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How & Why to Embroider on Wood- Introduction

You must be wondering - if you've read the title correctly. Yes, you did. The word "wood" is neither a typo, nor a hallucination.

There really is a type of wood that can be used for embroidery. It's called Balsa. These intriguing trees grow naturally in the humid rain forests of Central and South America.

Balsa wood is extremely lightweight, strong and is available in thin sheets that can be compared to heavyweight paper in terms of thickness. For this reason Balsa sheets are often used for aircraft and other hobbies including machine embroidery.

Of course, Balsa is NOT a perfect material to embroider on it, because it's still wood... It's not elastic enough and if mistreated, can break. Yet, there is a reason why you may want to embroider on it. And this can be done successfully.

Most craft shops are full of unfinished wooden accessories that are usually used for tole painting - boxes in all shapes, newspaper racks, trays, jewelry boxes, recipes and tissue boxes, drawers, trash cans etc. All made of unfinished natural wood. You've probably seen such items hundreds of times.

Usually crafters paint on them and/or cover with some kind of varnish, to create beautiful, finished look.

As alternative to painting, you may put embroidery on such items. And here comes the Balsa, because it's exactly the same color and feel. You can hardly tell it's surface from one of all these boxes and other stuff.

A sheet of Balsa wood with embroidery on it can be easily glued to wooden box/tray and it looks as if the embroidery was put directly on that piece of furniture.

See by yourself what we mean - we've applied machine cross-stitch designs on cute kitchen trays. And after you look at the photos - scroll the page down, to read detailed instruction explaining how to embroider on sheet of Balsa wood, without destroying it

How To Embroider On Wood - Supplies & Tips

Since we already know at least one great reason Why to embroider on Balsa wood, let's get straight to the How-To part. But first - take a look how our embroidered trays look:



Supplies & Tools:

1. [Polyester thread](#) in suitable colors
2. 2 mini trays from unfinished light wood (available at local craft shops)
3. [Embroidery designs in cross-stitch technique](#)
4. [Cutaway backing](#)
5. [Thin water-soluble topping](#)
6. [Temporary adhesive spray](#)
7. White craft glue (the universal one, available in most craft shops and even in Wal-Mart)
8. Balsa Wood Sheets - 8" wide, at 1/16 thickness (available at http://www.specializedbalsa.com/balsa_sheets.php)
9. Rotary cutter (available in most craft shops)

Warnings & Tips:

1. When you select Balsa wood, make sure it's thickness is 1/16. Lighter Balsa falls apart and isn't good for embroidery. And too heavy sheets may be just too heavy. Pay attention that the sheets are homogenous and of appropriate size - to fit your project AND the inside

part of your largest hoop.

2. When you select embroidery design, make sure it's a loose one. Machine cross-stitch designs in 14 count are perfect. 16 count is also good, but 14 is better. On our photos the pears are in 16 count and peaches - in 14 count. Avoid designs with straight edges / frames, especially when these edges are in the same direction of wood growth. If you do this, the embroidered design will be "cut out" of the wood.



How To Embroider On Wood - Basic Steps

Step 1

Measure the inside surface of your trays. Draw a rectangle on Balsa, at the exact size of your measurements. Cut it out, using your rotary cutter and ruler. Find center on each side of your Balsa rectangle sheet and mark it. Hoop a layer of strong cutaway backing, and mark the center of sewing field (like on our photo). Since we already know at least one great reason Why to embroider on Balsa wood, let's get straight to the How-To part. But first - take a look how our embroidered trays look:



[click to enlarge](#)

Step 2

Apply a generous amount of temporary adhesive spray on all hooped cutaway surface and then stick the Balsa wood over it. Make sure it's accurately centered. Let the spray dry for 10 - 15 minutes. Place 2 layers of THIN water-soluble topping over the Balsa. You may secure it in place by applying spray adhesive on a few small spots.



[click to enlarge](#)

Step 3

Embroider perfectly centered, LOOSE design, at the lowest speed of your embroidery machine. We've used designs in cross stitch technique, 14 and 16 counts. Their density is appropriate for Balsa. Denser designs may create problems. If the design you pick up is too dense, it may be just "cut out" of Balsa wood during the embroidery process. Also, be sure to AVOID designs with straight edges / frames, especially when these edges are in the same direction of wood growth. If you do this, the embroidered design will be "cut out" of the wood, too.

When the design is ready, take the hoop out and very carefully tear away the topping, one layer after another (NOT together). If you notice any difficulty in tearing - use small

scissors. Just be sure not to damage the wood, and stitches.



[click to enlarge](#)

Step 4

Unhoop the cutaway backing. Place the backing & embroidered Balsa on working surface and cut away the edges of cutaway exactly according to the edges of Balsa sheet. To do this, you may use rotary cutter. Then, carefully glue the remaining edges of cutaway to Balsa, using white plastic glue. Put the embroidered Balsa sheet under press to dry. Let it dry for a few hours.



[click to enlarge](#)

Step 5

Glue the embroidered Balsa to inside surface of your tray, using the same white craft glue. And again, put the project under press to dry. It should dry for a few hours. When ready, you may cover the tray with translucent varnish and add some kind of decorations, if you want.



[click to enlarge](#)

Here's a complete list of supplies used in this project:

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4. [Cutaway backing](#)
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