Carving Your Own Rubber Stamps

Carving your own rubber stamp is not difficult, but it's important to have the supplies that will produce the best results.

Most soft-block carvers start with a basic set of Speedball linoleum cutters. The set comes with a handle and several interchangeable cutting gouges. More advanced carvers will use an X-Acto knife or needles in various diameters for detailed work.

In addition to rubber erasers that can be used for carving, other soft-block products are widely available. A few have risen to the top as favorites, including Speedball Speedy Carve, commonly called 'the pink stuff' because of its color. Stampeaz has three products with similar properties to the popular discontinued PZKut. These are called NZKut, MZKut, and Firm Kut and are available on the Stampeaz website.

What should you carve?

Choose an image without a lot of detail for your first stamp. Search the internet for free artwork, look at newspapers and magazines for images—or draw something yourself. As you feel more comfortable with the tools, you can start tackling harder designs.

Transferring the artwork to the carving medium can be done in multiple ways.

• **You can draw directly on the block.** If you are tracing a design, use a number 2 pencil and press hard to make a bold image. Flip the tracing paper over on top of the rubber block, and rub the design with your finger or the side of the pencil to transfer the design to the rubber.

• **If you print a design using a laser printer or a copier,** you can transfer the image using a Xyleneblender pen or acetone. Lay the image, printed side down, on the soft block surface, then lightly saturate the paper to transfer the ink to the block. Both of these chemicals emit strong odors, so use in a well-ventilated space.

Start carving

You're ready to begin carving once the image is transferred. Carve away all of the 'white' space, and leave the black lines of the design to create a positive image. Once in a while, a design lends itself to carving away the black lines to create a negative image.

Start carving by outlining the design carefully, not cutting too deeply into the soft block. Once the outline is finished, begin to remove the excess material, working from the design out to the edge of the block.

When you are close to finishing, ink it up and test the stamp on paper. This will help you see where you need to 'clean up' your carving or add more detail.

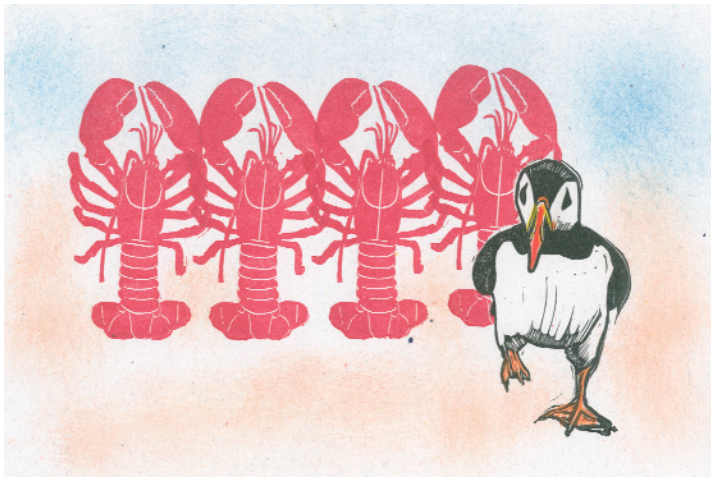
Finishing up

Whether you mount your stamp or not is up to you. I use E-Z Mount foam for use with acrylic blocks. I've also used double-sided sticky foam for mounting on wood.

For more carving instructions, try these websites: www.nettally.com/palmk/Rubber_Stamp_Carving_Tips.html and www.atlasquest.com/tutorials/carving/index.html.

—Renee Devine





Two carved artwork samples by members of the Carving Consortium's subgroup, Carvonia Myrth. The moose and hawk are by Dot McQuade. Diana Hammond, owner of Stampeaz, a company that carries soft-block carving materials and supplies carved the lobster and "webfoot."