

African Mudcloth – summer holiday fun!

In the African country of Mali, the people actually use mud to make wonderful patterns on cloth. They use river mud to paint patterns onto dyed black fabric. Then they use bleach to remove the colour in between the mud patterns. When the mud is washed off it leaves a wonderful black and white pattern on the fabric. This method is called 'resist'.



We can do something similar using soil from our gardens! If you use bright colours rather than black you can create some very lively patterns. (see photo above)

You'll need:

- . A sunny day if you want things to happen quickly.
- . A few ironed bits of white or cream sheeting or calico, about 30cm (12") square
- . Some newspaper or plastic sheeting to work on.
- . 3 or 4 fabric paints – thicker ones are best, like Dylon Colourfun or Pebeo Setacolor.
- . Old, firm paintbrushes.

Here's what you do.

Collect a jar of soil from your garden and use an old sieve to get rid of lumps and any little stones. Mix a little water with the sieved soil to make a paste which is just thick enough to be able to paint with and leave no sign of the white cloth underneath.

Paint patterns with the mud over your cloth. You may need to add a little extra water part-way through. You can make zigzags or circles, wavy lines or straight ones. Just have fun! Remember that the bits you paint with mud will be the bits that stay white at the end. (see photos below)



Let the mud dry completely. Leave it in the sun if possible to speed things up.

When it's dry, use the fabric paints to carefully paint between the mud patterns. (*see photos below*)



Let the paint dry and then gently shake off the dried mud and iron on the back of the fabric for about a minute (or as long as it says on the paint bottle). This fixes the colour so it won't wash out. Use an old sheet over the ironing board if you don't want to get in trouble!

Gently handwash the fabric in warm, soapy water to remove the rest of the mud. Rinse it and hang it out to dry or put it flat on the lawn in the sun. Iron on the back again when it's dry.

Instead of mud, you could make a paste from plain flour and water. It's a bit harder to get off the cloth afterwards (I used my fingernails!) but it leaves the fabric pure white underneath. Don't forget to iron it to fix the colour. The red, blue and white sample in the photographs is made this way.