

THE FLOWER Arranger

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Festive
designs
for the
home

Hotel
flowers

Simon
Lycett
interview

Step-
by-step
designs



Handmade decorations



Charmed memories

Botanical artist Sarah Boynton shows us how to make a vintage-inspired charm bracelet from items of plant material.

It is a wonderful challenge to look at flowers and seeds and try to create works of botanical art. I often tease that I will share any techniques I have used but I will never admit to how much time a piece has taken!

When planning my work I start by looking carefully at the schedule, and plan my piece for the space that is given. I love to research the category, such as 'Flamenco Fan', 'Victorian Charm Bracelet' or 'Celtic Art', and incorporate appropriate 'stones' and embellishments. I sketch out a design, then look to nature to create the piece with botanical material.

For this particular piece of jewellery, for which I gained Best in Show at the Newport Flower Show, Rhode Island, I started by researching Victorian charm bracelets and came up with seven examples of individual charms for the bracelet. This is how it was created.

The bracelet

This was made of tightly wound raffia made into round links. Each link was then turned to create a twisted link bracelet.



Star

This was made by gently sanding a star anise and coating it with epoxy to make it hard and smooth.



Heart

This was made with an almond. I selected an unusually plump almond and carefully sanded it into a heart shape then painted to look like marble.



Shoe and bird in a cage

These were the most difficult charms to make. Using clay, I moulded two forms, one shaped like a small foot and the other like a small birdcage. These were used to help shape the charms and were later discarded. I decided to use twisted raffia, so I knotted my raffia and secured the knotted end to a drill. I then coated the raffia with thinned-down white glue and twisted it with the drill, holding the loose end until the raffia was tightly wound. It was then taped down to a non-stick surface until it dried. Raffia is pliable and strong and can be shaped into curves and swirls. After creating the shoe and the birdcage, I applied a very thin layer of epoxy to both strengthen and smooth out the surface.



After the clay forms were removed each piece was painted. The bird was a dried seed pod from the plant *Actaea racemosa* (bugbane) which already looked very much like a bird. I carefully painted a thin coat of epoxy to preserve the delicate pod and glued it onto a perch attached to a cage bottom made of raffia and banana bark. I painted each piece and then simply glued the top on to the bottom of the cage.

Shell

This was simply a *Eucalyptus* pod that I thought resembled a shell.



Flower

This was made from *Cornus kousa* (Chinese dogwood) leaves which were dried and painted with 'Golden Self Leveling' clear gel which makes them flexible. Each petal of the flower was cut and glued to form a viola flower, then painted to accent the charm.



Black pearl

It was common in Victorian times to have stones or pearls mounted with the prongs showing. The pendant base is tree fungus which was shaped and then drilled to receive an *Andromeda* seedpod creating a 'setting' for the 'pearl'. I stretched the prongs and inserted a lentil. The base was painted to match the marble look of the heart charm and the lentil was painted to resemble a black pearl.



SARAH BOYNTON

Tip

I find plant material that dries hard is easier to use than more delicate items. It can be sanded and shaped to fit a purpose, such as the bevelling of 'stones'. My favourite material is tree fungus, which when dry is very hard and can be cut and shaped accordingly.

BELOW The class in WAFI Ireland's World Flower Show was entitled 'Art of the Celts'. After looking at photos of antique Celtic jewellery, I chose to create three Celtic crosses. When researching what type of stones were used by the Celts I learned about indigenous Connemara marble. I painted the 'stones' and 'beads' in one of the pieces to look like this beautiful green marble. The judges recognised the faux Connemara marble which pleased me very much. The exhibit won First Place and Best Craft Exhibit.

