# MUD STENCILS!





When you walk through the city, you are bound to see some graffiti, artwork on walls or other surfaces in public spaces. It is typically done with paint or markers that contain toxic chemicals that are harmful to the environment, especially spray paint. The chemicals used to clean up graffiti are also harmful for the environment, and a lot of people have a problem with graffiti so it gets cleaned up often!

But can you guess what isn't full of toxic petrochemicals? Mud. The mud in your yard (if you have one) is an amazing artistic medium that you may have never considered, but has been used by humans for thousands of years. Your favorite ceramic mug? That's made from clay, a type of soil. Malian bògòlanfini, or mudcloth, is made by painting designs onto dyed fabric using mud. Mud can also be used for graffiti! In fact there's an entire movement of people creating "eco-graffiti" using materials like mud, moss, and other natural materials. Instead of polluting the surrounding air, water, and soil eco graffiti will just wash away over time.



# WHAT YOU NEED

-Mud! Preferably different types and colors of soil.
-Sponges
-Container(s) for mud. Buckets are fine, paint trays like for painting your house also work well.
-A whisk
-Mylar film sheets to make your stencil
-Paper and pencil/markers to make your design.
-An x-acto blade or utility cutter
-A cutting mat
-A surface to print on. This project is best done outdoors on stone or concrete, but anything that mud sticks to will work as a surface.
-Tape

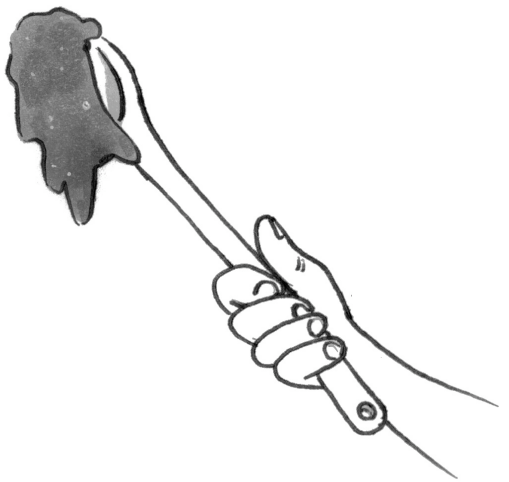


# HOW YOU DO IT

## MAKE SOME MUD

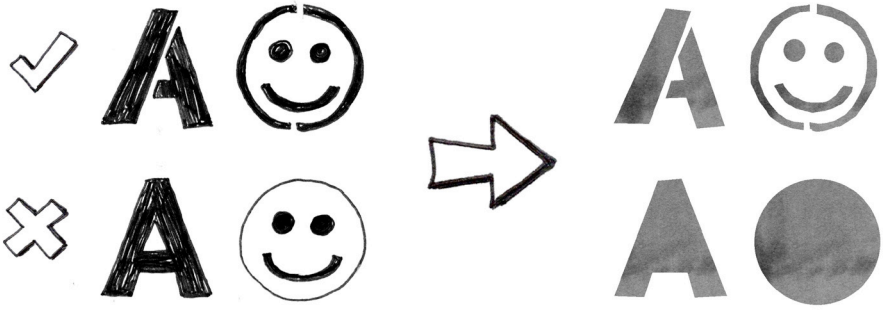
Find some soil, add water! Gradually add water and stir it into your soil, you can also use a whisk to mix your mud. It should be around the consistency of peanut butter, or slightly looser, and all of the water should be absorbed. Different types of soil will have different qualities, and may need to be processed slightly differently.

When I've done this I've used soil with a significant clay content, and found that it was very clumpy. When working with that soil I would break it up using my hands (wear gloves while doing this!) before adding water, then again after the water has been mixed in. This way I found that I got smoother mud with fewer clumps, and it was an opportunity to take some of the rocks out. But your soil may be different! Experiment!

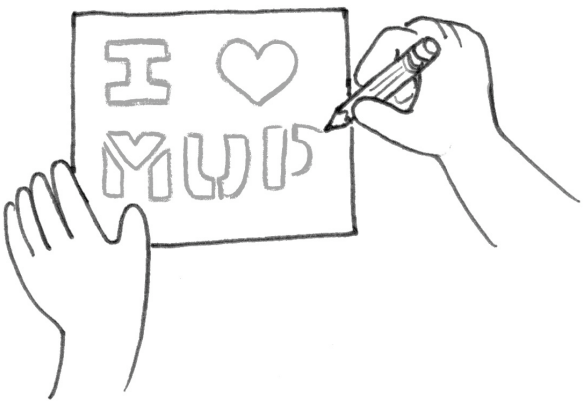


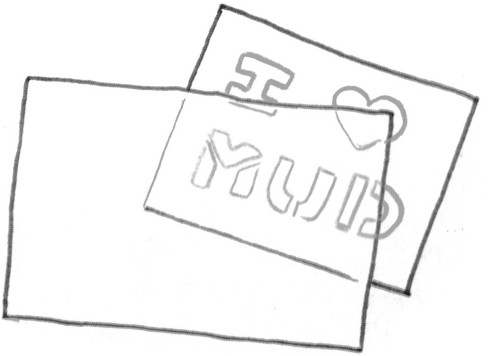
# MAKE A STENCIL

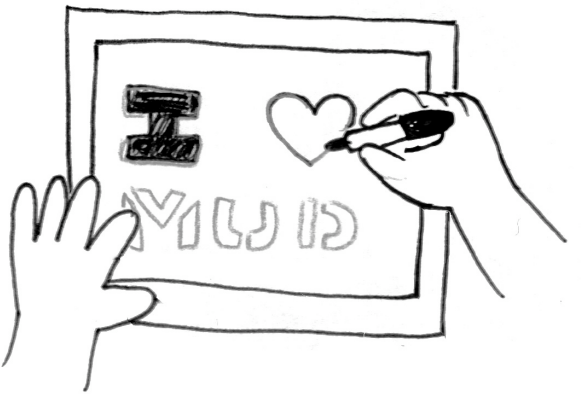
Start by drawing a design on paper, it can be anything you want! Just make sure you don't leave any islands. Floating pieces that will fall out when you cut your stencil.



Once you've drafted your design, you can transfer it to a piece of mylar using a permanent marker. Start cutting using an x-acto blade or other similar cutter. Kids may need the help of an adult if no kid-friendly cutting tools are available. If you do not have a cutting mat, you can also use a piece of cardboard.




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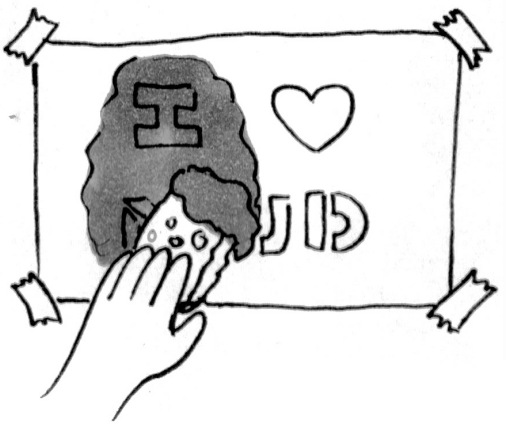

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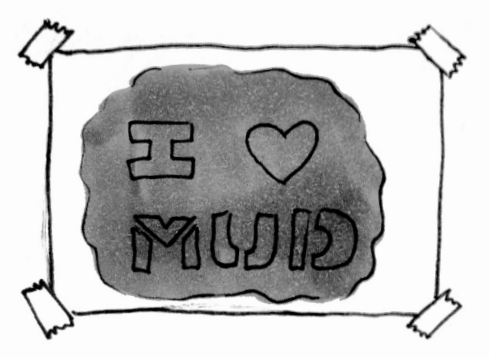
# PRINT!!!

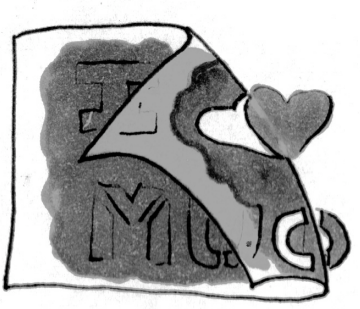
You have your stencil, you have your mud, and hopefully you have a spot to print on. The sidewalk is a great place to do your first mud stencil prints. To set up, tape your stencil down where you want to print. Then for your mud, I like to keep most of my mud in a large container and spoon it out onto something flat, the trays you use for housepaint work really well. It's helpful to keep a spray bottle around to freshen up the mud in your try as the air and sun can dry it out quickly.



When you're ready to start printing, take some mud on your sponge, and start applying it from the outer edges of the stencil, pulling in. It's important to work from the outside of your stencil inward to prevent any mud from getting on the underside of your stencil. Once the whole design is filled in, remove the stencil and enjoy your work! Then go print more!









Observe your stencil as it degrades over time. How long do you think it will last? How does its appearance change? Or maybe you experiment with different kinds of mud, multiple stencils, whatever you can think of! The important thing is to get out there, and make something that makes your neighborhood a more beautiful place.





Made by Ari Mulch for the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance in 2026

