

Silk Floral Wreath on Grapevine Base *for the* Professional Florist



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EXTENSION

Introduction

Luxurious floral designs capture the attention of the buying public. Consumers enjoy browsing in retail floral shops, both brick and mortar and online. Unless retailers design and market more lavish items, they will never know if they can indeed be sold.

This wreath style is lush and opulent. It's a designer piece, meaning that it is one of a kind. However, it is possible to make multiple copies of this unique design.

Display the design on your website or in your retail space, and store extras in inventory. Designing this way is efficient because you can create these wreaths during down times when retail activity is slow. During the seasons and holidays where wreath demands are higher, simply sell from the existing inventory. It is possible to ship wreaths like this one via ground and air transportation.

About Silk Flowers

Silk flowers require less maintenance than fresh flowers, and they do not have to be replaced as often. Permanent flowers and foliage enable decorating that would not be possible with their fresh floral counterparts, and are viewed as copies of "the real thing." Indeed, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!

Permanent botanicals allow designers to create floral designs that are impractical with fresh flowers. This wreath is suitable as an interior décor accent, displayed in a living room, bedroom, or bath. Many permanent flowers can stand weathering, making them ideal for door decorations and cemetery memorial floral designs.

When first delving into silk floral design, many retailers purchase silk flowers from craft supply stores. This option has the advantage of allowing easy access to a wide variety of materials. Another advantage of buying from craft stores is that you can purchase flowers in small quantities—just enough to make a single design. Local sources are a great way to start off design ventures like this.

One downside to buying permanent florals at your local craft store is that the prices are not as low as they would be if you were buying from a manufacturer. In addition, you are purchasing from the same sources as others in

the same market area, so design products run the risk of looking less unique. As sales increase, you can gradually purchase from manufacturers, but be sure to track the cost of goods sold to avoid large inventories of unused products.

You can find silk floral manufacturers online or at major floral and gift markets. Some wholesale florists carry silk flowers, too. Note that these manufacturers may require buyers to spend a minimum amount to place an order, ranging from \$150 to \$500. Often, these importers carry more than flowers, and can also provide containers, decorative accessories, and holiday decor items.

Keep in mind that silk flowers are artificial, made from polyester fabrics, paper, plastic, and wire. Most of the silk flowers on the market are imported, then packed into boxes and loaded onto cargo ships to reach retail destinations. Their form is static, meaning that they are stiff when removed from their packaging. It is up to you to manipulate these flowers so that they resemble the growth habits of the flowers they are portraying. Floral designers may refer to this as *breathing life* into the silk flowers and foliage. Bend the stems so that they have a slight curve. Reflex the leaves and petals so that they mimic their fresh counterparts. By creating some movement with the permanent foliage, you can create a more organic look for your overall design.

Mix up the colors and materials of your silk floral inventory to complement the seasons. You can make this wreath in a multitude of colors and color combinations. We have selected purple as the parent color and have selected many types of silk flowers, from light to deep purple. When creating a monochromatic floral design, it is important to vary the values of the parent color.

The term *value* refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. Use five, six, or more values to give the design depth and interest. Consider the beauty and retail interest in monochromatic yellow, red, white, blue, and other colors.

Working with Hot Glue Adhesives

Pan melt glue is manufactured and sold in small pillow-shaped chips. It is melted in an electric skillet, which must be dedicated for this use. Wholesale floral suppliers sell glue skillets, or you can purchase an ordinary household electric skillet. Heat the glue to



Hot glue appliances include pans and guns.

a temperature of around 200–250 degrees. The melted glue's consistency should be like thick syrup or cake batter for the best adherence.

It is possible to use a glue gun for this project, however, the glue pan is more efficient. With a pan, all you need to do is dip the stem, then insert it into the grapevine network. Glue guns are handy for spot gluing and for intricate work, but for most of the permanent botanical work in a florist shop, a glue pan is likely more efficient.

Try to keep a natural bristle brush in the glue pan. When the need arises, this handy brush can be used to apply more liberal amounts of glue to a surface.

Grapevine Wreaths as Bases

The base wreath for this project was made from grape vines that were pruned in January. In south Mississippi, growers prune dormant vines early in the new year to encourage fruit production. Often, the pruned canes are chopped and left to decompose. Many grape varieties work well and can provide diverse bark textures, from smooth to corky.

Grapevine wreaths are a good mechanic for creating silk floral designs. The multiple layers of vines provide a network or armature that helps control flower stem placement. When combined with hot glue, silk flower stems and vines form a tenacious attachment that can withstand long-term display and the effects of weathering.

Grapevine wreath producers take care in making wreaths in specific sizes. Exact measurements are helpful to these producers to market and sell to wholesale and retail florists. We take an informal approach to our wreaths, making each of them in slightly different sizes, hovering around 20 inches in diameter. It is best to make them right in the vineyard using the flexible, freshly trimmed canes (within a few days of pruning) rather than transport the unwieldy vines to the workbench.



First layer of a grapevine wreath.

The best way to create a grapevine wreath is to make it in layers. First, select a long cane, approximately 10 feet long, or you can use two shorter lengths, each about 6 feet long. Weave the cane to the appropriate size, ensuring it will hold its circular shape, then set it aside. Remember, the shape does not need to be a perfect circle! Repeat this process with additional canes. If they are shorter, weave multiple lengths of them together. The key to getting a good circular form is combining three to six layers of the circles.

After adding multiple ring layers, weave long vine segments (4–8 feet) around the unit, lacing the cane inside and outside of the wreath. Repeat this process until the wreath is secure.



Multiple layers of pruned canes are bound with additional grapevine.



Finished grapevine wreaths ready for drying.

After some practice, we were able to complete eight wreaths per hour. Once they are created, stack the wreaths on shelves and allow them to dry in a room-

temperature space with plenty of air circulation. It takes about two weeks for the wreaths to dry. Note that this style of wreath has an open habit, resembling a bird's nest. This is helpful in the next stage of designing: adding the flowers.

Silk Floral Wreath Design

Materials

- Mississippi-grown muscadine grapevine wreath, 20-inch diameter
- Pan melt glue skillet and glue
- Wire cutters
- Paper-covered wire*

Permanent botanical floral materials

Line pattern

- 2 stems silk eucalyptus
- 5–6 stems pussy willow

Mass pattern

Large

- 3 hydrangea flower heads, purple
- 2 lime echeveria
- 2 haworthia

Medium

- 3 small hydrangea flower heads, lavender
- 3–6 stems Eustoma (lisianthus)
- 3–6 stems ranunculus

Filler materials

Medium

- 2–3 stems dusty miller

Small

- 3 small bushes lavender
- 3 bunches botanical violets
- 3 bunches johnny jump ups

**When working with paper-covered wire, be sure to remove the wire from the inside of the roll, not the outside, which is usually contained within plastic film. Do not cut the film. It helps to hold the wire in place and keep the roll tidy.*



Necessary materials for a silk floral wreath.



Bind loose vines with paper-covered wire.

Because the canes are now dry, their network may be loose in some spots. Use the paper-covered wire to bind them in place. There is no need to cinch them tightly together because this will change the wreath's thickness and make it appear constricted. The trick is to keep the canes loose but twist the wires together tightly. Note that the brown paper wire blends in with the natural color of the canes.



Bend the stem into a u-shape before adding glue.

In this design, the stems are placed so that they flow in a clockwise direction. This practice helps to maintain *rhythm*, an important design principle.



Curl long floral stems before bending them into a u-shape.

Working with Silk Flowers

Often, inexpensive bush silks have quality, natural-looking flower heads mounted on thin, plastic-covered wires. There is no need to invest in silk flowers with premium, realistic stems when they will only be cut away and discarded.

Note that the stem is bent into a u-shape before being dipped into the pan melt glue. This bend creates more surface area to hold the glue, which helps hold the stem to the network of grapevines.



An asymmetrical triangular pattern of large hydrangea flowers.

Place the three hydrangea heads in a triangular shape on the wreath. Rather than placing them in an equilateral triangle, group two of them slightly closer together. This establishes some asymmetry within the overall symmetrical arrangement. This subtle difference makes the design appear more natural and spontaneous.

Next, add the stems of permanent botanical eucalyptus. Instead of cutting these stems to a short length, lightly spiral the ends of the stems around your index finger first; then, farther up the stem, bend them into a u-shape at the base of the leaves. The curly stem becomes a



Eucalyptus stems flow in a clockwise pattern.

decorative accent and helps fill in the pattern. Position the stems into the wreath so that they both flow in the same direction.

The third step involves placing the smaller hydrangea flower heads into the wreath. Fill in the sides of the wreath by adding the flowers to the inside and outside edges of the form.

Manipulate the pussy willow as you did the eucalyptus. Bend the stems and place a light spiral on the stem ends if the wire is easy to control. Keep them flowing in the same direction as the eucalyptus.



Willow and echeveria lend contrast to the design.

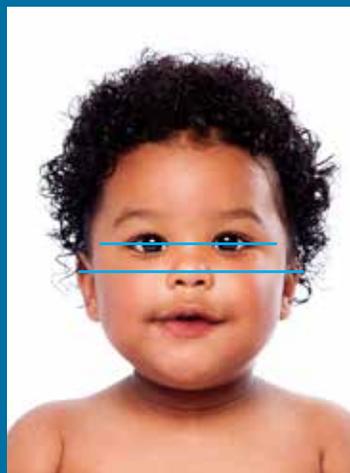
The lime green echeveria are some of the most contrasting elements in this design. We chose to use two of them as a color splash, but also to illustrate that it is possible to design successfully with even numbers. Because there are two, it is best to display them on a diagonal line. Diagonal lines are more prominent in the plant kingdom, while horizontal lines are dominant in the animal kingdom. In other words, if two flowers are displayed on a horizontal line, they tend to appear like eyes, staring into space.

At this point in the design process, add some of the medium-sized materials such as the eustoma. These flowers have lighter gauge wires, so they are easier to bend and curl.

Once you have added the medium-sized flowers, continue the design process by adding the small flowers as the last placements. Remember to keep the same directional flow as the other flowers.

Take images of the design on a plain, neutral background located about a yard from a natural light source such as a window or open door. To adjust the arrangement of the photo, include a second object in the image with a recognizable size such as a stack of books, figurine, or other tabletop item. This object

In order to make floral designs appear more natural, we avoid placing two flowers at the same height in a floral arrangement. It's rare to find two plants growing at the same height, or on the same horizontal line in nature. However, it is more common in the animal kingdom to find objects placed symmetrically such as eyes, nostrils, ears, and feet.





Eustoma with its curled, bent stem ready for glue.



A detailed, close view of the half-completed wreath.

introduces scale to the photo's composition, enabling consumers to visually discern the size of the wreath.

Avoid taking too many images of your design because it wastes time. A single, quality image is all you need to market your beautiful design.

Mark-Up and Pricing

Your retail strategy should begin by pricing the wreath according to what the market can bear. Florists who are new to the marketplace often undervalue their work. Some retail florists use this pricing strategy: Multiply the wholesale price of the wreath and permanent flowers by 2.5, then add a labor charge of 30 percent.

Retailers in small towns may use a different strategy with a slightly lower mark-up and labor charge, while those in urban areas may use higher rates. It is always a good idea to find out what other retailers in the marketplace charge for similar products.

Conclusion

Mississippi-grown grapes provide much more than fruit, they can add beauty to your home. Collect pruned canes during the winter season and form them into wreaths. They are beautiful without decoration, and make a solid base for luxurious permanent botanical wreaths.



Take an image of your final design on a plain, neutral background with natural lighting as demonstrated.

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This publication is dedicated to the memory of Matt Wood, AIFD (1956–2018). Mr. Wood was born in Columbia, Mississippi, and was an alumnus of Mississippi State University. He owned a successful retail floral shop in Jackson, Mississippi, and went on to a career in the permanent botanical sector of floristry, traveling the world in his role as creative director of Winward Silks.



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