

Hand-Cast Paper Holiday Ornaments

Homemade decorations go a long way to turn a house into a home during the holiday season. Beautiful hand-cast paper ornaments may look as delicate as newly fallen snow, but they're actually quite sturdy—and lots of fun for children to make! Your child will improve her fine motor skills and get in tune with her inner creative self while making this festive, wintertime craft.

What You Need:

- Paper-casting powder
- Cotton linter (both can be purchased at art supply or craft stores)
- Blender
- Strainer or wire screen
- Sponge
- Towel
- Knife or nail file
- Decorative ceramic molds or holiday cookie/candy molds
- Needle and thin cord or ribbon
- Watercolor paints
- Hot glue gun and trimmings (buttons, dried flowers, glitter, ribbons, etc.) (last two are optional)



What You Do:

1. Ask your child to fill the blender with about 1 quart of warm water.
2. Have her tear a sheet of cotton linter (about 8 inches by 7 inches) into strips about 1 to 2 inches in length. Allow the linter to soak for 5 minutes.
3. While the cotton linter is soaking, ask your child to spray the inside of the ceramic molds with a light, even coat of vegetable oil.
4. After waiting about 5 minutes, invite your child to blend the water on low speed for 30 seconds; then, add 1 teaspoon of paper casting powder and blend for a full minute on high speed. The consistency should be comparable to that of apple sauce.
5. Have your child pour about 1/3 of the mixture into the strainer to drain the excess water. Spread wet pulp evenly in the ceramic mold, making sure to overlap the outside edges of the mold just slightly.
6. Show your child how to compress the paper into the mold with a damp sponge, wringing out the sponge periodically to rid it of excess water. She should repeat this process 3-4 times and then carefully press the paper with a folded dish towel to absorb any remaining water.
7. Make sure she allows the mold to dry. You can dry the paper overnight in the mold or place the mold in an oven at about 125-150° F for 3 hours or so, until the paper is completely dry.
8. Have your child use the blade of a nail file or knife to loosen the edge of the paper and gently remove the ornament from the mold.
9. Using a needle and a thin cord or ribbon, create a hanger for the ornament. Thread the cord or ribbon through the top of the ornament, tying the ends at the top.

Plain white paper ornaments with gold thread make an extra special addition to your tree. Otherwise, use embellishments such as watercolor paints, ribbon, buttons, etc., to trim your ornaments as desired. Enjoy the holiday season and its accompanying crafts!