

The Simple Guide to Henna



Beautiful, temporary, painless body adornment

*Recipes and tips so you can experience the joy and
connection of drawing your own henna designs!*

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First, a bit of history and context...

Henna is the ancient art of bodypainting with paste made from powdered leaves from the henna plant. The word "Mehndi" is the Hindu word for the henna plant as well as the art of using it. In Arabic, the word henna means both the plant and the art. The words are linguistically related.

The henna plant grows wild across northern Africa, the Middle East and in India, which is where the local peoples figured out how to use the plant to decorate the body. Traditionally, the hands and feet are painted before important celebrations (like weddings), and the painting process is a celebration as well. Usually a women's art, some cultures also henna the hands of men on the eve of their weddings. Henna has been used to decorate the skin and hair for nearly 5,000 years -- and has been found on the hands and feet of Egyptian mummies! (Although there is little evidence to support that the Egyptians used henna as anything other than a hair conditioner and skin preservative until the New Kingdom Period when henna-using cultures interacted freely with the Egyptians -- before that time, henna for the Egyptians was not used for body art.)



Henna reached cultural heights in Persia during the Abbasid Empire, in the 1400s. Women were schooled in henna arts as well as poetry, music and dance. Often henna was mixed with strong perfumes and used to decorate a woman's body with evocative poetry. The scent lingered after the paste was removed, adding another element to what may have been the first multi-media performance art!

Henna is known by many names... SANSKRIT– mendika, raktgarbha, ragangi; ARABIC– henna, al khanna; PERSIAN–hina; HINDI–mehndi ...just to name a few!

Patterns vary from culture to culture...in India, hands and feet are covered in intricate, lacy designs. In North Africa, patterns that are more geometric are preferred. In India and Pakistan, the groom's initials are hidden in the mehndi on the bride's palms; it is said that if the groom cannot find the initials, the wife will be the family boss. At the very least, the groom must give the bride an extra gift if he cannot find the initials.

What henna is not

- Henna is not black. Even at its darkest, it is still a shade of brown or red.
- To get a black color, para-phenylenediamine (PPD) is often added. PPD is banned by the FDA for direct use on skin. (Although it is still found in cheap black hair dye – mostly sourced from China)
- *Reactions include skin rashes, dermatitis, blisters, sores, scarring, etc.*
- PPD is acceptable in hair dyes that do not come into contact with skin for prolonged periods.
- Black henna can cause blisters and permanent scars
- Henna takes time to stain the skin. If you find someone selling henna that stains your skin black in 10 minutes and lasts 6-8 weeks and they have no idea what is in the paste.... Go somewhere else for your henna!



Safe Variations on Henna

WHITE HENNA

There is nothing out there that will stain your skin white. Bleaching is not a safe option and can burn your skin.

White henna is an alcohol based body paint that can be applied like henna in henna patterns and lasts a few days. It is very pretty – but not real henna.



JAGUA

Jagua is a dye made from a fruit from the Amazon rainforest. It dyes the skin blue-ish dark grey that almost looks black. When mixed with henna, it deepens the henna color. It takes longer to dry than henna and has little room for error, but it is a safe alternative to black henna.

Unless you are allergic to strawberries, guava or walnuts... in that case, stay away.

"How To" Overview or Henna in 10 Easy Steps

1. Prepare henna paste
2. Clean skin to be painted
3. Apply transfer, or stencil, or boldly paint freehand
4. Let the henna dry.
5. Apply sealant (optional)
6. Stay warm and leave paste on for at least 4 hours; a bandage helps protect the design from bumping off and also helps retain body heat.
7. Remove remaining paste by rubbing, rubbing with olive oil, or rinsing with warm water.
8. The stain should be a nice bright orange which will slowly darken, sometimes taking up to 2 days to reach full color.
9. Protect your henna design from water by using products that contain oil and wax, such as lip balm or hennacare balm. In a pinch, olive oil or vaseline will help, but they absorb into the skin instead of creating a barrier from water.
10. Enjoy your beautiful henna design!

Skin Preparation

Traditionally rosewater or orange water is used to remove any excess oils and dirt from the skin before painting. However, you can use any astringent lotion, alcohol, or even soap and water.

***If someone has just used a self-tanner, the henna won't reach the skin and won't stain. Make sure the skin is clean -- no lotions -- OR self-tanners!!!

Drawing Tips

Choose your pattern and plan how it will fit on the skin. Lightly sketching your design with a yellow or orange non-toxic children's marker will help guide you and not interfere with the color as it develops. Coins can be used to model circles. String or rubber bands can be used to guide straight lines. Don't be afraid to draw slowly, and to correct mistakes when you make them.

Toothpicks are a henna artist's best friends; they can nudge lines or remove mistakes completely. Bamboo skewers or manicure orange sticks also work well.

You can make a transfer by tracing the design in ballpoint pen onto tracing paper (don't forget to reverse letters!) Clean the skin, then roll a glycerin-based deodorant (such as Mennen Speed Stick or Tom's of Maine) over the area. Apply the transfer design, ink-side down. Tap lightly to ensure good contact of the paper to the skin. Peel paper off and voila! the design has transferred.

APPLICATION

TIP: To make sure you have no lumps, strain your paste by spooning it into the toe of an old pantyhose knee-high, then squeeze the paste through the material. Pre-sifted henna is always worth the extra expense; many cheap brands of henna contain a large amount of twigs which must be sifted out if you want to get fine lines. Not only is it a pain in the patoot to sift henna, you lose a lot in the process so the cheap henna actually ends up costing more because only a fraction is usable and you've expended a lot of labor to get that fraction!

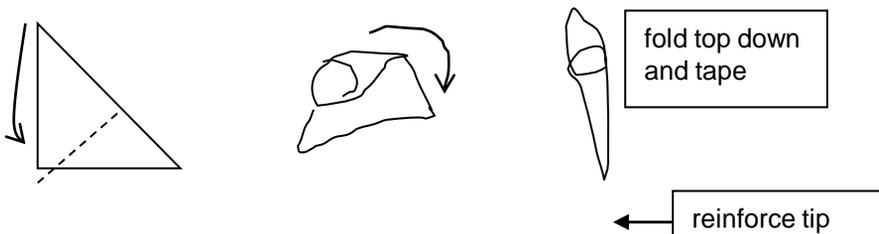
There are almost as many methods of application as there are recipes. Some of the more popular (from traditional to modern) are: stick (e.g. toothpick or bamboo skewer), paintbrush, cake-decorating cone with a metal tip, hand-rolled cone, syringe (no needle, of course!), squeeze bottle, and squeeze bottles with special metal tips for very fine lines.

There are many professional henna artists who swear by Jacquard bottles, which are small plastic bottles with metal tips. These can be found in the fabric dyeing section of craft stores since they were designed to apply gutta for silk resist painting. Filling the bottles can be a bit tricky. You will need to squeeze the bottle to let suction pull paste in, and keep repeating the process until the bottle is full.

Many people use a cake-decorating cone (also called carrot bags) with a fine tip. I get good control and it's easier on the hands than a small squeeze bottle. Filling the cone is easy. I put the pantyhose strainer into the bag, then constrict in the middle and pull the pantyhose out. This leaves finely sifted paste in the cone with minimal mess. There are several sizes of metal tips and you can use plastic coupler so you can change tips without changing bags. Carrot bags are large and will use an entire box of henna.

Other artists use cake-decorating cones without metal tips and are able to achieve a stunning variety of lines.

You can make your own cones from mylar or cellophane wrapping paper. Start with a square and then cut that into 2 right triangles. Put your thumb in the middle of the long side and twist so that one end of the triangle meets the middle point. Then start rolling until you have a cone. Tape the edges. . Fill with henna paste. Tape the cone shut -- make sure it's really well-taped to prevent henna cone blow-out. This is now my preferred method of application because you can control the size of the tip by how much you cut. It fits easily in the hand and requires much less washing than either the bottles or the cones with metal tips. Clear, shiny cellophane or Scotch tape works best to seal the cones. Invisible tape will leak.



Recipes

Recipes do not have exact measurements -- more alchemy than applied chemistry. THIS IS NOT ROCKET SCIENCE... Variations in relative humidity and temperature also affect your henna paste. Henna loves hot and humid conditions and will release its dye much more quickly in Houston, Texas than in Nome, Alaska. Also, henna needs an acid to help release its dye. Anything with a pH lower than 4 will work: lemon juice, lime juice, acidic water, strong tea made with neutral or acidic water, strong coffee, Coca-cola, lemonade, etc.

All henna recipes should be prepared in plastic, ceramic or glass bowls, using plastic or stainless steel utensils. The acid in the henna paste reacts with certain metals, which causes weird colors (usually a greenish cast). Leftover paste will keep in the fridge for about a week; longer than that and it starts to lose staining power. Paste freezes well and can last up to 5 months in the freezer.

It's also crucial to use fresh henna. Henna loses its ability to stain the skin over time and stale henna is a big disappointment. Make sure you get fresh powder from a supplier that knows the harvest date and keeps their henna in cool conditions. The henna from the local Indian store might have been sitting on the shelf for 6 years.... which would be very stale!

Some hennas are naturally stringy – Yemeni, Rajastani, and Moroccan hennas fall into this category. Jamila henna from Pakistan is not stringy at all.



Very Simple Recipe

1 tbl henna powder, sifted
1 tbl or more distilled water

Put sifted henna powder in a bowl, add enough water to create the consistency of toothpaste. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit for several hours at room temperature, or until you see a brownish layer that shows dye release. Add water until you have the texture you want.

Popular Indian Recipe

1 part henna powder, sifted
1 part lemon or lime juice
eucalyptus, clove essential oils
strong dark tea

Put sifted henna powder in a bowl. Mix with enough lemon juice to make a mealy paste. Let sit overnight. Add several drops of eucalyptus oil. Mix in strong tea until you reach the desired consistency.

Recipe from United Arab Emirates

henna powder, sifted

dried limes

strong dark tea or spiced coffee

Either buy dried limes from an ethnic grocery, or make your own by slicing limes and letting dry naturally or in a warm oven (~200°). Put dried limes in a non-aluminum saucepan, cover with water and simmer until water color changes to reddish. Add many strong dark tea leaves. Boil until tea leaves settle. Strain out the liquid. Mix henna with lime-tea liquid until the paste is a smooth consistency. Rest for at least an hour. Leftover liquid will refrigerate nicely for a long time.

Recipe from Morocco

henna powder, sifted

rosewater

strong spiced coffee that includes cardamom

Make a mealy paste with the henna and rosewater. After dye release has occurred, mix in strong hot spiced coffee until you get a smooth consistency. A traditional sealant from Morocco is made from lemon juice, sugar, black pepper, and garlic. (It also makes a great marinade for chicken...)

Natasha's Mix

1 tbl henna powder, sifted

1 tbl distilled water

1 pkt dried lemon juice

1/8 tsp essential oils of lavender and eucalyptus

1/8 tsp sugar (You could use molasses, fructose or corn syrup)Mix henna, lemon powder, and water until it is a crumbly paste. There are no firm measurements for the water. When the texture is right, then it's the right amount...Wait for dye release – on a hot day this can happen in 2 hours; on average I leave henna to rest on the counter for at least 6-10 hours; sometimes when I'm lazy, I'll leave the mixture in the fridge for 2 days before adding the other ingredients. Add essential oils and molasses and mix well. Add more distilled water as needed to make a smooth consistency. I prefer a very soft yogurt consistency.

Put paste in your applicator. The paste should stain immediately. You can freeze the paste for up to 5 months; just let it thaw in the fridge before using. It will last for about a week in the fridge.

*Tests from the Sirius Henna Conference in 2001 confirmed that monoterpenol alcohols makes henna stain faster and darker. Indian melabiyah oils often contain monoterpenes (safe for skin) but can also contain turpentine (not safe for skin).

Essential oils high in terpineols which are readily available in American health foods shops and other specialty shops are: tea tree oil, cajeput oil, ravensara oil, lavender oil, and geranium oil. Unfortunately, pure terpineol oil is not easily found in the U.S. However, *results using eucalyptus, tea tree and lavender essential oils have been excellent*. Lavender oil is recommended for pregnant women since it is the mildest and most easily tolerated of the essential oils. I often make an essential oil blend using 1 tbl lavender essential oil, 2 tsp tea tree or eucalyptus essential oil. The lavender, tea tree and eucalyptus oils have monoterpenol alcohols to enhance the stain. I then add the needed amount of my blend to my paste when I mix.

Witch's Brews

Everyone has a favorite henna mix. The effective additives all fit into the basic chemistry of how henna works. Acids release dye faster. Monoterpene alcohols release the dye more evenly. Sticky things make the henna stay on the skin better. Tannins help the dye color. Other ingredients enhance the scent of the mix.

Acids: lemon juice, lime juice, vinegar, coke (also has sticky stuff), tamarind, pomegranate syrup (also has sticky), red wine, dried limes

Sticky things: sugar, honey, molasses, syrup, coke (also has acid), okra, fenugreek, egg whites,

Monoterpenes aka Terps: Essential oils of tea tree, geranium, ravensara, cajeput, lavender, terpineol (not readily available in US), cloves (too much is an irritant)

Tannins: tea, coffee, black walnut powder (some people are allergic), red wine. Tea, coffee, and wine are also slightly acidic.

Scent enhancers: rosewater, rose petals, orange flower water, cardamom, herbal teas, essential oils that don't have monoterpenes, such as: sandalwood, patchouli, clary sage, cedar, etc.

This is a witch's brew I make every now and then.

2 teabags of good British black tea, such as Yorkshire Tea

1 tbl strong coffee

2 teabags of Chai spice tea

1 tsp tamarind paste (from Indian store)

a handful of cloves

cardamom pods

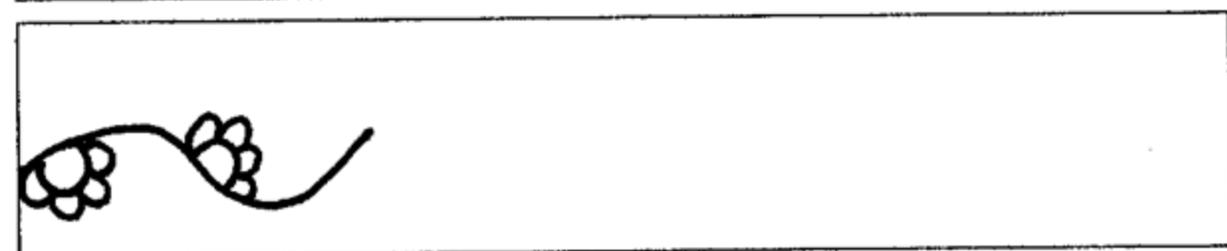
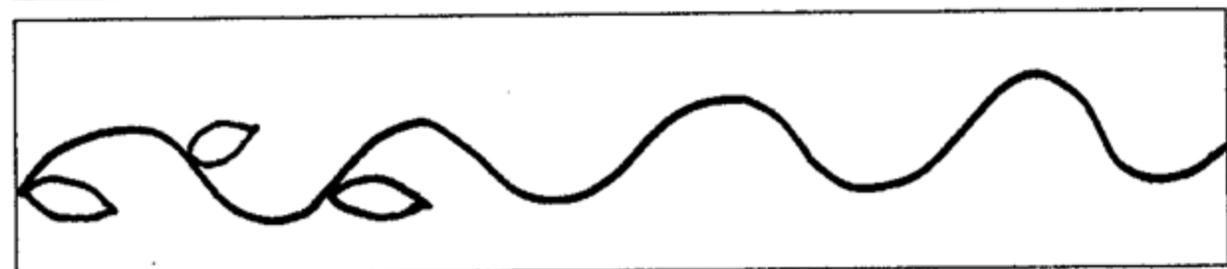
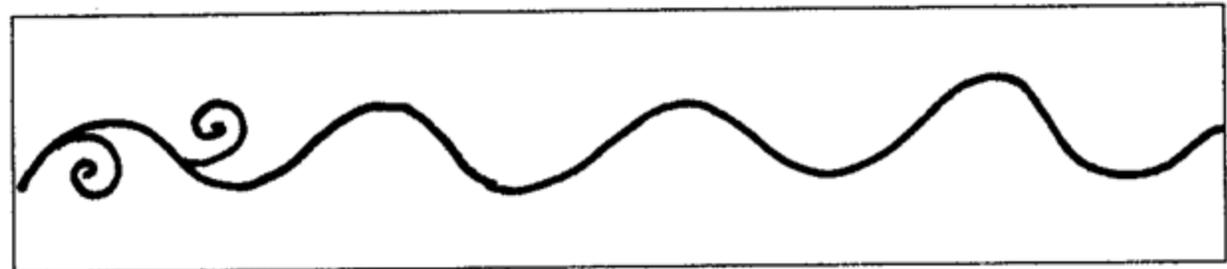
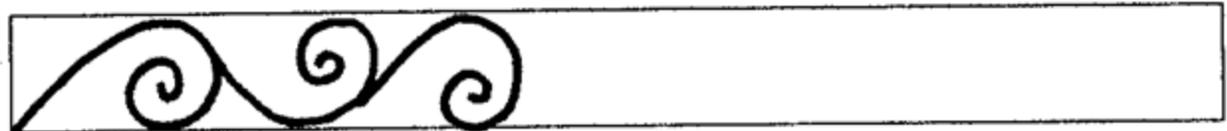
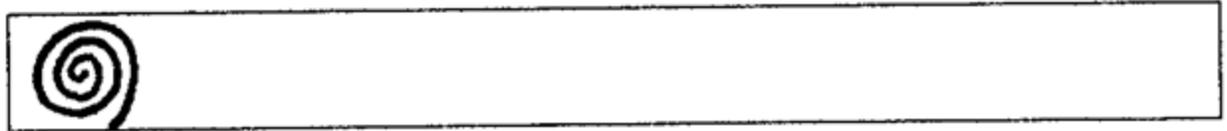
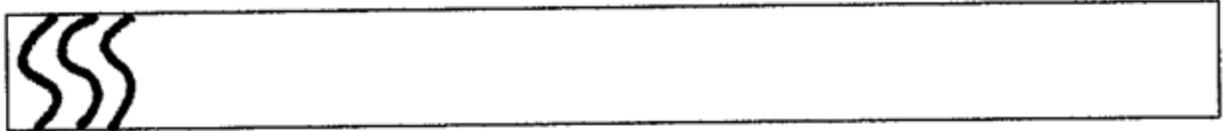
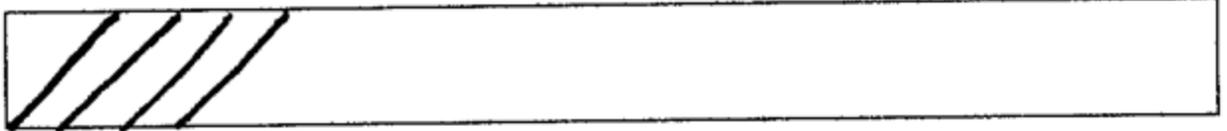
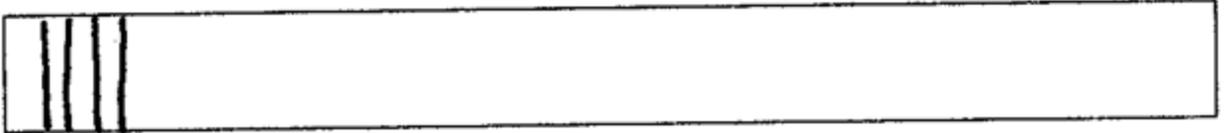
2 cups reconstituted lemon juice

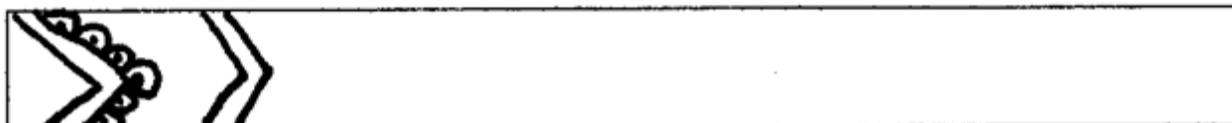
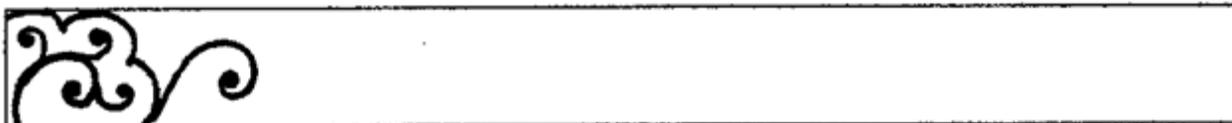
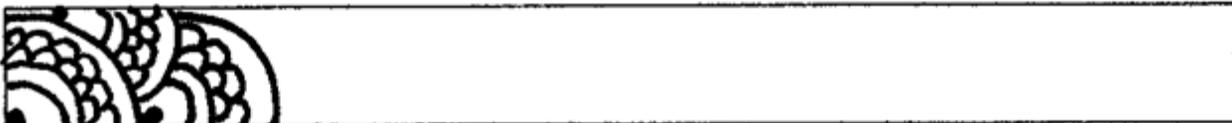
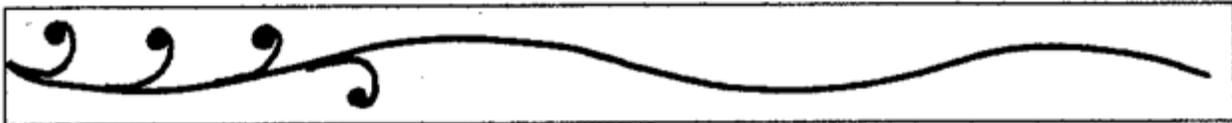
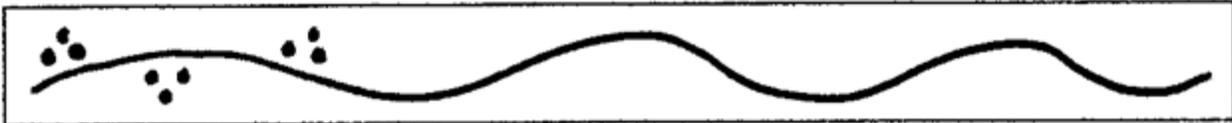
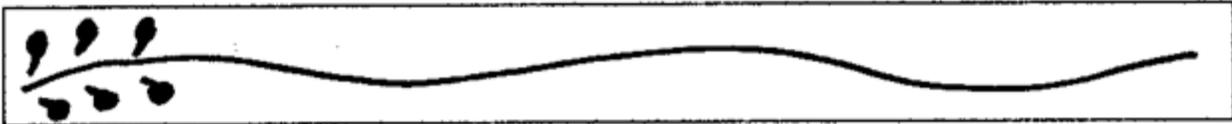
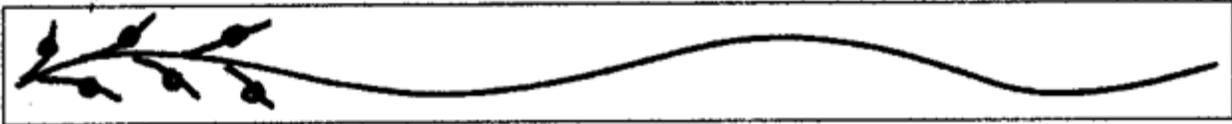
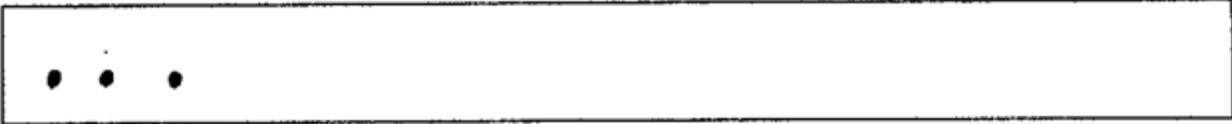
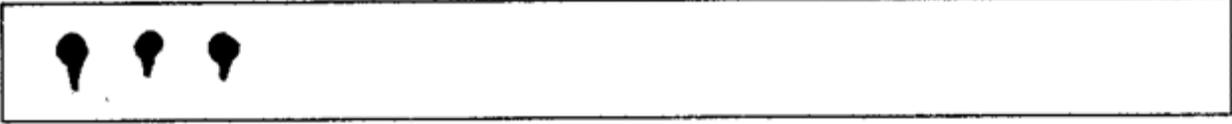
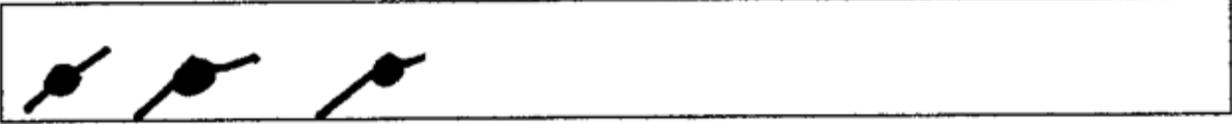
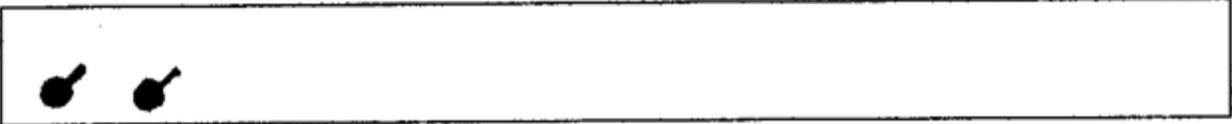
(optional: dried limes)

Put everything in a pot and simmer all day. Add more lemon juice as needed. I have a small crockpot for fondues that's perfect for this. It keeps almost indefinitely in the fridge.

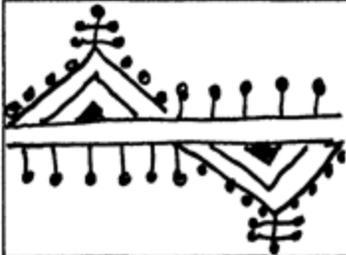


Practice these elements – mix and match to create your own designs





Practice shapes and lines to build patterns



Sealing

Sealing is a traditional step, but is not crucial for getting a good stain. If you have sugar of some sort in your paste, then the henna will stick to the skin evenly. I rarely seal designs at events,, but recommend it for people who get intricate designs with very fine lines – sealing really does help keep the henna in contact with the skin – and that’s what ensures a good stain!

Once the henna is applied and dried, you might want to apply a setting agent to help keep it on the skin, and to further activate the henna staining compounds. Traditionally, a mixture of lemon juice and sugar has been used -- carefully daubed on and allowed to dry. The sugar creates a protective crust and the lemon juice activates the henna. You can also add a drop or two of clove oil to the lemon and sugar mix.

I make a fairly thick lemon-sugar syrup:

1 tbl sugar

2 tbl lemon juice

Mix well and then microwave for 30 seconds or less -- until it boils.

This keeps for a very long time in the fridge.

More Sealants and Bandaging

After the lemon-sugar has dried, cover the design with a layer of toilet paper or unrolled cotton balls. Tape it securely. You might cover the bandage with a sock or ace bandage.

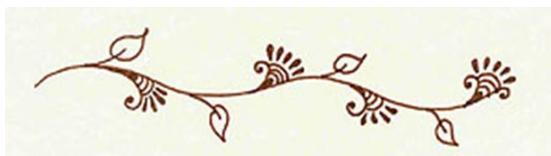
Hypofix tape, originally meant for medical uses, is breathable and very useful as a bandage: simply apply to dried henna designs – no need for a lemon-sugar sealant. This is best for overnight henna.

Heat

Once the design is securely wrapped, it is time to apply heat. Heat helps release the dye as well as encourage absorption into the skin. The temperature should be warmer than body temperature, but not scalding. Heating pads are nice, as are microwaveable heat pads and blow-drying. Hanging out in the sunshine on a nice day is excellent. If the design is on your hands or feet, wear gloves or socks. You are trying to encourage the pores to open. If you induce sweating, that is good, because the salts in the sweat further activate the henna making a very nice dark stain -- but don't run a marathon or induce so much sweat (and/or friction) that you smudge or wash away the design....!

Timing

Try to leave the bandage on as long as possible. Four hours is minimum. Six hours is better. Overnight is preferable. After about 12 hours, there's no more room in the epidermis for the henna to stain, so beyond 12 hours isn't going to add oompf to the stain...Stay warm. Think warm thoughts. Have a cup of something hot. Cuddle with your cat...



REMEMBER:

M*A*T*H:

M- Moisture - Keep the henna moist, it keeps staining.

A- Acidity - Lemon or lime juice helps release the dye.

T- Time - The longer the better, up to about 12 hours when the henna has no more skin to absorb into.

H- Heat - The warmer the better, sweat until you can't stand it anymore!

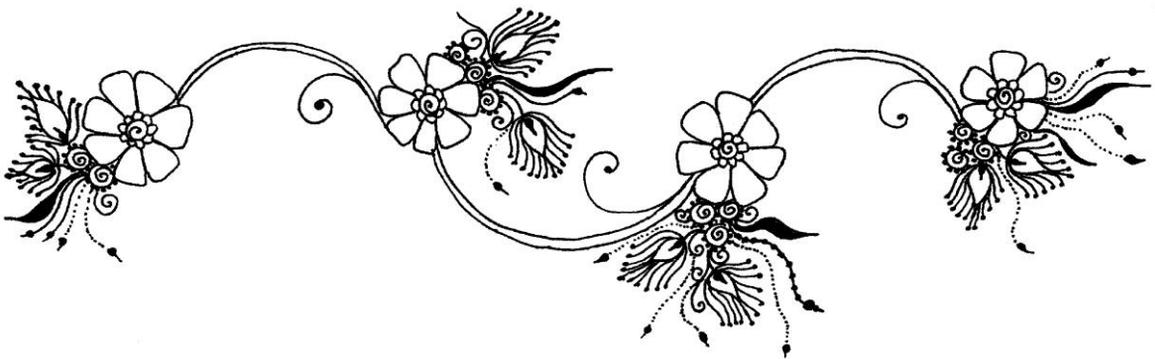
(this acronym is thanks to Carrie of Red Veil Henna in Boulder, CO)

Removal

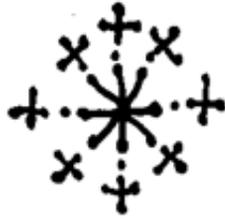
Once you cut away the bandage, there will probably be some henna paste that stubbornly refuses to scrape off with your fingers. Cocoa butter or light massage oil works great to dislodge henna. You can use any oil, but be careful not to use lotions with AHAs or other exfoliating agents. You can also rinse the stubborn paste off with warm water. Try to avoid swimming pools and jacuzzis for the next 24 hours if you can.

Aftercare

Mehndi can last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. The darkness and intensity is a result of many factors: quality henna, good mordants, skin chemistry, heat, and setting time. The average length of time is between a week and two weeks. You can help your design last longer by moisturizing the area and avoiding harsh chemicals and exfoliants. Swimming pool chlorine causes rapid fading. Protect your henna design from chlorine and other chemicals by using a balm with a mixture of oils and waxes. Chapstick works very well. Vaseline and olive oil are not as protective as lip balm because they absorb into the skin instead of forming a barrier on top of the skin, but they are good for short term exposure to water. DO not use anything with AHAs, glycolic acid, salicylic acid or other ingredients which exfoliate the skin. Since the henna design is only in the upper layer of your skin, you want to do what you can to keep that layer on as long as possible!



Traditional Designs from Morocco



"stung by love!"



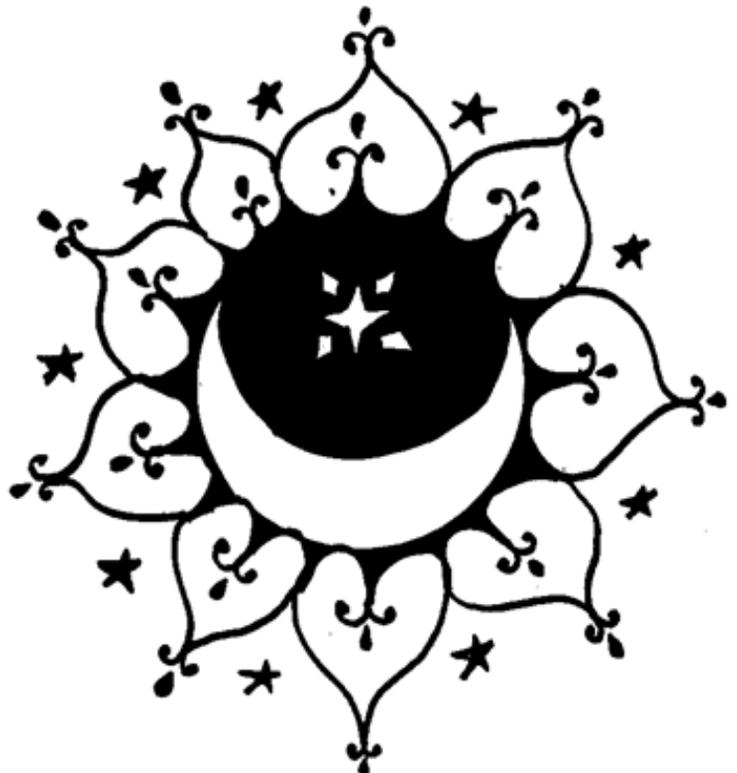
Traditional Persian Designs



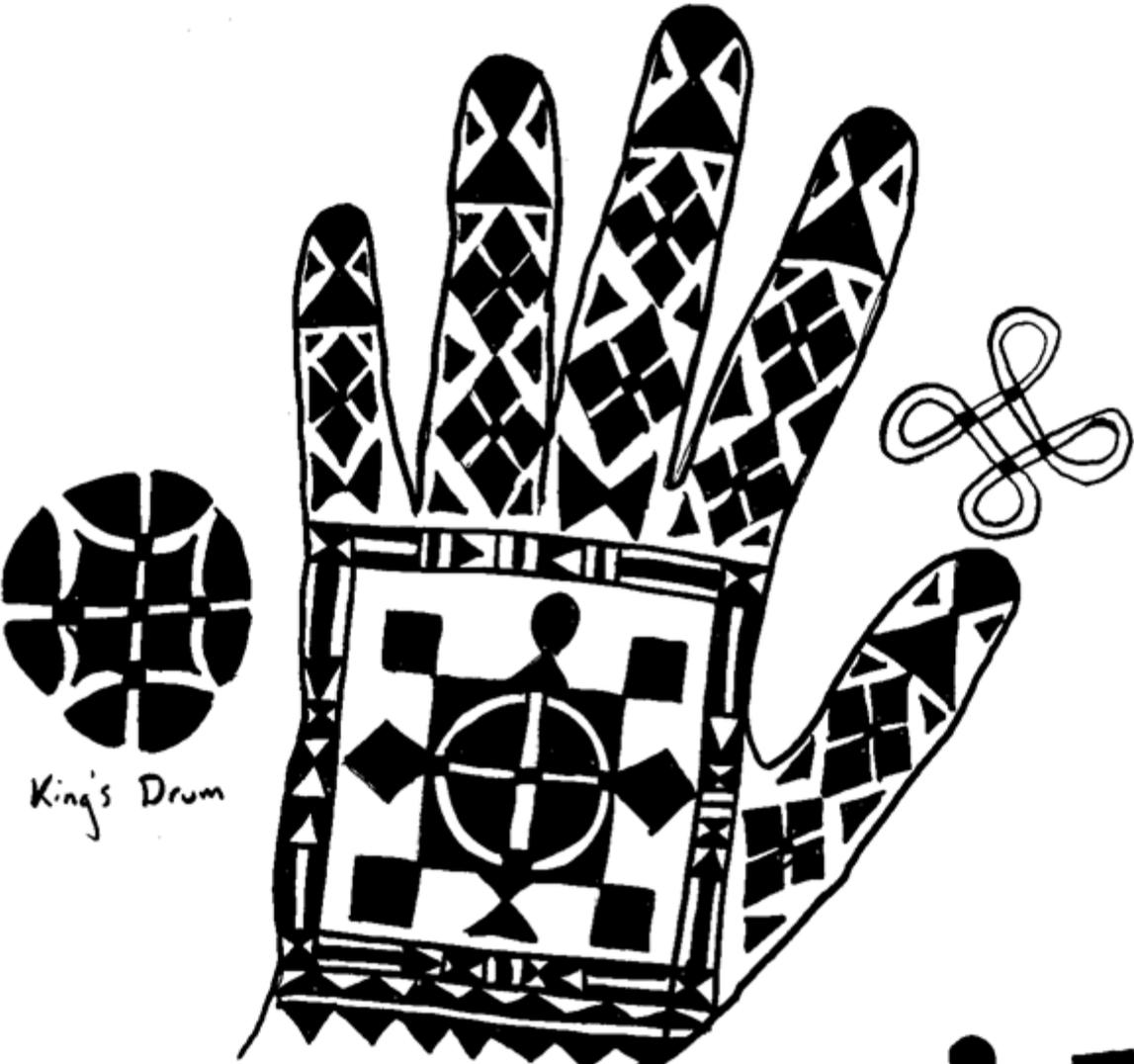
Traditional Designs from the Arab Gulf



"Hub" Arabic for
Love



Traditional Designs from the Horn of Africa



King's Drum

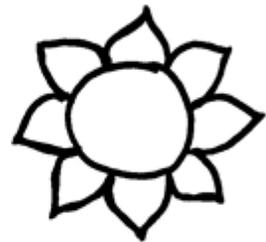


Warrior

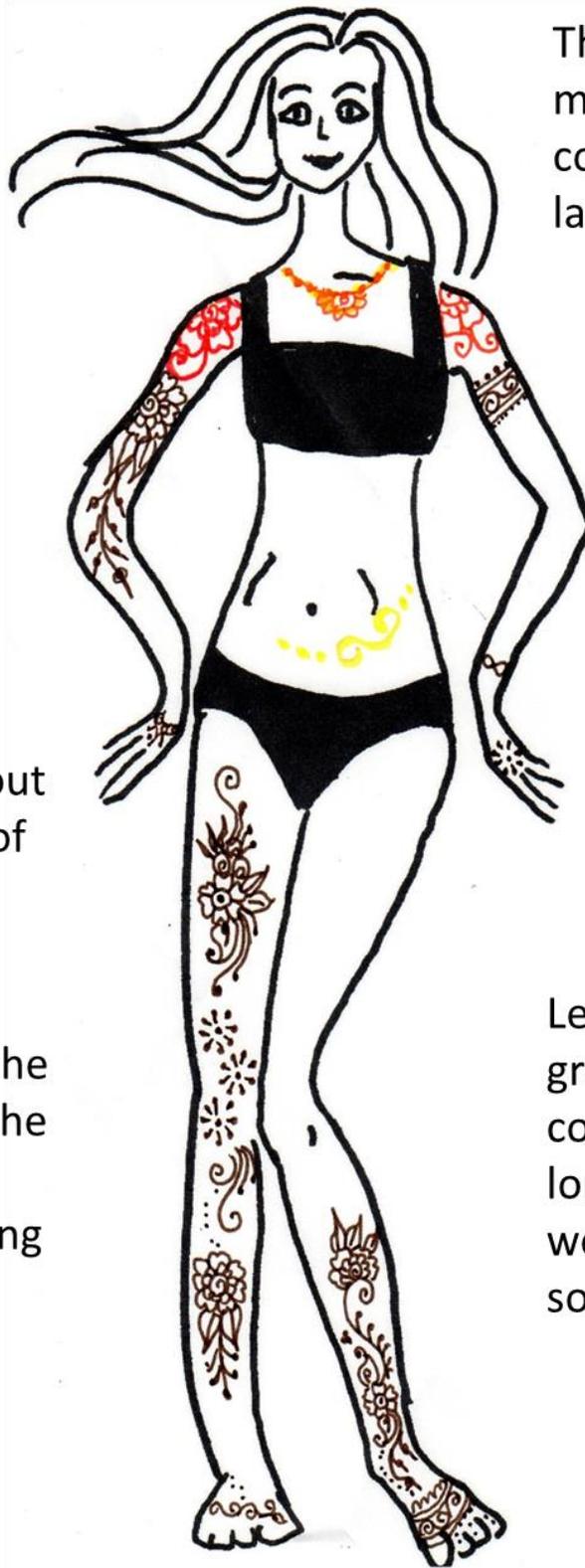


anti evil eye

Traditional Design Elements from India



Where does henna stain best?



The chest, torso and mid-back get lighter color that doesn't last as long.

The hands, arms, get great color. Henna on the arms can last 1-1/2 to 2 weeks

The back of the hands get great color but last about 1 week because of constant hand-washing.

The palms stain the darkest and last the longest, but you can't pick anything up for several hours.

Legs and feet get great color and last the longest, up to 3 weeks in some cases.

Your mileage may vary. If you don't leave the henna paste on for long enough time, it won't get a good color or last long no matter where it is. Swimming within 6 hours of getting a henna will also lessen its color and longevity.

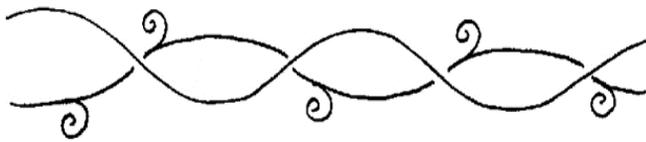
How to draw a twining vine



Draw a wavy line



Draw over and under to simulate crossed lines



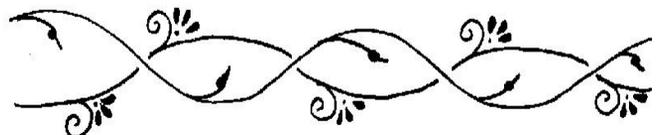
Add an outside curl to the under and over of a line



Add an inside dot-pull leaf to the inside of the other line



Add a dot and 3 dot-pull petals at the junction of each curl



Repeat dots and petals until you have a lovely vine

Let's draw a flower!



- **Step 1** The dot. Hold applicator and squeeze quickly, then release.



Step 2 Right above the dot, make another dot, then pull paste quickly so that it forms a point. This is called a dot-pull.



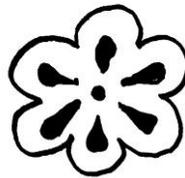
Step 3 Make a series of small dots around the central dot. These will serve to make sure your petals are arranged symmetrically.



Step 4 Complete the dot-pulls by starting above the guide dots and ending on them.



Step 5 Draw an arch over a dot-pull.



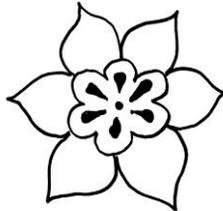
Step 6 Continue drawing arches around the entire flower.



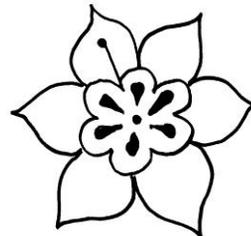
Step 7 Add a line with a bit of curve from the center of an arch.



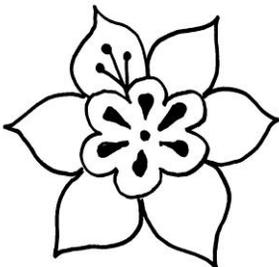
Step 8 Add another slightly curvy line in mirror image to complete a pointy petal.



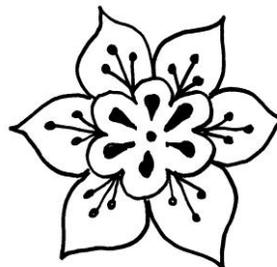
Step 9 Complete the set of pointy petals. Notice that the top of the point aligns with the bottom of the arches.



Step 10 In the center of the petal, draw a dot and pull a long line to the center of the arch. This is called a long dot-pull.



Step 11 Good things come in threes; draw a long dot-pull on either side of the original one; it looks nice if the flanking ones are a bit shorter than the one in the middle.

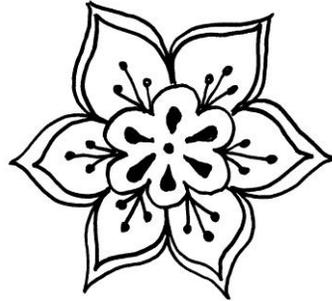


Step 12 Finish all the long dot-pulls. This little flower can be sold on its own.

Draw a flower, continued



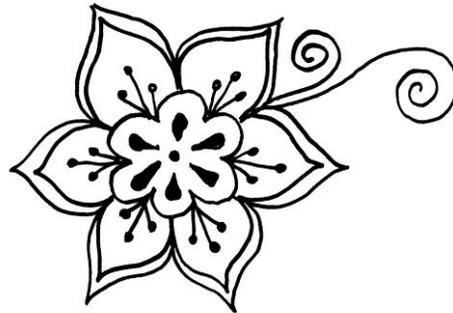
Step 13 Henna designs look better with doubled lines. Draw a line on the outside of each half of the pointy petals.



Step 14 Finish all the double lines.



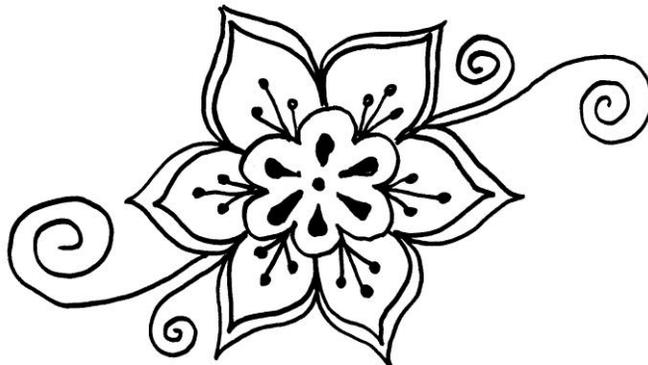
Step 15 Add a curl.



Step 16 Where there is one curl, it always looks better to add an opposite and slightly larger 2nd curl.

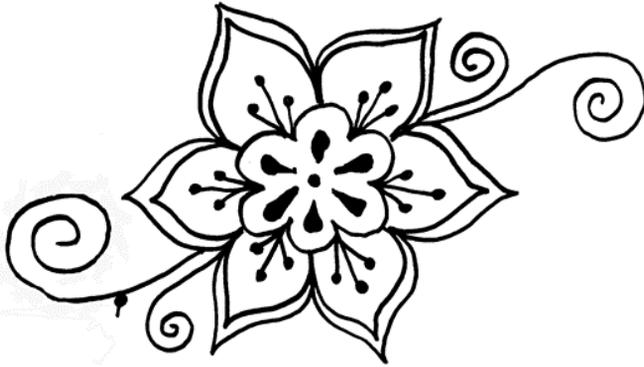


Step 17 It's nice to add balance with another curl on the other side

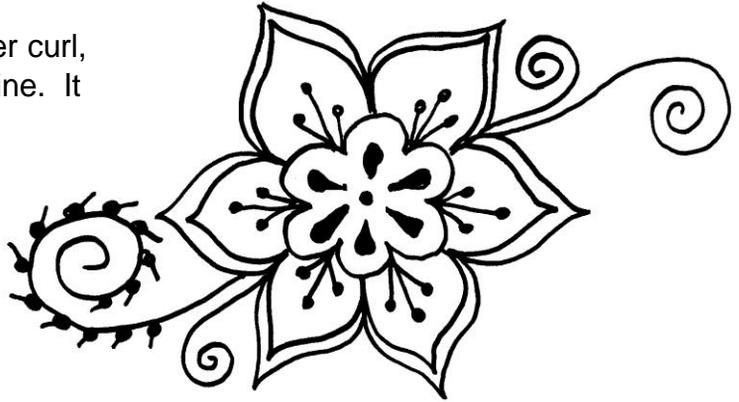


Step 18 Equal and opposite curls add balance

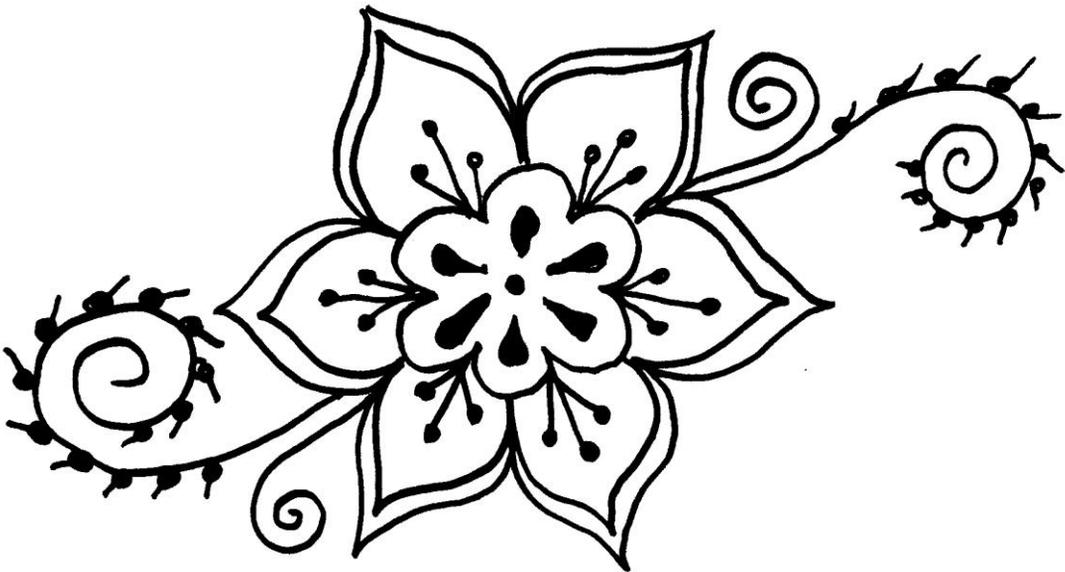
Draw a flower, continued



Step 19 On the outer edge of the larger curl, add a dot-pull, starting the dot on the line. It makes an elegant Indian-style leaf.

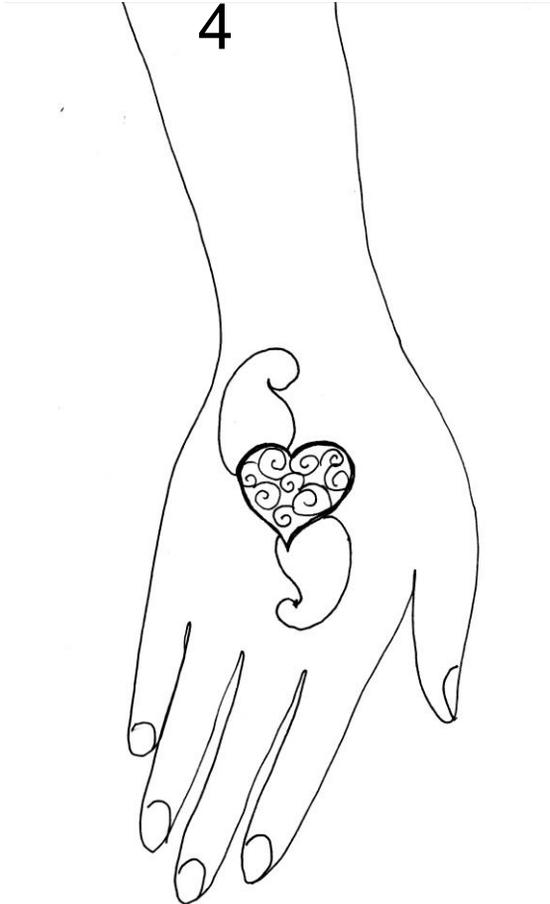
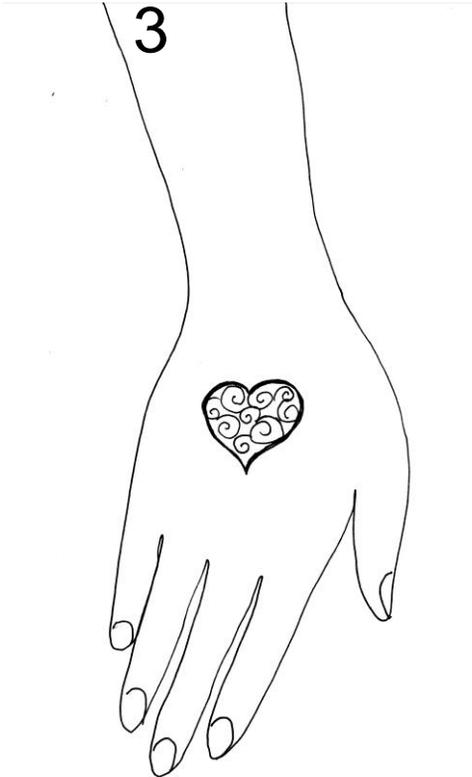
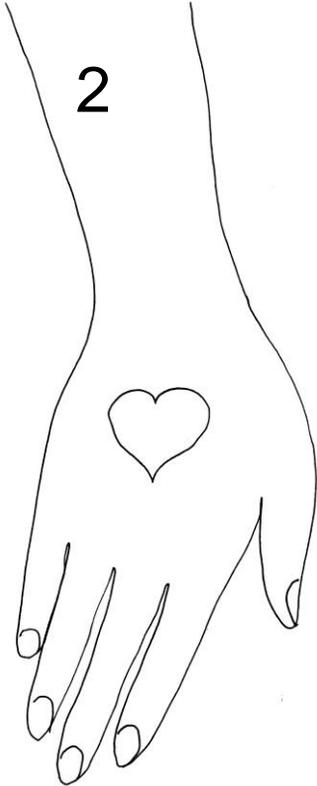
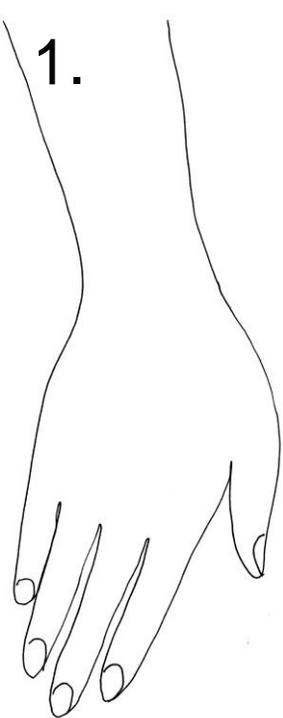


Step 20 Finish your dot-pulls along the edge of the large curl.

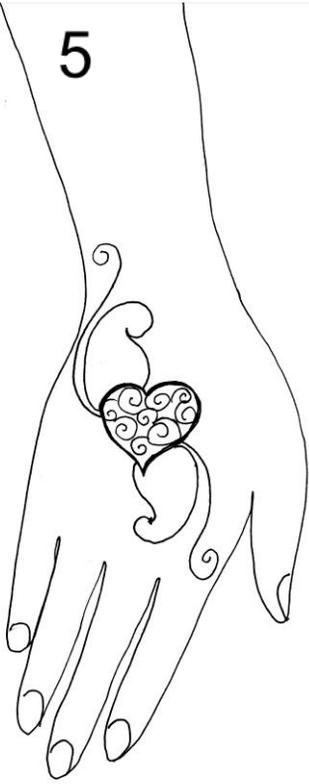


Step 21 Complete dot-pulls on the other side. Smile broadly and admire your work.

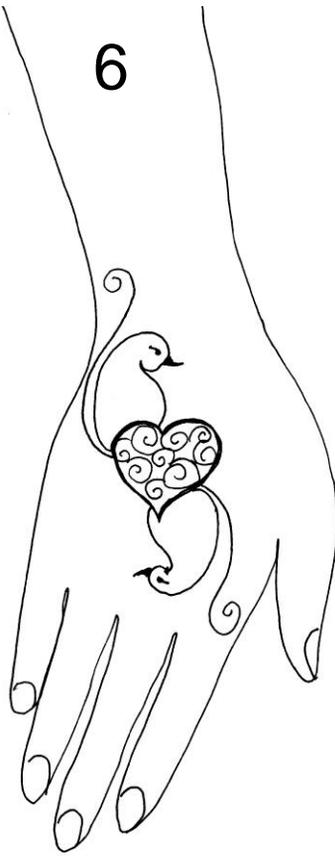
How to Draw an Indian –Inspired Peacock



5



6



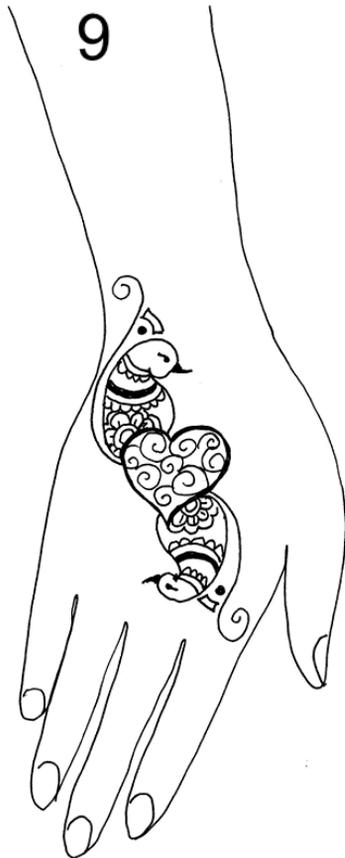
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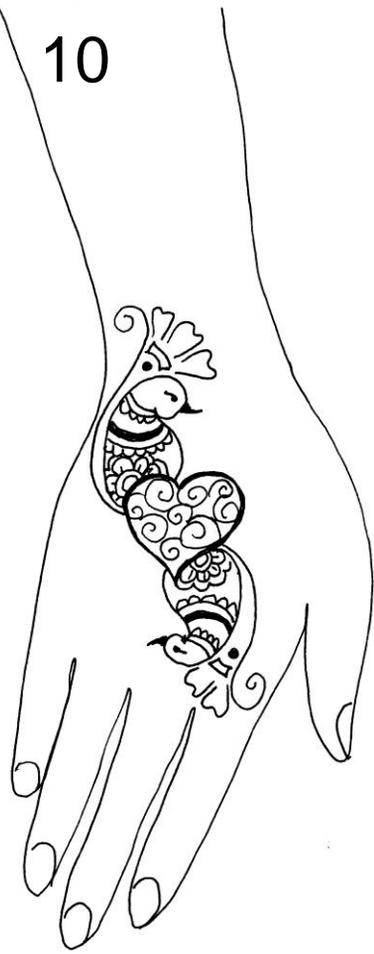
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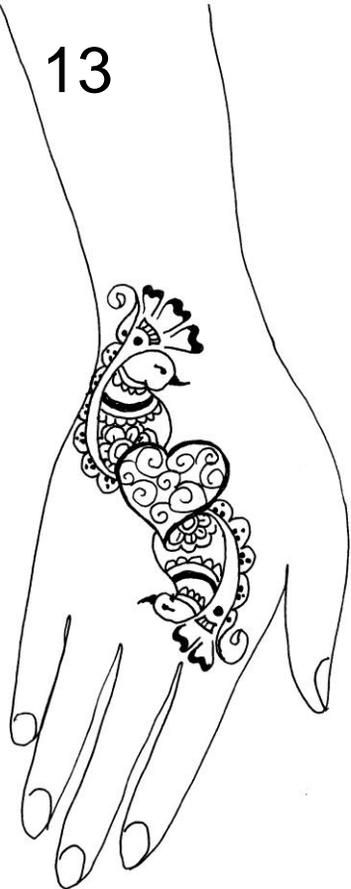
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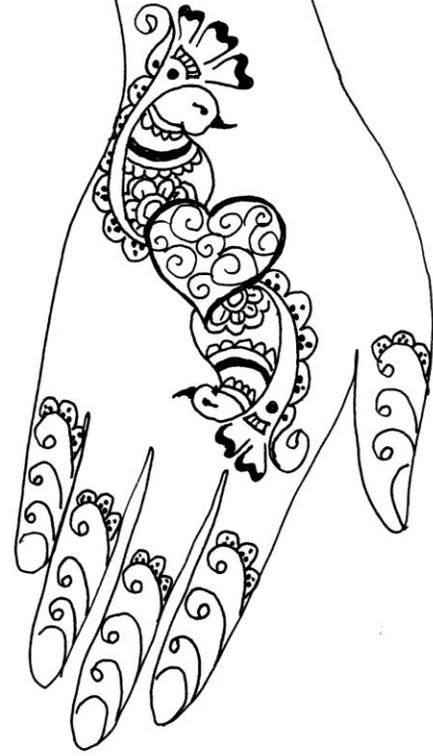
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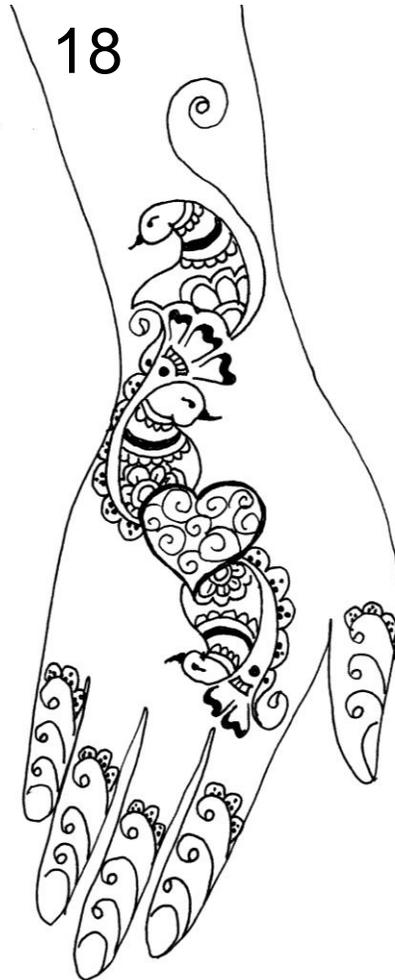
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17



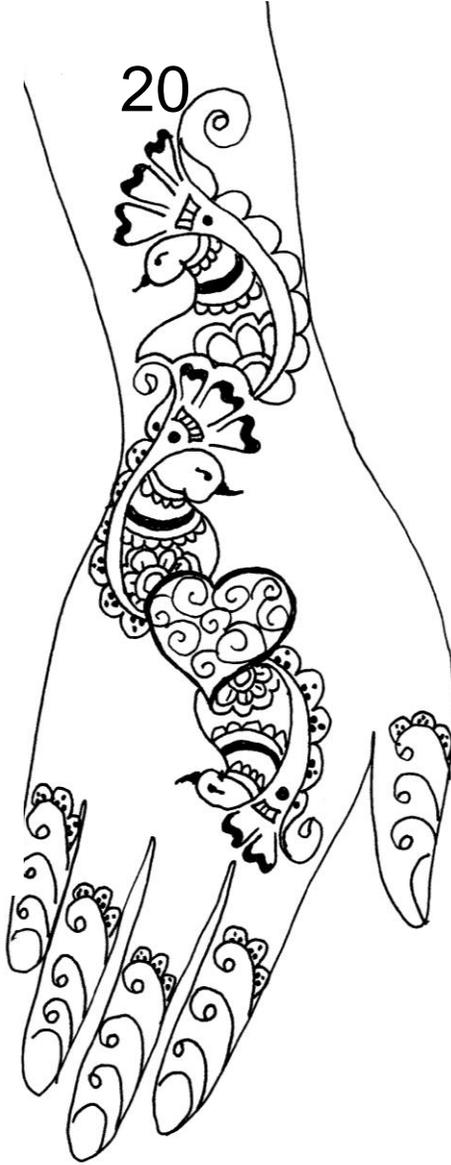
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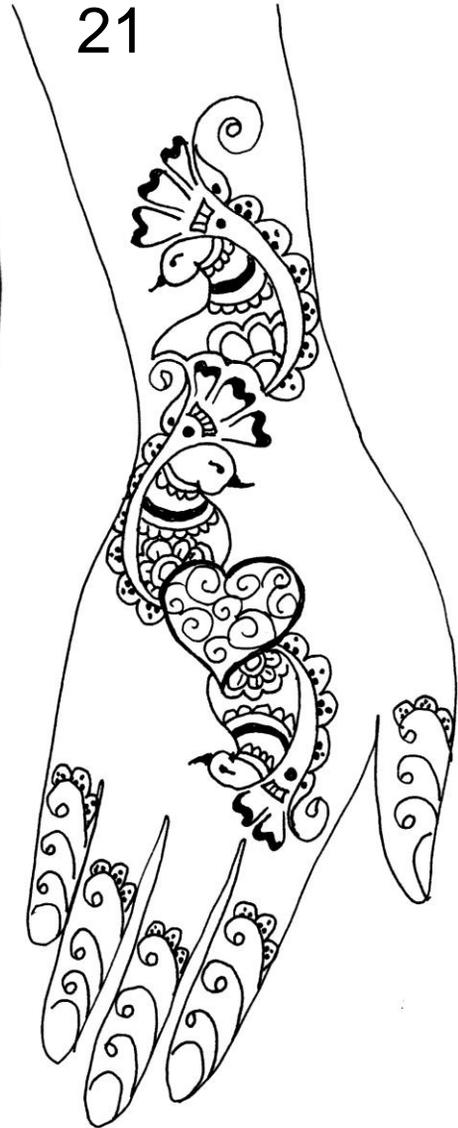
19



20



21



22: Natasha's extra

