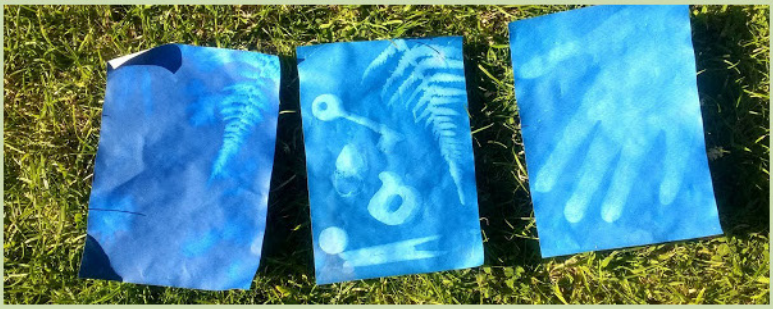
Making prints with sun print paper

Introduction

Cyanotype is a photographic printing process that uses the sun to create wonderful cyan-blue prints.



How does it work?

The sun-sensitive material is coated with light-sensitive chemicals. When exposed to light the chemicals react to the light waves and particles. When objects are positioned on the material they block the light and the effect the sun has on the chemicals. Water is then used to stop the process and fix the images. The area protected from the sun by the object will be a pale blue/white and the area exposed to the sun will be a richer colour, depending on the type of paper, card or material that you use. In the activity below we're using sun print paper.

Environmental & health & safety considerations

- Remember to leave no trace and dispose of water used for rinsing in mains drainage
- Be aware when collecting natural materials
- The chemicals - ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide - are mild irritants, so wear protective gloves and wash hands afterwards
- Follow your usual operating procedures & carry out appropriate risk benefit assessments

What you'll need

- water
- a pack of sun print paper, card or fabric
- a piece of thick cardboard and some pins
- a selection of natural materials/objects
- a waterproof container the size of the print paper

Preparation

Choose a nice sunny day for this activity! Have everything you need to hand and ready to go - the process starts to happen quickly.

Step 1 - gather your objects

Explore your local surroundings and find some **FLAT** objects to print. You can experiment with non-flat items but the contrast of the print isn't as clear. You could have a basket of objects, like keys, buttons or lace, to experiment with. Talk about what the image may look like and discuss how the sun paper works.

Step 2 - prepare your sun-sensitive paper

Ideally do this step in the shade and have your items to hand so you can place them quickly.

Remove a sheet of sun-sensitive paper from the pack and pin it to each corner of the cardboard (**BLUE SIDE UP**). This will hold the paper in place and stop it from being blown away. Alternatively, place the paper in a high-sided container for wind protection.

NB If you use thumbtacks or drawing pins you will get small circle prints in each corner. Using needlework pins will reduce this effect.

Step 3 - arrange your objects

Arrange the objects on top of the sun sensitive paper - do this in the shade and/or act quickly - as soon as the paper is exposed to the sun it will begin to react and will leave the background of the finished print a lighter shade of blue (see hand in main photo at top).

Tip: If you want to use lightweight items like feathers you can cover the whole thing with clingfilm or a piece of clear plastic (like an acetate sheet that might be lurking at the back of a store cupboard!) instead of using pins. You could also punch holes in the corner of the acetate (cut to the size of the sun-sensitive paper) and pin the whole lot together.

Step 4 - expose the paper

Carefully move your paper and arranged objects into direct sun. Expose the paper to strong sunlight until the blue paper turns a very pale blue. This will take 2-5 minutes.

Tip: Place the sun paper/card/container on a raised surface to prevent items being knocked off the paper; particularly if you are doing this with very young children.

Tip: Adjust the position to minimise shadows that are cast from more solid objects.

Step 5 - stop the process

Carefully take your exposed sun paper into a shady area. Remove the objects & whilst protecting the print from direct sun soak it in a container of water for about 1 minute.

NB Any image will disappear whilst the paper is soaking and then will gradually reappear towards the end of the minute.

Step 6 - dry the paper

Dry the print flat. The images will sharpen during drying time. If it is windy weigh down the print to stop it blowing away.

Tip: The paper will go a bit wrinkly; try blotting the excess water first with a cloth.

Take it further

- experiment with a range of objects, light sources and exposure time
- cut the prints out and make a collage or make a card for someone

See this sun print activity on the **Outdoor Hub**