Glass Etching Cream

Please read all instructions before starting.

Preparation

In the area you plan to use for etching you should have running water available, make sure the room has good ventilation, wear protective clothing (long sleeves, neoprene gloves and goggles), use newspaper or plastic drop sheets to protect the work area, and keep the room temperature over 60° F or 15° C to get best to get best results from the etching cream and glass cleaner.

Etching can be done using pre-cut stencils or using stencils you design yourself from vinyl shelf covering. To apply the etching cream, an acid swab is the ideal brush. The better the quality of glass you use, the better will be the results of your etching projects. It is advisable to practice the techniques on scrap glass before trying to do a project.

Using Your Own Stencils

If you wish to use your own design for an etching pattern, you will need some adhesive-backed vinyl sheeting (such as shelf covering) to use as a mask. The first thing to do is to cut a section of vinyl that will cover the entire piece of glass you intend to etch, with an inch or two extra left on all sides. Clean all grease, dirt and fingerprints from the glass then wash it with a type of glass cleaner that will not leave a residue.

To apply the vinyl to the glass, peel back about a 2″ section of the backing across the top of the plastic and crease it so it lays flat. With the backing side down, position the vinyl over the glass, allowing for the vinyl to overlap on all sides. When it is aligned, press the exposed two inches of vinyl onto the glass and smooth it down. With one hand on top of the vinyl to smooth it back and forth, use the other hand to pull away the protective backing from underneath the vinyl. Pull slowly and evenly, pressing out air bubbles as you go. If you miss any air bubbles the vinyl can be carefully lifted to remove them. When the vinyl is applied over the entire surface, fold the excess masking over the edges and tape down.

To transfer your design to the vinyl, you can use carbon paper, a stencil or a template made from cardboard. If you use carbon paper you may want to dull the surface of the vinyl by rubbing it with steel wool, so that your pencil lines will show up better.

Position the design on the vinyl and make sure it is aligned on all sides. Tape it on one side only so you can lift it from time to time to check on the pattern as you transfer it.

Once the complete design is transferred to the vinyl, look at it to ascertain which portions you want etched and which ones you want to remain clear. (A general rule is to avoid etching large open areas because natural textures and striations in the glass will be more visible after etching.) With a pencil, shade in the areas you want to appear etched to show you which areas you will want to cut out of the vinyl.

Using a sharp hobby knife, pull the knife toward you along the cutting line, applying just enough pressure to cleanly cut the vinyl. You can turn the glass under the knife to negotiate curves. Where you want lines to be etched in the glass, cut parallel lines on either side of the line drawn on the vinyl instead of making a single cut down the center of the drawn line.

When cutting is done, remove the desired areas of vinyl. Do so carefully by first lifting an edge with the tip of your knife then slowly peeling off the vinyl. Make any necessary corrections.

Wrap a piece of lint-free cloth around your finger then use it to press down all edges of the vinyl. Clean the exposed glass with suitable glass cleaner and a lint-free cloth by moistening the cloth and dabbing the cleaner onto the glass. Pat dry. You can use a cotton swab in a very small area.

Using Etching Cream

Before applying the etching cream, shake it vigorously until it is a uniform color. Run warm water over the bottle if the cream is too thick (as can happen if it has been stored in a cool area). Do not be concerned if the cream is not smooth: this is because it contains crystallized fibers. Apply the cream by dipping a brush into the bottle and transferring an even layer to the surface of the glass. The cream reacts upon contact but must be left on for ten minutes. During this time you can use the brush to redistribute any uneven coverage.

Care must be taken when rinsing off the cream. Use very low water pressure to not dislodge any of the vinyl. Do not let the water get too hot or it will soften the adhesive. Rinse thoroughly until all residue is gone, then pat dry with a clean paper towel. You will not see the pattern clearly until the glass is dry. For rinsing, the best container to use is a plastic pail. Note that etching cream will remove the shine from porcelain or enamel sinks after they have been used repeatedly for rinsing. It is also important to note that the cream should not be used in an area where food will be prepared.

If the glass was not uniformly etched, apply a second coat of cream over the entire piece. If the etching is satisfactory, remove the vinyl. Stubborn pieces will come off when rubbed with a piece of wet paper towel. Clean the glass twice to remove all traces of the cream.

Using Peel 'N' Etch Pre-Cut Stencils

These are sandwiched between a top protective carrier sheet and a waxed backing sheet.

Locate on your glass where the stencil is to be positioned, marking the location with tape or a grease pencil. Measure from the artwork: do not assume that the pattern is centered on the pre-cut stencil.

Place the stencil so that the waxed backing sheet is facing up. Slowly peel off the backing, pulling at a 180° angle. Save the backing.

Stop if any stencil pieces stick to the backing, and press them back down. Holding the stencil in your hands, turn it over so the exposed adhesive side is facing down. Bend up two sides of the stencil so that the center is bowed. Apply the stencil center-first, inside your reference marks. Smooth out any bubbles then remove the top carrier sheet.

Using the stencil diagram as a guide remove all sections that show as white in the diagram. Loosely place the backing sheet over the remaining pieces, then with your hand or a suitable burnisher firmly press all pieces onto the glass to make sure all pieces are flat in position. Extra pieces of vinyl can be used to cover surrounding glass surfaces not completely covered by the stencil.

Apply etching cream then rinse as described previously.

Using Rub 'N' Etch Pre-Cut Stencils

Clean glass as above.

Cut the desired stencil from the larger sheet, keeping the dark blue side facing down on the white backing sheet when not in use. Measure and mark the location of the design on the glass. Separate the stencil from the backing sheet and place it on the glass with the blue side making contact. Secure the stencil in place by putting masking tape all around with a 1/16″ to 1/8″ overlap. Using the supplied wooden burnisher, transfer the stencil to the glass by rubbing firmly over the design with smooth, even strokes. Do not dig into the stencil. The color changes from dark blue to pale blue when the transfer is done.

When the entire stencil is adhered, carefully remove some of the masking tape while holding the stencil in place. Slowly peel up a small corner of the carrier sheet and remove the entire sheet. Make sure all edges of the design are well-adhered so the etching cream cannot seep underneath. Take the white backing sheet, cover the stencil again and rub over the entire design. Very gently clean the exposed glass within the stencil area before etching.

Place masking tape around the entire border of the design stencil, leaving a 1/16″ to 1/8″ overlap. If a very large area has to be protected, use strips of vinyl. Check the stencil area for pin holes, digs or tears. If any show up, they can be covered with a small piece of masking tape. Note that once a piece of tape is put on it can’t be removed without destroying the stencil.

Apply a thick coat of etching cream with a brush, staying within the taped area, and let stand for one minute only. Rinse off both the cream and the stencil under lukewarm water, and remove any tape or vinyl. Clean with glass cleaner.

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