

The definition of marbling from the Collin dictionary says it is a pattern resembling marble obtained by transferring floating colors from a bath of gum solution.

Marbling has been done for a long time in many cultures. The Japanese call it Suminagashi. Turkish marbling involves flicking paint off a brush from 9-12 inches above the “size”, then making patterns and transferring it to paper or cloth. Almost no one talks about marbling onto wood.

#### ITEMS YOU MAY NEED:

Container that is larger and deeper than your item to marble. Drop cloth for the mess, blender, measuring spoons and cups, newspaper, rubber gloves, toothpicks to make your patterns in the paint, homemade combs, distilled water, a rinsing bucket.

#### TECHNIQUES

As I read and researched the topic I found a number of techniques using different materials.

**SPRAY PAINT** involves taking different colors of spray paint and spraying them onto the water surface that you plan to dip your items into. I tried it and found that the paint was only workable for a very short period of time and then it stuck to your utensil you are using to make a pattern. If you can work very quickly, this method is fast and easy.

**NAIL POLISH** although it worked a little better, the working time on it was very short. There are a lot of YouTube video’s using this medium and they seemed to have more success than I did.

**EASY MARBLE BY MARABU** I found this to be easier to use than the first two mentioned above but still a pretty short working time. For \$18 from Amazon, I thought it would be a lot better.

The nice thing about the three methods above it that they all sit right on ordinary water. The bad thing besides the small working window is that once you have dipped your item you have to move all the paint out of the way before lifting your item out of the water otherwise the paint will stick again as you raise it back up out of the water. That is not the case with the following method.

#### HERE IS THE TECHNIQUE I USED

The following technique which I found to work the best was also the most expensive and took a little more planning. In this technique you create a solution which is called “the size” by mixing 2 tablespoons of **Carrageenan powder** (Amazon, \$10 for a 4 ounce bag) into a gallon of water (distilled is preferred). Carrageenan is a seaweed food product used as a thickening agent in lot of vegan cooking. The easiest way to make a gallon of solution is to put a quart of water in a blender and add 1 tablespoon carrageenan powder and blend for a minute.

Pour this into a container and repeat. This gives you 2 tablespoons mixed into ½ gallon of water. Now just add another ½ gallon of water, shake and you have your 2 tablespoons per gallon of “size” mixed. Let this sit over night so the air bubbles release from the liquid. This solution has a shelf life of about 3 days unrefrigerated or about 7 days refrigerated. The “size” should be at room temperature prior to starting to marble.

Your thinned out paint will sit on top of the “size” and not sink because the water has been thickened with the carrageenan powder. In order for the paint to stick well to your item, you need to prepare your items several hours before you plan to marble. You’ll need to coat your items with an Alum solution. Only coat the surface that you want the paint to stick to.

Measure 1 ½ teaspoons **Alum powder** (Amazon, Antony’s Premium Alum, 1.5# for \$10.49) and stir it into one cup of water. You can use a spray bottle, paint brush, sponge or dip to coat your items. Allow them to dry completely. Alum is a food safe item used in pickling. Hard woods work best because the grain is not raised as much when the alum is applied. I sanded the grain back after the first alum coat with 400 grit and then reapplied the alum solution and allowed it to dry again.

The paint you choose will take some experimenting to get the correct viscosity. You want it thin enough so that it spreads easily on the surface but thick enough that stays on the surface of your “size” and doesn’t easily and quickly sink. Acrylic paints work the best. Carole Floate who did a demo years ago for our club and gave us a handout in which she said Golden brand paints worked the best but were also the most expensive. Isn’t that always the case!!!!

I used Artist’s Loft Acrylic paint value pack (24 colors) ( Michael’s \$10.99). They are tubes that you squeeze the paint out of. Pat and I mixed the paints in one ounce plastic cups. The amount you use is very small. We were mixing 1 part paint to 2 parts water (distilled is preferred). We only mixed ¼ teaspoon paint to ½ teaspoon water and with 3 colors you could do 3-4 eggs. We used disposable 5 ml plastic pipettes (Amazon, 200 pack for \$10.99) to drop the paint onto the “size”.

### **OK NOW WE’RE READY TO MARBLE**

Attach some kind of holder to the item to be marbled. It could be hot glued to a toothpick or popsicle stick. For eggs I hot glued a very small eye screw to a popsicle stick and drilled a very small hole into the egg and it made a nice handle .

Prepare a bucket of rinse water to wash the “size” off of the piece after you dip it. Again it should be bigger and deeper than your item.

Pour your room temperature “size” into a clean container a little larger and deeper than the item to be marbled.

Skim off the surface of the water with newspaper. Dust is your enemy.

Mix your paint to a consistency so that it spreads easily but doesn’t sink into the “size”.

Take up paint into your pipette trying to avoid air bubbles. Air bubbles are also your enemy.

Drop a single drop of paint onto the surface from just an inch above and let it spread to the edge. Higher may cause a bubble. If you do get a bubble on the surface try to pop it with a toothpick otherwise you will have a blank spot on your finished product.

Alternate colors until you think you like the amount, probably about 20 drops total is a good place to start. Now using a toothpick, skewer, knitting needle or ???? to maneuver the paint around into a pattern that you like. If you are marbling paper, bend the paper and lay down the center first then

slowly lower each side. Your goal is to prevent a trapped air bubble which will leave a blank spot on your finished product. If you are doing it on a wood piece, enter on an angle so that only one side touches first and then slowly lower it into the paint.

Remove from the marbling container and immediately lower it into your rinse bucket and shake off the "size". Now place the piece somewhere to dry overnight.

Using fresh newspaper skim your surface to remove excess paint and dust.

Repeat this process until all your items are completed.

Tips:

You can have multiple areas that you are dropping paint into on the "size". Say four different places within the container. If you want to do this and it does look very nice you must first drop one or two drops and allow them to spread across the entire surface then build your separate areas of paint. You have to do this. If you don't, there will be air spaces with no paint at the edges of each individual set of colors and the finished product will have a blank space where there is no paint.

References:

*Marbling Directions*, Handout by Carole Floate

*Marbling* by Laura Sims, published by Lark Books

*Marbled Finish*, article in *American Woodworker* Oct/Nov 2010 by Alan Lacer