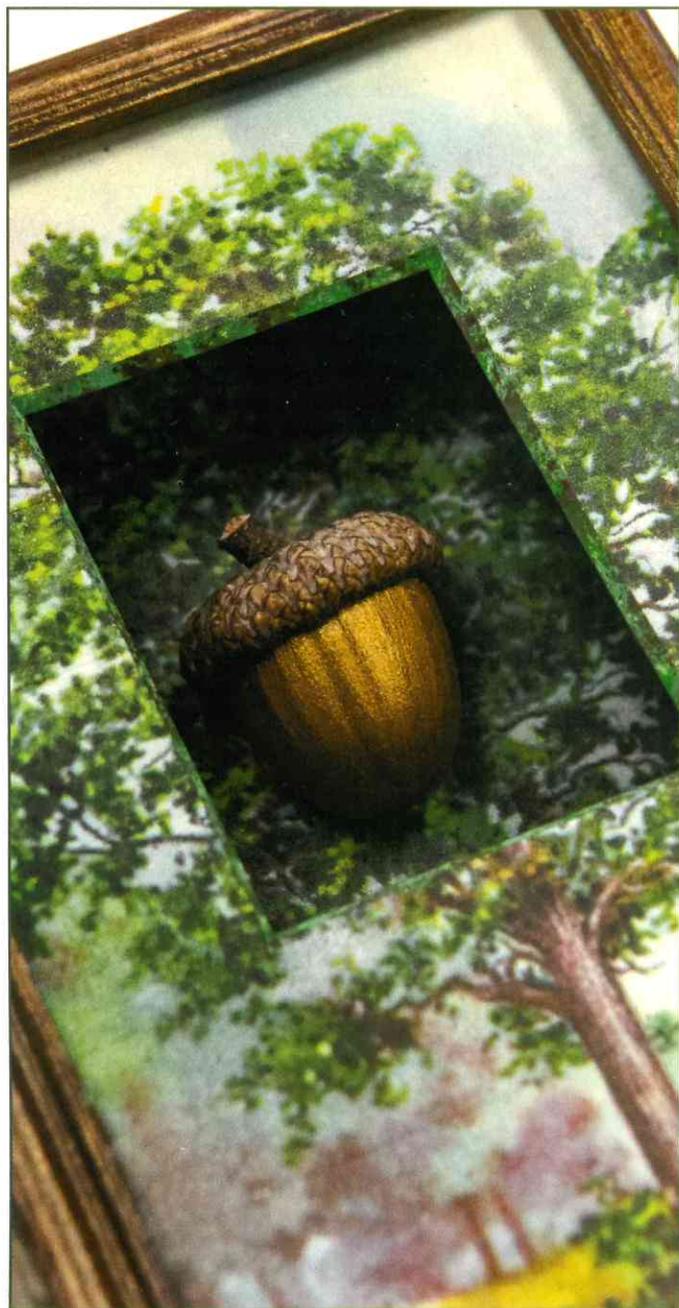


NATURE WALK

Collection Boxes

BY CHERYL DOSSEY



I have a fun little story about how these nature boxes came to be. On Superbowl Sunday 2020, we brought home our newest family member, Indigo, a four-legged Sharpei rescue. Little did we know within weeks we would be in lockdown due to COVID-19. As it was for so many, our lives were turned upside down and our regular daily routines disrupted. Thank goodness for the great outdoors!

Luckily for Indigo, my favorite form of exercise is walking, and residing in Florida, this is a comfortable activity year-round for the most part. Being outside in nature, breathing in fresh air, and hearing the sounds of birds chirping and lizards rustling in the bushes has become part of a daily routine. It's now a ritual of exercise with a side of collecting.

Collecting natural objects is part of my creative process. Wasp nests are my current obsession, with each one being unique in size and shape, much like snowflakes. Acorns, leaves, twigs, small stones, bird feathers, and discarded nests can also find their way home to be used in an assemblage.

The real beauty of these homemade boxes is that they can be created to encapsulate any type of small collection, natural or otherwise. So dig out that collection of vintage buttons, game-board pieces, or seashells from a special vacation, and let your creativity guide you! ▶

SUPPLIES

- * Acrylic paint
- * Balsa wood
- * Cardboard box: sturdy
- * Craft knife
- * Ephemera
- * Foam board
- * Gel medium
- * Glass cleaner
- * Miter box: small
- * Natural objects
- * Paper towels
- * Patterned paper: gel prints
- * Pencil
- * Picture-frame glass (optional)
- * Rubber stamps (optional)
- * Ruler
- * Stencils (optional)
- * Tacky glue

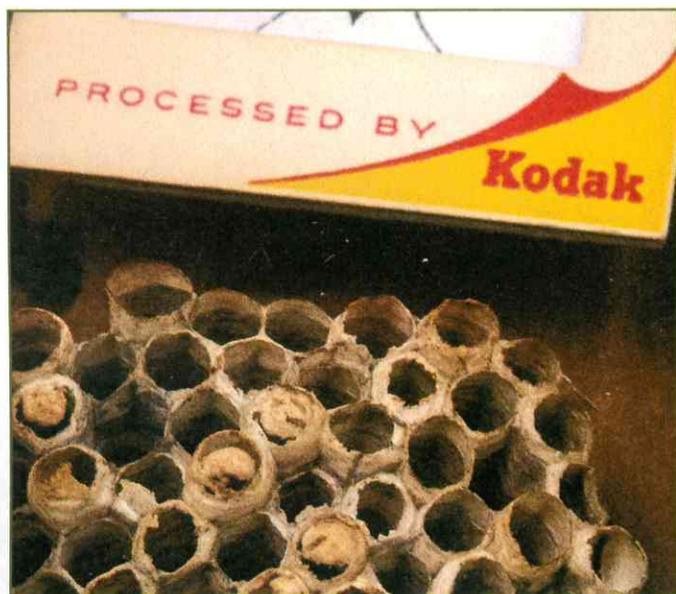
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TECHNIQUE

Use gel medium to adhere patterned papers to all sides of the box. I used an iPhone box. You can also paint the box, if preferred, and then add additional designs with rubber stamps or stencils. Set aside to dry.

Use foam board to create a shadow box. Measure the inside depth of the box, and then subtract $\frac{3}{8}$ inch to allow for the thickness of the glass and the balsa wood. Next, measure the length of the inside of the box. Transfer the measurements to the foam board with a pencil. Cut the foam board with a craft knife, using the ruler as a straight edge. Measure and cut the width the same way.

Slide the cut strips inside the box to check the fit. All the pieces should be snug but not too tight. Next, wrap the foam strips with patterned paper or paint them, and let dry. Adhere in place with tacky glue. If you'd like to create dividers within the box, follow the same steps.

Fill the box with collected natural objects and other found elements you've gathered, and glue them in place with tacky glue. You can also leave them unsecured within a divided section.

Once everything is glued or secure inside the box, lay your piece of picture-frame glass inside of the box to check for fit, and remove. Spray a paper towel with glass cleaner, and wipe down both sides of the glass. Place the clean glass on top of foam-board strips, and then measure and cut a piece of balsa wood to fit on top of the glass. Paint, stain, or cover the balsa wood with patterned paper, and let dry. Adhere the balsa wood to the inside edge of the box with tacky glue.

TIPS

- * Ask your local frame shop or hardware store to cut the glass needed for your project(s). Take the box with you so they can get an accurate measurement and provide the perfect fit.
- * iPhone boxes work perfectly for these projects.
- * Have fun with these little boxes. Using other elements along with the nature finds made them more interesting and allowed me to create a story.

Cheryl Dossey is a mixed-media artist living in Florida. To see more of her work, visit cheryldossey.com. You can also find her on Instagram (@cheryldosseyart).

NATURE'S *Treasure Vessels*

BY VICKI KAMMERER

The “Call of Nature” challenge really spoke to me. Living in a pandemic changes your perspective and the lens through which you see things and the world. The most obvious change for me is how I see the world; my lens now goes only as far as my yard. Luckily, our yard is three quarters of an acre. I’ve come to know it really well and learned to see the hidden bounty that had been around me for so long but never truly noticed.

Unfortunately, 2020 was not a particularly bountiful year in Iowa. It’s like the flora and fauna knew there was pandemic and it was time to go on hiatus. Flowers didn’t bloom in abundance or as vividly; the walnut trees produced no walnuts; some of my perennials did not even bother to come back up; but this proverbial dry spell revealed stages of plant life I had never noticed before.

An example of this was my neighbor’s tree. While out with our dog, Sugar, one late fall day, I looked up at the neighbor’s tree and could see vines twisted all around the branches with these fascinating dried pods all over them. Closer inspection revealed them to be milkweed pods. I was immediately obsessed and could picture them as “treasure vessels.” I wondered how long they had been there and how it was possible that I had never noticed them before. I simply never took the time to look at dried-up plants and flowers as there were too many things to do and too many places to go. I have the time now, and hidden right in front of me are the same plants and flowers as before, just in different stages of life but still displaying their glory. I came to my senses and got permission to “cannibalize” the pods. ▶





I held on to the pods, and when the "Call of Nature" challenge was announced I knew the time to create the treasure vessels I envisioned had arrived. It was also time to open that bin of dried plants and flowers I collected from all over the neighborhood. With the vessels clear in my mind, I remembered these large matchbox sets I had that featured a large cut-out opening. Unbelievably, the pods fit perfectly in the bottom so the entire pods would be visible in the opening, revealing the treasures tucked safely inside. Finesse was needed, which is how my collection of dried sage, lavender, calendula flowers, etc. became used in this project.

My lesson learned from this project was that nature's bounty comes in all stages, not just fresh and new but also old, dried, spent, and dormant. I learned that lesson quickly and I not only saw the bounty of my yard differently but also the yards of all of my neighbors.



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SUPPLIES

- * Acrylic paint
- * Beads
- * Cheesecloth
- * Crackle medium: (Kroma)
- * Dried natural elements: calendula; flowers; grasses; lavender; milkweed pods; white sage
- * Emery board
- * Fabric scraps
- * Gesso
- * Glue
- * Grass paper
- * Hot glue
- * Matchbox kits: large
- * Modeling paste: light (Finnabair - Art Basics)
- * Paper plate
- * Spools: wooden
- * Spray sealer: matte
- * Stencil: butterfly
- * Texture paste: Pumice & Lime Stone Effect Paste (Finnabair - Art Extravagance)
- * Texture powder: (Finnabair - Art Ingredients)
- * Trims
- * Twine

TECHNIQUE

Apply a base coat of gesso to the matchboxes. Fill the milkweed pods with various combinations of white sage bundles, dried lavender, dried calendula flower buds, dried flowers, and stems. Wrap the bundles with layers of scrap fabrics, and glue the fabric in place to the back of the pod stem. Wrap twine around the fabrics and secure in the back with glue. Adhere a bead.

FLOWER-TRIMMED BOX

Mix pumice texture paste with dried grasses, and spread over the matchbox sleeve. Cover the grasses with a very thin layer of cheesecloth to keep them in place, and let dry completely. Spray with a matte sealer. Wrap the flower trim around the box and glue in place. Adhere grass paper in the bottom of the drawer. Apply hot glue onto the bottom of the paper in the drawer and quickly sprinkle dried calendula flowers on top. Adhere the filled milkweed pod in the middle of the drawer. Layer and stitch scrap paper and fabric strips together, and adhere them to both drawer ends. Wrap scrap fabric around a spool and glue the spool to the front drawer end. Glue beads in place. ▶



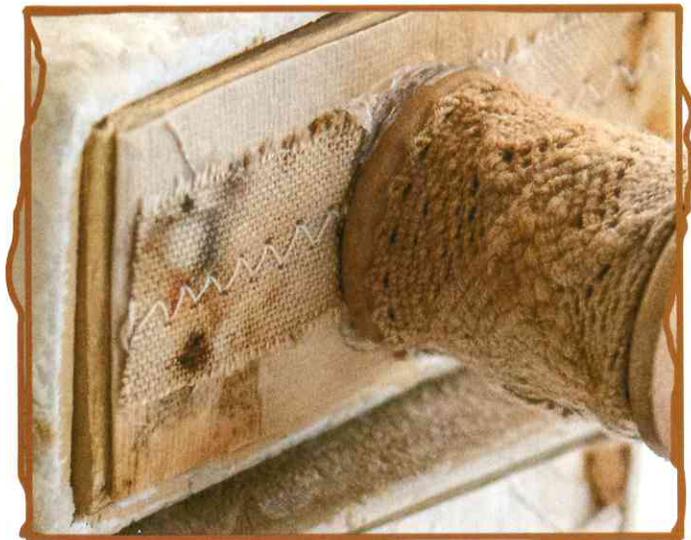


BUTTERFLY CRACKLED BOX

Paint the matchbox sleeve with acrylic paint, and let dry. Adhere butterfly trim around the box. Brush crackle medium generously in and around the butterfly strip and the rest of the box sleeve, and let dry completely. Rub acrylic paint over the crackle medium to highlight the cracks. Spray with matte sealer. Adhere grass paper to the bottom of the drawer. Apply hot glue onto the bottom of the paper in the drawer and quickly sprinkle dried calendula flowers on top. Adhere the filled milkweed pod in the middle of the drawer. Layer and stitch scrap paper and fabric strips together, and adhere them to both drawer ends. Wrap scrap fabric around a spool and glue the spool to the front drawer end. Glue beads in place.

LIMESTONE BUTTERFLY BOX

Spread a thick layer of limestone texture paste over the matchbox sleeve, and let dry. Mix light modeling paste, texture powder, and acrylic paint on a paper plate, and spread the mixture through the butterfly stencil and onto the sleeve. Lightly sand over the top of the stenciled butterflies with an emery board. Adhere the butterfly to the side of the box. Embellish with a bead. Adhere grass paper in the bottom of the drawer. Apply hot glue onto the bottom of the paper in the drawer and quickly sprinkle dried calendula flowers on top. Adhere the filled milkweed pod in the middle of the drawer. Layer and stitch scrap paper and fabric strips together, and adhere them to both drawer ends. Wrap scrap fabric around a spool and glue the spool to the front drawer end. Glue beads in place.



Vickie Kammerer is a regular contributor to Stampington & Company publications. She lives in Council Bluffs, Iowa, with her husband, Randy, and dog, Sugar. To see more of her work, visit her Facebook page ([vickie.kammerer.1](https://www.facebook.com/vickie.kammerer.1)). She welcomes email at stampexpressions@cox.net.

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