

Butterflies

Light and Airy Options

MJ Dowling, CMSA, Westford, MA



Basic Butterflies

All of the butterflies listed below use the same basic components and construction techniques. All of them use Platinum Paste, fine and medium weight wires, fine stamens, dusting and luster powders, and a variety of cutters and veiners. The beauty of this process is that you can re-purpose cutters, veiners and rollers you already have to customize the look of your finished butterflies for each project. From botanically accurate to fanciful flights of nature, these easy, fast butterflies can add interest and color to any project. If your goal is a botanically correct specimen, make sure you use good photos of your butterfly choice. This technique has been adapted and enhanced from Alan Dunn's method of making butterflies.

Basic Body

Using your black or white paste make a small log about 1/2" long and 1/8" wide, tapering to a soft point at one end. Using your plastic knife make an indent to form the head at the fatter end to form a 1/8" ball, DON'T CUT through the paste, make sure it is an indent only. Make another indent about another 1/8" from the first one to form a body section. Carefully insert an "L" shaped, 20 gauge white wire so that the "L" portion of the wire goes through the body in back of the head area to support it towards the back. Next, take one of your small stamens and cut off both ends so they are 1/4" long. Carefully dip them in a tiny amount of gum glue and insert them into the top of the head so they are facing forward. Using a 28-30 gauge black wire, curl it around a small pin to form the spiral for the tongue. Cut it to length after curling it. Insert the "tongue" into the head under the antennae.

Materials

Platinum Paste or gumpaste
Butterfly cutters
Petal dusts
Small roller and rolling surface
Small impression rolling pins
Luster dusts
28-30 gauge white wires
White floral tape
Fine black stamens
20 gauge white wire
Rose petal cutters - 2 sizes
Styrofoam™ block
Wire clippers
Generic petal veiners or butterfly veiners
Plastic knife
Black food coloring, vodka
Black food coloring markers
Gum glue or rosewater



Wings

Choose the shape of your wings. You can use many different cutters including rose or other petal cutters. Usually, you will need one slightly larger than the other. The larger ones are used to make the front wings and the smaller cutters are used for the back wings. Color and roll out a small amount of the Platinum Paste, making sure it is larger than the cutter you have chosen. When you are rolling be sure to leave a ridge in the middle area of the paste so you can insert the wire into the vein. The benefit of using the Platinum Paste is that you can roll it out very thin. Your wing should be almost translucent. Place the inner corner of the cutter where the vein ridge starts and goes to the outer edge. Once the shape has been cut, insert the wire into the vein. Repeat the process with the other wings making sure that if your wing shape is directional, you will need to flip over the cutter to produce a "mirror" set. If using rose petal cutters the pointed part will be the area closest to the butterfly's body.



Marking and Decorating the Wings

Depending on the butterfly you choose, there are many ways to create the pattern on each wing. One way to mark the wings is to impress them with a pattern. You can use specialty butterfly cutters like Patchwork Cutters, gelatin impression mats, or stampers. You can also use any veiner with a radial pattern to impress the wing. Some great choices are rose petal, peony petal and even nasturtium leaves. There are commercial impression molds that you can use, but many of them are too deep or aggressive for these delicate wings. If making a fanciful butterfly, try using small impression rollers with delicate patterns.



Using your reference photos, add coloring to your impressed wings. Make sure you are adding them to the top side of each wing and that you maintain the "mirror" set as you work. Great ways to mark your designs are using edible markers, food colors with small detail brushes and by flowing the color into the impressions. You may want to wait until you dust your wings if you want the marked areas to be more pronounced.

Dusting your wings will add more color and variation to your wings. Take advantage of the iridescent qualities of some butterflies by using luster dusts to color them. Adding vodka to the luster dusts will intensify the color and the iridescent effect. Be sure to color the very edges of the wings and also the bottom of the wings. You may want to wait until the butterfly is assembled to mark the undersides of the wings to prevent smudging.

Assembling the Butterfly

Holding the wire for the body in one hand, wrap a length of $\frac{1}{3}$ width white florist tape around the top near the body to start it. Place the large wings on each side of the body as close to the ends of the wires as possible and wrap the tape around the wires to secure. Repeat with the back wings and then carefully bend the wings down and shape them to finish your butterfly.

Using Patchwork Cutters

Roll out the Platinum Paste with a vein ridge and angle the top section of the cutter overtop of the vein ridge so that the ridge goes into the center of the inner corner of the wing. Clean up any extra wing area with a knife and insert the wire in the vein. Often times the impression made by the cutter will be too pronounced, you may wish to gently roll out the impression slightly with a small rolling pin before coloring. 🍷

