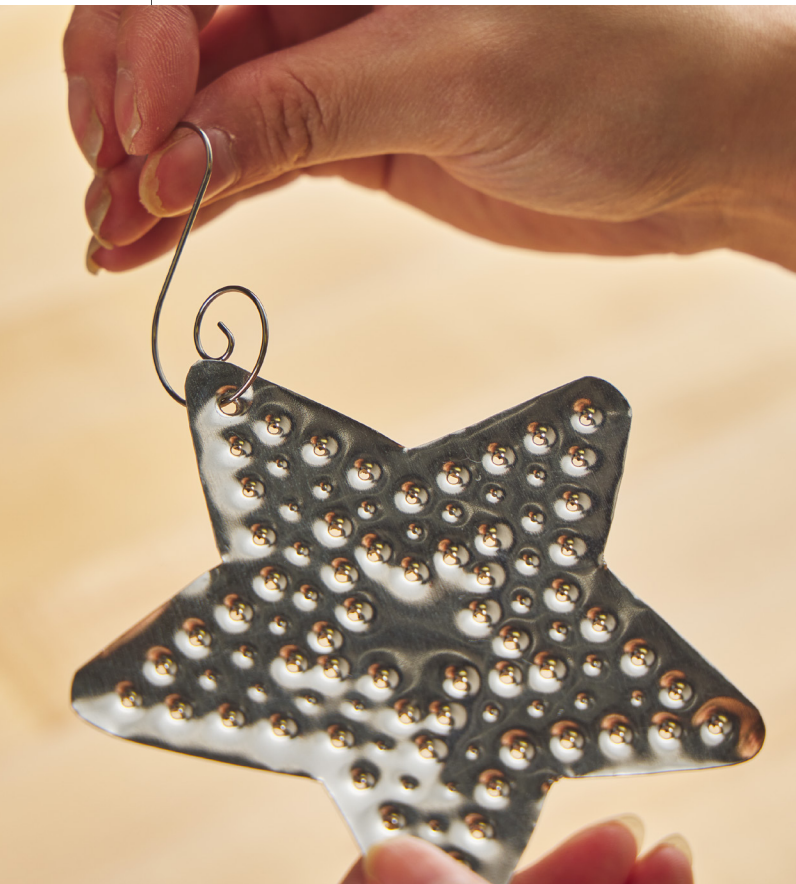
**Tip:** Adjust the sanding angle as required to minimize the abrasion marks produced by the sandpaper.



- c. Gently tap the backside of the ornament with the flat end of the ball-peen hammer to ease the sharpness of the punched holes.

## 7 INSTALLING THE HOOK

- a. Determine which end of your ornament will point upward and use the large punch to pierce a hole close to the top.
- b. Slip the curly end of the hook into the hole and hang the ornament by the plain end.



*END OF DAY 1*



## PERSONALIZING YOUR ORNAMENTS

We are positive you have come up with some great ideas on how to personalize your ornaments as you were making them, but here are just a few of ours to get your creative juices flowing.

Instead of cutting out the ornaments to their shape, you can frame them as panels or join several panels together with wire and place LED lights on the back to illuminate the designs.

More ideas:

- Use letter and number punches to add a date, name or initials.
- Tape the edge with decorative washi tape or copper tape, or fold over a safe edge.
- Make a simple slotted stand to hold each panel and place a battery operated tealight behind it.
- Color them with lacquer paints.
- Adorn them with beads.
- So many possibilities.

We would love to see how you personalized your ornaments.





## NOW WHAT?

The tools and supplies in this kit are reusable. We hope that you will be inspired to continue practicing your tin piercings skills and find ways to incorporate this technique into other projects, from tags and light reflectors to wall signs and inserts for cabinet doors. The more you make, the more the tools will be of continued service.

This technique can also be applied to other materials, such as copper tags, Mason jar lid inserts or empty tin cans.



## CREATED BY LEE VALLEY. MADE BY ME.

Now that you have completed your pierced-tin ornaments, we would love to hear about your experience and see the finished project.

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MK110 Pierced-Tin Ornaments

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