

Up-cycled brushes



For this up-cycle craft tutorial, brush-maker Ellie Birkhead has come up with a fun activity using found or waste materials. Once you have made one brush you can experiment with lots of different materials for both the handle and the bristles as further upcycle experiments.

You will need:

- Bamboo cane - dry bamboo cane indoors for at least 24 hours if cut from the garden. Bamboo thicknesses will vary a lot so it's up to you what you go for, but this will determine whether you create a thick or thin brush.
- Bristles – either hog hair (the traditional brush making material, could be taken from an old unwanted brush) / feathers / unraveled rope or net / straw / grass / horse mane or tail hair / any other animal hair / your hair! / pine needles / rubber strands / other found or waste materials
- Wooden skewer / kebab stick / cocktail stick
- Dental floss / fine string / sewing thread
- Garden clippers or a junior hack saw
- Craft glue
- Scissors
- Elastic band



Warning! This activity uses sharp tools. Children should be supervised and garden clippers should only be used by adults.



Using the garden clippers cut the bamboo to the length you'd like your brush handle to be. Warning: sharp tools! Ask an adult to do this for you.



Using your skewer hollow out about 3cm into the soft inside of your bamboo cane. You only need to hollow out the end that you're going to put your brush bristles into.



Your bamboo handle should now have a nice clean hole in one end ready for your bristles to be inserted.



Cut your chosen bristle material to length. The length is up to you depending on whether you want to create a brush with long bristles, like a calligraphy brush, or a brush with short bristles, like a stippling brush, or just something in between!



Pinch off a small amount of bristles which looks right for your hollowed-out bamboo cane. This can be a little tricky to judge first time round so may take a bit of trial and error!



Use your elastic band to tie your bristles together. Aim to have the band towards one end of your bunch. Once you've done this tap your bristles down on a hard flat surface to try and get them all level on the end nearest the elastic band.



Cut a length of floss or thread of about 15-20cm. Tightly wrap this a few times around your bristles, below the elastic band and tie in a double knot to secure.



Remove the elastic band, being careful not to move the bristles too much as you do so. Now trim the long ends of your floss or thread close to the knot, but try to leave a few millimeters so that the knot doesn't come undone.



Squeeze a small amount of glue in the hollow end of your bamboo cane. If any spills out of the hole you can wipe this away with a damp cloth.



Make sure the knotted floss or thread is pulled down towards the end of your bunch of bristles but be careful not to pull it over the end as you do this. Now you can gently insert your bunch of bristles into the hollow end of your bamboo cane and into the glue.



Using your scissors trim the ends of your bristles if you need to. You can cut them straight across, on an angle, or tapered depending on what style of brush you'd like to create.



Let the glue dry, ideally for an hour.



Now you are ready to start using your homemade brush!

Have you been bitten by the brush-making bug? Here are some more brushes you can try to make. Lots of materials make interesting bristles and you can experiment with different handles too, from twigs and antlers to old pens, tubes, pipes or mop- and broomsticks. [Go for a walk outside like Ellie](#) or hunt around your home to see what you can come up with!



Ellie has sent us some suggestions for using your swanky new tool:

Painting You can make stiff brushes which are better for oil paint and acrylic or make finer brushes which are better for watercolors

Calligraphy Dip your brush in ink to practice calligraphy writing, and if you trim bristles into different shapes this will create different effects

Mark making Test out what interesting marks you can make with different types of bristles

Glazing ceramics Use your brush to paint patterns onto ceramics pots or plates

Mushroom cleaning If you make a thick bristled brush you could even use it for cleaning handpicked mushrooms!

Craft Club is a national campaign that champions craft in schools, galleries, libraries and anywhere else you can bring people together to share craft skills.