

Painted Cheesecloth for Naturescapes

by Nanette S. Zeller

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp and quilt artist Nanette S. Zeller

Materials

- 100% cotton cheesecloth
- Vinyl or latex gloves
- Plastic sheeting
- Large container of water for soaking cheesecloth
- Small container of water for mixing paint
- Paint trays or plates for mixing paint
- Plastic spoons
- 2–3 colors of acrylic paints
- Paper towels
- Washable school glue stick (I use the purple kind which turns clear when dry.)
- Monofilament thread
- Closed-toe darning foot with wide opening
- Sewing machine with zigzag and free-motion stitching capabilities
- Completed art quilt

When I make nature-inspired art quilts, I frequently include textural ground cover elements. Several years ago, I started painting cheesecloth and found that this gauzy fabric makes an interesting and colorful texture I desire for these earthy elements.

You can find 100% cotton cheesecloth in hardware stores (paint and stain aisle), big-box sewing stores, or in most large retail shops that carry cooking supplies. Be sure to check the cheesecloth before you buy. The weave of the cloth can vary depending on the manufacturer. Some have a very open weave and others are much tighter. The looser the weave, the stretchier the fabric. Each style provides an opportunity to create a different texture.

INSTRUCTIONS

Painting cheesecloth

This technique is messy. Wear protective gloves and clothes, and cover your work surface with plastic sheeting.

1. Cut cheesecloth into useable-size strips and place in the large container of water to soak.

Note: *The size of the strips depends on your intended finished project. If I'm planning a large project, I cut larger strips of cheesecloth. At the minimum, use strips around 6" x width of fabric (WOF).*

2. While the cheesecloth soaks, place 1 drop of each color paint on the mixing tray several inches apart. Add about ½ spoonful of water to each spot of paint and blend with the spoon to create a watery, color mixture. It's OK to allow the colors to blend in the tray.

Tip: *When mixing paint, don't use the large container of water as your water source. Dipping the spoon into large container will add paint to the water—not only coloring the water but also the cheesecloth soaking in it. I keep a small container of clean water nearby and use it as my source for mixing paint.*

3. Remove a cheesecloth strip from the water, squeezing out the excess water.
4. Open the strip and place the wet cheesecloth into the paint mixture. Allow the strip to soak up the color, as desired.

Note: *The cheesecloth will collect as much or as little color as you allow it to. To completely color the cheesecloth, you may need to move it around in the paint solution to fully absorb color. Leaving some areas white is also an option.*

5. Gently squeeze out the excess water. Set the painted cheesecloth on paper towels. Allow to dry.

Note: *Depending how wet it is, it may take up to 24 hours for the cheesecloth to dry.*

Using painted cheesecloth

1. Gently open the dried, painted cheesecloth. The cloth may be stiff from the paint but will loosen-up as it is separated and handled.
2. Cut the painted cheesecloth into useable-size pieces.

Tip: *I cut the cloth on the bias which allows it to easily stretch and pull apart, making more interesting natural shapes.*

3. Layer small pieces of painted cheesecloth onto the finished quilt. Secure the pieces in place with a little dab of glue stick. Allow the glue to dry.
4. Set up the sewing machine for free-motion quilting with monofilament thread on the top, a bobbin thread that matches the quilt, and a closed-toe darning foot. Drop the feed dogs and set the stitch to zigzag.



Note: *Before stitching, use the handwheel to gently test the width of the zigzag to make sure the needle doesn't hit the darning foot as it swings left and right. If necessary, adjust the width of the stitch and re-test before sewing to avoid breaking a needle.*

5. Use a free-motion zigzag to secure the layers of cheesecloth to the quilt. Sew over the cheesecloth in a meandering style, making sure to catch all loose pieces and secure it to the design.

Tip: *It is best to use a closed-toe darning foot. An open-toe foot may catch on the weave of the cheesecloth, making sewing difficult.*

6. Add hand embroidery or other embellishments to complete the design, as desired. 

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