

Color Your World With Crystals!

Get the scoop on the products and techniques you need to add beautiful, sparkling crystals to wearables, accessories, home decorative items, and more

by James Raymer, Dalco Home Sew



Hot melt crystals will go on any type of fabric making their decorating possibilities endless. Here, crystals were used on the butterflies to enhance this appliquéd pillow.

Crystals are one of the hottest trends in home sewing, embroidery and quilting right now. They come in a wide range of colors and are so easy to apply; embellishers all over the country are coming up with all kinds of fun and creative applications.

Once you start using crystals, you may find they are like potato chips. You can't eat just one potato chip and once you learn how to apply crystals, you will find an endless number of ways to use them.

Crystals come in all colors and sizes but the two most popular sizes are 3mm and 4mm. They come packaged by color and size in individual packages or can be purchased from some suppliers in handy kits (in 3mm, 4mm or a combination) that include divided trays with each section holding one color. The kits make it easy to keep colors separated and to choose the colors you want as you work.

The back of each crystal has a heat-activated adhesive, commonly known as hot fix crystals, that when melted will bond the crystal to the item to be embellished. The adhesive adheres to just about anything that is porous such as fabric, paper, leather, or wood. You can experiment to see what other types of substrates may work.

How To Use

To apply the crystals, you need a heated applicator. One of the most common types comes as a wand that is plugged in. The better-quality wands will have an on-off switch and a selection of

tips to accommodate the different crystal sizes.

Some also may include a flat tip for additional embellishment uses. First, the user selects the tip that fits the chosen crystal.

Then the wand is turned on and preheated. Generally, several minutes is all it takes. Make sure your crystals have a flat bottom and have the heat-seal adhesive on the flat bottom.



In many cases, the pattern in the fabric will suggest an ideal place to put crystals. Any patterns with motifs that have a center lend itself to crystal placement. They also work well used as outlines of an object such a ball.

The crystal is placed on a Teflon sheet or some surface that cannot be damaged by heat. The reason is the hot applicator tip may burn a table. If you are attaching a crystal to apparel or to a lightweight fabric, it's a good idea to slide a Teflon sheet underneath the fabric for added protection.

The tip, which has a slot on the side, is pressed down over the crystal until it is attached. It immediately begins to heat up, melting the glue. Look to see if the glue is melting and when it is, place the wand in position and press down in the desired location. The melted glue bonds to the surface, which causes the crystal to stick and have staying power so when you pick up the wand it releases the crystal. For most fabrics, holding the wand for about approximately 10-15 seconds does the trick.

For heavier fabrics like flannel or felt, it may be necessary to hold it a bit longer in the 20-25 second range. You want to press hard enough to drive the glue down into the fabric, but not too hard or you may lodge the crystal into the applicator. Some users have suggested once the crystal is released, you can put a thimble on your finger and press down on the crystal to help it adhere better.

In rare occasions when the crystal gets stuck in the applicator tip, it can easily be dislodged by sticking a quilt pin or some sharp object into the slot and pushing down gently to remove it. Let the crystal cool and then try again to apply it. If you are finding that crystals are consistently sticking in your applicator, try cleaning it to get rid of residual glue.

Flat Head Technique

The second technique for applying crystals does not use the applicator tips but the flat head. When doing more complicated designs, this method is preferred. Specially designed gripping tweezers are used to pick up crystals one at a time and put in place. This allows the embellisher to see how the design looks and changes can be made to the

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color and size of the crystal. This method also avoids the possibility of a crystal getting stuck in the tip. The flat head of the applicator is then pressed down on the positioned crystal until it heats up the glue and melts it.

The applicators can apply more than just crystals. Many wands have additional heads that can be used to apply nail heads, studs, pearls or other embellishments. Some of the better wands also include a triangular-shaped tip also referred to as a ribbon tip. This tip can be used to apply fusible webbing or anything about the width of a ribbon that is fusible.

Washability

Once the glue has cooled and set, you can wash the garment or item it is on. It is recommended that you turn the item inside out, use cold water, and set the machine on the gentle cycle. Crystal-decorated garments have survived the dryer, but to be on the safe side, it is better to let apparel hang dry.

Applicator wands also come with a handy stand that can be used to rest the wand on when it is heated so it will not do damage to any surfaces. Look for a wand that has a special groove to securely hold it on the stand.

The number of ways that crystals can be used is up to the imagination of the embellisher. Just a few suggestions include any type of blank, appliquéd, or embroidered apparel such as jeans, jackets, sweat shirts, skirts, spiritwear, costumes, and caps. Home decorative items such as quilts, wall hangings, framed artwork, coasters, ornaments, candles, decoupage, and silk florals can be enhanced. Crystals are perfect for any type of bridal apparel or accessories, scrapbooking, dolls, boxes, and a wide range of other crafts.

At Debi Moffit's store, Somewhere Sewing, Johnson City, TN, she holds a Midnight Madness event once a month on a Friday. Customers come in from 6 p.m. to midnight and create projects in the store. During her December event, one project was decorating pre-cut felt Christmas trees using crystals as the ornaments. "It's a great kid's project," Moffit said, "because you can have the kids cut out the shapes, punch a hole at the top, and then help them attach the crystals."

Salley Chaney, owner, AAA Sewing and Vacuum in Madison, TN, also has used the same project and was very successful in helping many of her customers learn how to use and apply crystals.

Another idea Moffit came up with was taking a greeting card, which in her case was a Christmas tree, and enhancing it with crystals. This idea could easily be done for Easter, Valentine's Day, or other holidays. "If you wanted, you can punch a hole in the card to make it an ornament or frame it," she said.

More Ideas

A customer of Moffit's, Joan Bencene, Johnson City, TN, used decorative stitching combined with crystals to decorate a favorite pair of jeans. Linda Fugitt, who owns Linda Kay's Embroidery in Rowlett, TX, found her customers wanting to put crystals on quilts. Linda's daughter dressed up a Florida tourist T-shirt. Fugitt also



A quick craft project that Debi Moffit designed for her Midnight Madness class, held one Friday a month at her store from 6 p.m. to midnight, was these felt tree ornaments made out of felt. Customers could pick which jewels colors they wanted to adhere to the trees.



Consider decorating hand or tea towels. This piece was decorated with one of the designs offered in the Leaves collection of Dalco Home Sew Easy-Stitch Appliqué kits and then enhanced with crystals. The tweezers were used to put the crystals in place and then the flat tip of the applicator heats them up so the glue melts and holds them in place.

has used crystals to put names on Christmas stockings.

Fugitt discovered she had a huge hit when she used crystals on girls' volleyball jerseys. The team's name was the Shockers. The name was created in tackle twill but the O in the word was created entirely of clear crystals arranged to look like volleyball. "The girls loved it," said Fugitt, "and many people at the game commented on how the girls' uniforms sparkled."

Jackie Gilbreath, 35th Avenue Sew and Vac, Phoenix, AZ, hosted a "bling" class where crystals were used to decorate a variety of embroidered apparel and non-apparel items. The most popular was jeans, with girls' tops coming in close behind. "Girls like to place crystals along the thin ribbing at the neckline," she says. She also has seen them used on flip flops.

Early Irwin, a Dalco Home Sew educator based in McKinney, TX, has used crystals on bags, placemats, and baskets. Helen Ray, San Angelo, TX, head educator at Dalco Sew, has seen "an amazing number of uses" by embellishers she has worked with.

With their wide variety of colors and sizes, there's no limit to the different ways crystals can be used to enhance wearables, accessories, and decorative items. The pre-packaged kits provide everything a person needs to get started. Consider displaying some samples with decorated items around the store and watch your crystals sales boom. 🧡



This beautiful handbag was created out of a placemat and embroidered with an Easy-Stitch Appliqué design from Dalco Home Sew. It was then further enhanced with the addition of crystals which were placed on the fan and inside the rose. This project was created by Nancy Avery, Wolverine Lake, MI.

Photos courtesy of Dalco Home Sew.

James Raymer, vice president of Dalco Home Sew, has been in the textile industry for more than 25 years. As managing director of Dalco Home Sew, he and artist/digitizer Norman Gates have spent the past three years creating appliqué design collections for a dealer network. The company offers easy-to-use appliqué kits in more than 50 motifs as well as DalCrystals, Dal Wands, and other accessories for applying crystals. For more information, you may contact him at 1-972-494-1455 extension 214; e-mail: jraymer@dalcoathletic.com or visit www.dalcohomesew.com.